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Strategies followed by Iraqi EFL learners in recognizing the illocutionary act of invitation

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Abstract---Invitations are social activities that usually occur among individuals (and particularly among friends) in everyday life, utilized to keep rapport, to increase social solidarity and to maintain good relationships among people. However, people use various types of pragmatic and linguistic strategies to recognize invitations. Thus, this paper aims to detect Iraqi University students' ability to recognize and to distinguish invitation from other related speech acts. Fifty Iraqi EFL 4th year students of the University of Misan, have been administered to a recognition text. Responses to the test have been collected and analyzed. The paper reveals that most Iraqi EFL 4th students have the ability to identify the speech act of invitation, while other students resort to the use of *offer*, *questioning*, *advice*... etc. strategies rather than invitation. They take one strategy instead of another since their pragmatic knowledge about invitation and situations involving invitation is not precise. This students' failure is due to the fact that they lack knowledge of the employment of the strategies utilized for recognizing invitation.

Keywords---EFL students, strategies, invitation, test, recognition.

Introduction

Invitations are said to be everyday activities habitually happen amongst friends in every day interaction, and occasionally in formal and informal situations amongst acquaintance and indeed strange people. Invitations are considered portions or

elements of everyone's normal life. It is an important way to increase social harmony, and occasionally it is also employed to accomplish institutional purposes (Piera et al., 2017:2-3). As a constructive and polite practice, invitations can be regarded as social acts. Al-Khatib (2006:272) contends that invitations occur commonly in everyday life, specifically in preserving (or maintaining) a good relationship. They habitually intent "to address the positive face" of the invitee's. However, there are many pragmatic ways by which invitations can be identified. This would constitute a problematic point to any EFL learners.

Due to the above discussion, it is obvious that Iraqi EFL university students encounter difficulty in handling invitations, they must then resort to various pragmatic and linguistic strategies in identifying the SA of invitation. Hence, a study is required to take into account the sort of pragmalinguistic strategies utilized by Iraqi university EFL learners when distinguishing the illocutionary of invitation from other associated speech acts. In this respect, this paper begins with giving a survey of the SA of invitation, focusing on its pragmatic and linguistic characteristics. Pragmalinguistic strategies are too presented, followed by the method exploited in gathering and investigating data, and getting at the most important outcomes.

Speech Act Theory

It was Austin who first offered the theory of speech acts which was later published in the Austin's influential book "*How to Do Things with Words*" (1962). In his seminal work *Speech Acts* (1969) and in his later works (1976, 2010) John Searle the American philosopher developed Austin's ideas further. Both of them were interested in utterances' structure regarding their meaning, use as well as the action they perform. Austin noticed that there are some utterances that do not describe or tell something as true or false, which means that they are not truth conditional utterances. In fact, it is not a case of just saying something but of performing an action. These basic observations, described in his work, bring up speech act theory, a theory that underpins much of pragmatics (Sadock, 1974:8; Taguchi, 2019:17; Culpeper and Haugh 2014:156).

Relationally, Yule (1996:47) expounds that "when people attempt to express themselves", they would not only "yield utterances that contain grammatical structures and words; they perform actions" by those utterances. If someone works in a situation where a boss has much power, then when a boss utters the expression (a) *you're fired*, it is more than a statement. An utterance like (a) can be used to accomplish the act of ending someone's employment. These activities that are executed by utterances are known as speech acts. For Yule (ibid), "speech acts are actions that are performed or accomplished by utterances". In English, they are given more particular labels, like complaint, apology, invitation, compliment, request or promise.

Speech Act of Invitation

Invitation, according to Searle (1976:11), is a directive illocutionary speech act which refers to the attempts that the speaker makes to get the hearer to perform something. For Hancher (1979:13) invitation is a commissive-directive act which

means that the speaker is committed to a specific course of behavior. Relationally, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984 cited in Alflig, 2016:1) state that invitation is a type of request, thereby, by uttering it, the speaker influences the claim of the hearer to “the freedom of action and freedom from imposition”. Likewise, Suzuki (2009: 28) asserts that the speech act of invitation “occurs when the participation or attendance of the addressee at a certain occasion or event is requested by a speaker; basically one is hosted by the other”.

For Leech (2014:180), invitation is a speech event that exemplifies the Generosity Maxim. Invitation is seen as an offer occurring “in a hospitality frame”; it entails that a speaker being the host, offers something pleasant to his addressee who plays the role of a guest. In this respect, various types of invitations are utilized in every social daily life. Then, it may be “an invitation to a party”, to a meal, to stay at speakers’ home and likewise. In order to offer some details of the literature review of the SA of invitation, it is necessary to offer a survey of the pragmatic, pragmalinguistic and syntactic behavior of invitation as presented in the literature available

Pragmatic Behavior of Invitation

Searle (1976:11) asserts that invitation is a directive illocutionary speech act which refers to the attempts that the speaker makes to get the hearer to perform something. For Hancher (1979:13), invitation is a commissive-directive act which means that the speaker is committed to a specific course of behavior. Wolfson (1989:119) classifies invitation into two kinds, ambiguous and unambiguous, according to him, “unambiguous invitations involve a reference to time and a mention of activity or place, and most importantly”, a request for response. An example is:

- Do you want to have a lunch tomorrow?
This example contains a reference to time, activity and a request to response. Wolfson introduces the features used to distinguish ambiguous invitations, these features are (a) the indefinite time; (b) unrequired responses that is to say (there is no yes/ no question); (c) an auxiliary modal, such as “should” and “must”, is almost always used. Consider:
- We should get together something.
Leech (2014:180) defines invitation as speech event that exemplifies the Generosity Maxim. Invitation is seen as an offer occurring in a hospitality frame. That is, it means that a speaker being the host, offers to provide a nice thing for the invitee who plays the guest role. An invitation may be to a party, to a meal, to stay at speaker’s home and likewise. Briefly, invitations are social activities which aim to maintain the social relationships between the interlocutors in any communicative situation.

Pragmalinguistic Behavior of Invitations

In order to learn about the study of how people achieve their goals interpersonally while using language, Leech (1983:10-11) introduces the idea of dividing pragmatics into two constituents namely: socio-pragmatics and pragmalinguistics. Sociopragmatics refers to the sociological boundary of pragmatics and to the

studies which are culture specified. Sociopragmatics is a less abstract field of general pragmatics and is concerned with the local conditions on language use; this means the effect of particular social condition, e.g. “social distance and social status” on the linguistics realization of a specific illocution. It is obvious that the politeness principle and the cooperative principle operate variously in “different cultures or communities” of language, in various social settings and among various “social classes” (Leech, 1983:10-11).

On the other hand, pragmalinguistics refers to “the study of the more linguistic end of pragmatics” taking into consideration the specific means provided by a given language in order to convey particular illocutions. For Crystal (2008: 379), pragmalinguistics is sometimes used within the study of pragmatics to indicate to the study of the language from the perspective of the structural resources of a language. More elaborately, pragmalinguistics is a field of research that has a very short history and insufficient collected theoretical and empirical findings to define its own character and perspective boundaries. Actually, pragmalinguistics points to “the study of different linguistics and extralinguistic phenomena (conditions and effects) engaged in any communicative act in which some specific function is performed by the verbal message” (Prucha, 1983:1).

To sum up, pragmalinguistics refers to the way that a learner employs to generate utterances in order to communicate appropriately using linguistic units depending on social context and politeness value which is related to the degree of rank, power and imposition.

Syntactic Behavior of Invitation

Syntactically, the speech act of invitation can be accomplished by different strategies, such as using declarative, imperative and interrogative clauses. In addition, modal and non-modal expressions are also used to perform invitation. The next are the main syntactic strategies that are followed in realizing the speech act of invitation.

Declaratives

Declaratives, according to Downing and Locke (2006:208), are said to be the most common and basic used to express an action. In most normal cases, declaratives are employed to arrange a sentence and usually an extensive “variety of speech acts are expressed by using it like asserting, claiming, complaining etc. Any speech act that is expressed by any of the other types of clause can be expressed indirectly through the use of a suitable declarative clause”. They can be used to give advice, request, praise, permission and apology. In particular, they are used to make an invitation (Aarts et al., 2020:387). Consider:

- *Hi. We are talking about our graduation party.* (Al-Marrani et al., 2019:12)

Imperatives

Nuyts and Auwera (2016:73) claim that imperatives are prototypically used to convey a directive force. Generally, imperatives are not only used to convey a

command but also other types of directives as such, demands, requests, permission, recommendation and so on. A lot of imperatives are employed to talk about family, friends and co-workers, but not mostly as commands. The broader term 'directive' is more suitable as it covers offers, commands, requests, instructions, advice and invitation. The following imperatives are utilized to make an invitation:

- *Come to dinner.* (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005:8)
- *Have some more coffee.* (Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 541)
- *Come over and see my etching.* (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002:929)

For invitation, one of the most common forms used is the contracted form (*let's+ infinitive*) which is a structure of suggestion often employed to make an invitation in informal situations particularly for the first person plural imperatives (Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 542), Consider:

- A-*Let's walk to the park this evening.*
- B- *All right* (Titlitt and Bruder, 1985: 29)

Interrogatives

Interrogatives can be utilized to perform various functions such as, request and invitation. Wh-question and Yes/No question are the major types which can be used to make an invitation (Borjars and Burridge, 2010: 108).

- *Are you busy today?* (Suzuki, 2009:100)

More support comes from Huddleston and Pullum (2002:939) who affirm that interrogatives are very often used to indirectly convey directives. The form of indirect directives conveyed by interrogatives are said to be more polite. Interrogative sentences consist of the type that searches for a 'yes or no' answer, for example:

- *"Can you come over and join us?"* (Lam 2000, as cited in Trong, 2012: 22)

Other types of interrogatives such a type is related to asking for information. That kind begins with an element such as *when, who, how, which, when, what, whose, whom, where, whether* and *why*. Consider:

- A-*How about dinner?*
- B- *Sounds great.* (Titlitt and Bruder, 1985: 29)

Invitation Utilized by Modality

Carter and McCarthy (2006:685-702) confirm that the modal expressions sometimes are used in a declarative interrogative clause to function as directives, realizing speech acts such as instructing, commanding, advising, suggesting, requesting and warning. Invitations are related to cases of offering an opportunity to someone to share or do something usually pleasurable with the speaker. An invitation may be accepted or rejected by the speaker. Eastwood (2006:120)

expounds that to invite someone, the pattern *Would you like to ...?* is often used, as exemplified in:

A: *Would you like to have lunch with us?*

B: *Yes, I'd love to. Thank you.*

Do you want to is sometimes used to make an invitation and it is considered as less formal than *Would you like to*:

B: *Do you want to come?*

A: *I can't cos of work.*

In some cases *will* can be employed to make an invitation, for instance:

- *Will you join us for a drink after the concert?* (Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 648)

Must can also be used to make an invitation, particularly in polite situations.

A: *You must come down and have a meal with us sometime.*

B: *Yeah.* (Carter and McCarthy, 2006:654)

You'll have to is often used to make non-specific invitations:

A: *You'll have to come round for a coffee.*

B: *Yeah.* (Carter and McCarthy, 2006:702)

Invitation by Non-modal expression

Mostly, '*Why don't*' can be employed to make an invitation; it is considered less frequent (Carter and McCarthy 2006:705).

A: *Well, Why don't you come up some time?*

B: *Well I will, yes.* (ibid: 706)

Methodology

Methodology is comprised of three phases: the method followed in data collection and analysis, the sample of participants taking the test and the main instrument, the recognition test.

Method

The researchers make use of a mixed (qualitative and quantitative) method in order to describe and analyze their data. The data are collected from responses of Iraqi EFL university students to a recognition test administered to them during the academic year 2020-2021. The analysis of the data is based on students' responses to the recognition test. The findings are obtained in terms of particular

statistical methods to identify the ability of the students to recognize speech acts of invitation and to differentiate it from other related speech acts.

Sample

The sample of the study consists of 50 fourth year students of the University of Misan, College of Education, Department of English. The reason behind selecting fourth year students is that they have a good knowledge concerning pragmatic behavior, especially of speech acts which are found in books of Linguistics and Grammar during their BA stages. In order to avoid any side effect on the test and at the same time to make sure of the homogeneity of the testees, certain variables are taken into consideration. These variables involve the age of the students, the students must be nearly of the same age; of the academic level of the parents.

Instrument

The tool that is used in this research is a recognition test consisting of 12 situations of invitation, in which the subjects are asked to recognize options suitable for these situations.

Results Analysis

The students' answers to the recognition test are collected then analyzed in order to detect the Iraqi EFL college students' ability to identify the speech act of invitation and their ability to differentiate it from other speech acts such as (*offer, request, advice, etc...*).

The analysis of the twelve items of recognition question discloses that most students have the ability to recognize speech act of invitation with few mistakes. 61% of the subjects' answers are correct and 39% of the subjects' answers are not correct. Depending on the analysis of the twelve items of the test it has been found that 17.83% of the subjects' go for *offer* strategy simply because some of the students get used to the form of *let's* to make offers or suggestions rather than invitations. 10.33% of the students' answers are for *questioning* strategy the reasons behind that are different, this is owing to the fact that they are more influenced by the syntactic rather than pragmatic interpretation of the given utterance. In addition, 4.66% is for *request* strategy because of the social relation between the parties, meanwhile 3.16% select *advice* strategy as a result of the construction of the sentence. Furthermore, 1.15% choose *order* strategy and finally 1.83% select suggestion strategy. The reason behind the choice of *request, advice* and *order* is attributed to the fact that those students in some cases resort to direct rather than indirect speech acts. So it is to be concluded that some of the students were unable to differentiate between speech act of invitation from other related speech acts such as *offer, questioning, request and advice*, due to their pragmatic incompetency All the answers are represented in the table below with the percentage for each item in order to give a full picture about the results of the analysis.

Table 1: Overall Results of Recognition

Item No.	Correct Answer	Request	Offer	Invitation	Questioning	Suggestion	Order	Advice	Per. of Incorrect Answer	Per. of correct Answer
1	21	0%		42%	50%		8%		58%	42%
2	26	8%	36%	52%		4%			48%	52%
3	13		20%	26%	42%			12%	74%	26%
4	38	10%	8%	76%			6%		24%	76%
5	45	0%	6%	90%		4%			10%	90%
6	27	12%		54%	20%			14%	46%	54%
7	37	6%	20%	74%	0%				26%	74%
8	34		20%	68%		8%		4%	32%	68%
9	39	0%	10%	78%	12%				22%	78%
10	36	8%	14%	72%		6%			28%	72%
11	14	12%	60%	28%			0%		72%	28%
12	36		20%	72%	0%			8%	28%	72%
	366	4.66%	17.83%	61%	10.33%	1.83%	1.16%	3.16%	39%	61%

The overall percentages of the pragmalinguistic strategies recognized by the Iraqi EFL university students can be also displayed in Figure 1, which seems to be a summary of the results obtained from the analysis of students' answers to the test:

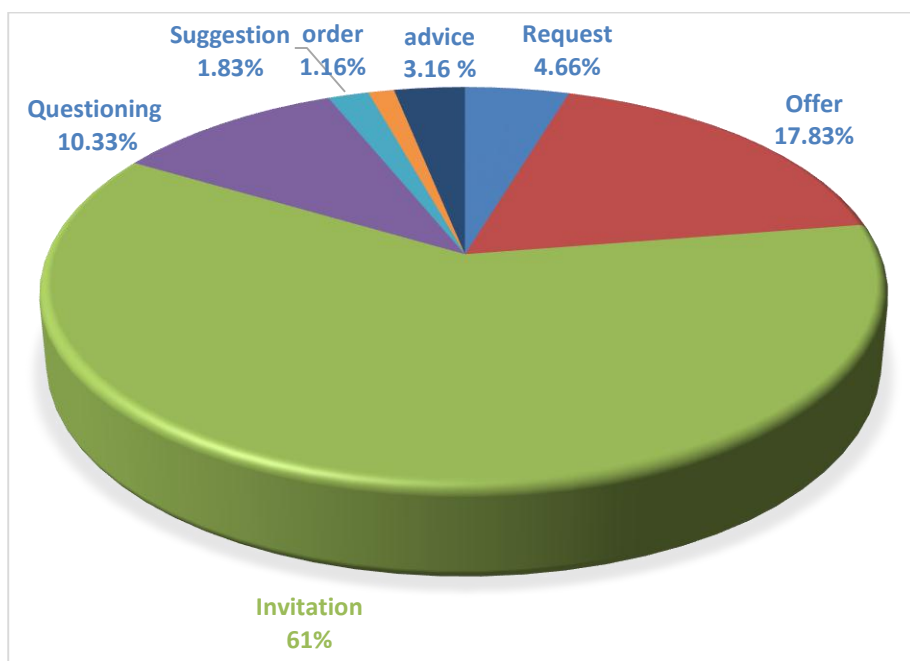


Figure (1) Recognition Strategies of Invitation

Conclusion

With reference the analysis of the students' responses, it has been revealed that most Iraqi EFL 4th students have the ability to recognize speech acts of invitation and their ability is somehow good. This is simply because they are, in recognition test, only required to identify and select the right choice. In addition, it has been found that some of the Iraqi EFL college students encounter difficulty to differentiate speech acts of invitation from other speech acts. The recognition tests reveals that some of them use *offer, questioning, advice...* etc. strategies instead of *invitation*. They take one strategy instead of another since their pragmatic knowledge about invitation and situations involving invitation is not good and perhaps they lack knowledge about the employment of these strategies for invitation.

Recommendations

For the progress of both teachers and EFL learners, there are certain aspects that are needed to be improved. So, it is recommended that:

- It is necessary to help EFL learners to develop their ability to use all different kinds of the strategies in order to express speech acts at large and especially invitation. Further, they must be well taught to use linguistic choices that suit given situations.
- 2-It is crucial to enhance the pragmatic competence of the learner by giving more attention to pragmatic use in EFL classes and making it part of their curriculum. Teachers should improve the pragmatic competence of learners not only concentrate on the grammatical aspects only.

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Appendix: Recognition Test

Q1/ Choose the most appropriate options

1. You want your girlfriend to meet your family tonight. You say "Ella, do you want to come and stay at my home tonight". This entails...
a- Request b- Questioning c-Offer d-Invitation
2. You are a painter and you have a gallery next week and you want your friends to come .You say" Hi guys. Come to my gallery next week." This entails...
a- Suggestion b- Invitation c- Offer d-Request
3. Your friend is suffering from depression and you want to change his mood and take him watch a movie. You say" Let's go out to watch a movie." This entails...
a- Request b- Offer c- Invitation d- Order

4. You feel thirsty and you want to go to STARBUCKS to have a drink and you want your friend to go with you. You say "Come to have a drink from STARBUCKS?" This entails...
- a- Advice b- Offer c- Questioning c- Invitation
5. You are a college student and your graduation party is at the 7th of July and you want your grandmother and grandfather to come to the party. You say "Would you like to come to my graduation party on the 7th of July?" This entails...
- a- suggestion b- Invitation c- Request d- Offer
6. You work at a supermarket and you want your boss to watch a football match with you. You say "How about watching a football game?" This entails...
- a- Invitation b- Questioning c- Request c- Advice
7. You're a college student at Oxford University and you saw your professor at the Mall and you want him to have a cup of coffee. You say "I will be honored if you join me to have a cup of coffee." This entails ...
- a- Request b- Offer c- Invitation d- Questioning
8. You're an employee at a company and you've got promotion recently and you want to make a party and you want your boss to join. You say "Won't you join us for the party, Mr. Parker?" This entails...
- a- Suggestion b- Advice c- Offer d- Invitation
9. Suppose you're a teacher and you want your students to go camping in the forest. You say "Do you want to go camping in the forest?" This entails...
- a- Invitation b- Questioning c- Request d- Order
10. Suppose you are a manager and you want to celebrate the second anniversary of the company and you want your staff to participate. You say "Will you join us for a drink?" This entails ...
- a- Offer b- Invitation c- Suggestion d- Request
11. Suppose you are professor and you want your student to join the college anniversary carnival. You say "Why don't you come and participate the college anniversary carnival?" This entails...
- a- Advice b- Invitation c- Offer d- Questioning
12. Suppose you are a grandfather and you want your grandsons to come and celebrate the New Year. You say "Come to my house." This entails...
- a- Order b- Request c- Offer d- Invitation