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Iraqi EFL University Students' Strategies of Producing 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, increase social solidarity, and maintain good relationships. However, people use various types of pragmatic and linguistic strategies to yield invitations. Thus, this paper aims to detect Iraqi University students' ability to use the illocutionary act of invitation. Fifty Iraqi EFL 4th year students of the University of Misan have been administered to a production text. Responses to the test have been collected and analyzed. The paper concludes that those students mostly do not have the ability to produce utterances of invitation, and they encounter difficulty when producing them. In addition, they show a high preference to use modality, imperatives and interrogatives in most situations. Most of their utterances concerning invitation are translations of Iraqi utterances used in everyday Iraqi spoken situations.

1. Introduction

Invitations are said to be everyday activities that habitually happen amongst friends in everyday interaction and occasionally in formal and informal situations amongst acquaintances 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 the preservation or (maintaining) of a good relationship. They habitually intend "to address the positive face" of the invitees.

Due to the above discussion, it is obvious that Iraqi EFL university students encounter difficulty in handling invitations; they must then employ various pragmatic and linguistic strategies in producing 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 handling the illocutionary of invitation. Thus, this paper begins with giving a survey of the SA of invitation focusing on its pragmatic and linguistic characteristics and general views of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic issues as they constitute two components of the pragmatic interpretation. Pragmalinguistic strategies are too presented, followed by the method exploited in gathering and investigating data and getting at the most important outcomes.

2. Speech Act Theory

It was Austin who first offered the theory of speech acts which was later published in 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 a complaint, apology, invitation, compliment, request or promise.

3. Speech Act of Invitation
Invitation, according to Searle (1976:11), is a directive illocutionary SA that refers to the attempts that the speaker made to get the hearer to perform something. For Hancher (1979:13), the invitation is commissive directives 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), an invitation is a speech event that exemplifies the Generosity Maxim. The 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 daily social 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.

4. 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), an 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:

 (a) Do you want to have lunch tomorrow?
This example contains a reference to time, activity and a request to respond. 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:

(b) We should get together something.
Leech (2014:180) defines invitation as a speech event that exemplifies the Generosity Maxim. The invitation is seen as an offer occurring in a hospitality frame. That is, it means that a speaker is a 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.

To sum up, invitations are social activities that aim to maintain the social relationships between the interlocutors in any communicative situation.

5. 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: sociopragmatics 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 conditions, 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 used sometimes within the study of pragmatics to indicate 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.

6. 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 is the main syntactic strategies that are followed in realizing the SA of invitation.

6.1 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)

6.2 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 such as 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 (Titllitt and Bruder,1985: 29)

6.3 Interrogatives
Interrogatives can be utilized to perform various functions, such as request and invitation. Wh-question and Yes/No question are the major types that 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 is 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 as type, are 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. (Titllitt& Bruder,1985: 29)

6.4 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, suggestion, 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)

6.5 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)

7. Methodology

The 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 production test.

7.1 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 production test administrated to them during the academic year 2020-2021. The analysis of the data is based on a pragmalinguistic investigation of the students' responses to the test. The findings are obtained in terms of particular statistical methods to identify the strategies that Iraqi EFL students apply when handling invitations, the utmost frequent strategy and the ratio of errors made by students.

7.2 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 good knowledge concerning pragmatic behaviour, especially of speech acts found in books of Linguistics and Grammar during their BA stages. In order to avoid any side effects 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 near the same age; the academic level of the parents.

7.3 Instrument

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

8. Data & Results Analysis

The students' answers to the production test are collected then analyzed in order to detect the pragmalinguistic strategies that Iraqi EFL university students make use of when producing SA of invitation, to reveal the most common strategy, and furthermore to find out why students use certain strategies.

The analysis of the twelve items of the test shows that most of the students face difficulty in producing speech acts of invitation whereby 40% of the subjects answer correctly, while 60% of the subjects' answers were incorrect. However, the students who answer the items of the production test correctly utilize the following strategies:

Modality, 10% of students tend to invite using modality strategy (*would you like*), which is the highest percentage. This is exemplified in items (1, 4, and 6). The students seem to be familiar with this strategy, and it is considered the most common one, for example:

(a) *Would you like to come to dinner?*

Imperative, 9.83% of the subjects prefer to use imperative strategy as in item number (2, 9, 11, and 12) particularly when the speaker has more power than his/her addressee or equal status but their relation is close, that is to say, they know each other. Imperative strategy is used, for example:

(a) *Guys, you all deserve a great night and a delicious meal for your hard work, so be ready tonight to celebrate.*
(b) *Let's have a drink to celebrate the success of the program.*

Interrogative, 9.66% of the subjects resort to interrogative strategy to invite, using the form of *Wh-questions* and *yes/no questions* as in item number (3 and 7) for example:

(a) *How about going outside to watch a baseball match?*
(b) *Do you mind if I invite you to join me to watch a baseball match? It would be so happy.*

The reason behind choosing interrogatives is that the speaker has lower power than his/her hearer, and the use of the interrogative form with indirect directives is more polite.

Performative, 5.33% of the students invite by using performative strategy when the speaker has lower power than the hearer; or when the speaker has more power than the hearer, but they know one another, so the speaker uses the form of performative to invite. This form is a polite expression used when the speaker wants to show respect to the hearer, as in item numbers (8 and 10), for example:

(a) *I would like to invite you to lunch with your family to express my gratitude to you.*

Declarative, 4.16% of the students have recourse to declarative strategy to make an invitation, declarative strategy is a polite expression, and it is used when the speaker has lower power than the hearer, as in item (5), for example:

(a) *I and my friends are having a party; we will be honored if you come to our party.*

Finally, 0.33% of the subjects invited using **non-modality** and 0.66 used **other strategies** to make invitation; these two strategies are the least used ones. Consider:

(a) *I'm going to Paris. Why don't you go with me?*
(b) *1-we miss having you with us, son, and for this Christmas, I will wish seeing you.*

To account for the percentages of the strategies used by the students to produce the SA of invitation, examine table 1 below:

Table 1: Pragmalinguistic Strategies in Producing Invitation

Item No.	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	Declarative	Performative	Imperative	Interrogative	Modality	Non-Modality	Others
1	48%	52%	4%	4%	10%	8%	20%	0%	2%
2	44%	56%	0%	0%	18%	14%	12%	0%	0%
3	40%	60%	0%	2%	8%	16%	10%	2%	2%
4	38%	62%	4%	0%	6%	6%	20%	0%	2%
5	36%	64%	14%	10%	0%	4%	8%	0%	0%
6	38%	62%	4%	0%	10%	10%	14%	0%	0%
7	36%	64%	4%	0%	6%	18%	8%	0%	0%

8	40%	60%	6%	12%	6%	10%	6%	0%	0%
9	44%	56%	4%	12%	14%	10%	4%	0%	0%
10	38%	62%	8%	14%	4%	6%	6%	0%	0%
11	42%	58%	2%	0%	20%	12%	4%	2%	2%
12	36%	64%	0%	10%	16%	2%	8%	0%	0%
	40%	60%	4.16%	5.33%	9.83%	9.66%	10%	0.33%	0.66%

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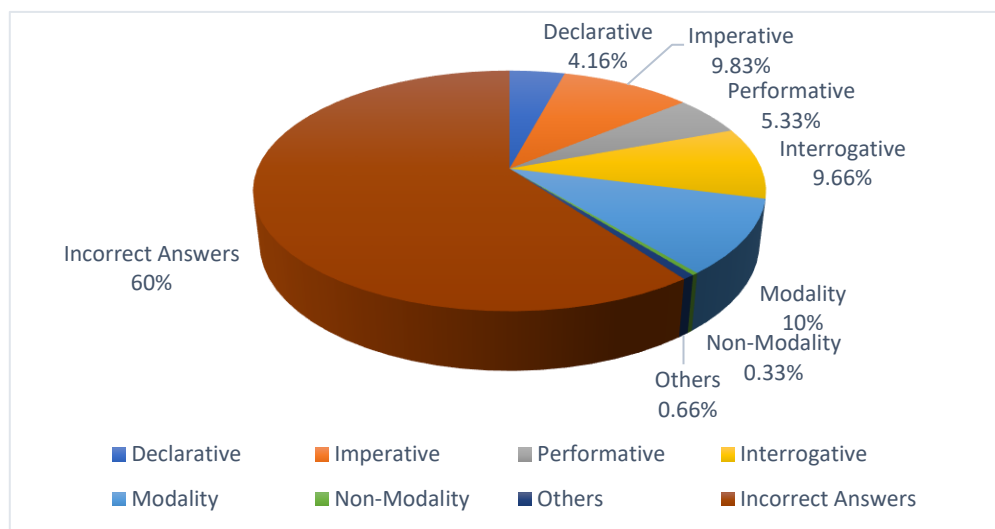

Figure (2) Percentage of Pragmalinguistic Strategies of Invitation

9. Causes of Failure

The students' failure to give correct answers is due to two factors interlingual and intralingual reasons:

i. Interlingual

Richard (1994, as cited in Sari, 2016: 89) states that when a foreign language learner makes a mistake in the target language as a result of the mother tongue effect, this is called interlingual errors. For Touchie (1986:75), interlingual errors "are basically caused by the influence of the mother tongue". Most of the students tend to use the structure of their mother tongue and apply it to the target language. The errors that the learner make when producing SA of invitation are caused by using the structure of their mother tongue. Three basic classifications represent the specific errors that the speaker commits: misuse of verb tense, misuse of prepositions, misuse of articles. Examine:

(a) *"hi love, there is a great new movie played in the cinema, would you like to go to watch it together?"*
(b) *Do you want to go with me to a baseball match? I have two tickets.*
(c) *Do you want to watch a movie at the cinema?*

The total percentage of errors committed by students as a result of the interlanguage factor is 54%.

ii. Intralingual

Committing errors is not only a result of the student's language interference but also a result of the mistakes they make in the target language. This is due to the fact that students are not well-qualified in the target language; they have not mastered the rules of the target language. Keshavarz (2012:124) states that the influence an item of the target language makes upon another is called intralingual. In most cases, the reason behind intralingual errors is the mutual interference of some items in the target language. In this respect, Touchie (1986:78) mentions many factors leading to intralingual transfer:

i. Simplification happens when learners intend to employ simple constructions and forms instead of complex ones. An instance is the utilization of present simple rather than present perfect continuous. In terms of tenses, students used present simple instead of present continuous such as:

(a) *Are you come to my birthday next week?"*

*ii. **Overgeneralization*** occurs when learners tend to use one structure or form in a context where they are not applicable. An example of overgeneralization is the omission of the third person singular like *he go*. Another example is the use of *goed* or *comed* as the forms of *go* and *come* in the past tense. The ratio of errors in this aspect is (19%). Further, students commit errors in using *come* as a present continuous instead of *coming* as such:

    (b) Are you <u>come</u> to my birthday next week?

*iii. **False concept hypothesized*** happens when learners tend to form the wrong hypothesis about the target language. For example, some learners think that *was* is a marker of the past tense, so they use passive instead of active. Consider:

    (a) *Everyone <u>was participated</u> in the success of the program; I would like to invite you for food.*

The total percentage of the intralanguage errors registers (46%). This means that interlanguage errors are greater than intralanguage errors committed by the Iraqi EFL university students.

10. Conclusion

With reference to the analysis of the students' responses, it has been revealed that most Iraqi EFL 4th students do not have the ability to produce suitable utterances concerning the speech act of invitation, and even when producing them, they encounter various types of difficulty. In addition, they resort to different pragmalinguistic strategies when producing invitation. They have a high preference to use modality, imperatives and interrogatives more than other strategies in most situations. Furthermore, it has been found that most of the utterances that Iraqi EFL produces when expressing invitation are translations of Iraqi utterances that are used in everyday Iraqi spoken situations rather than utterances of the target language.

11. 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:

1- It is necessary to help EFL learners to develop their ability to use all different kinds of 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.

3- There is a need to enhance the lexical competence of the Iraqi EFL learners that are used to represent SAs of invitation, that is, to teach them when it is suitable to use imperatives, interrogatives, declaratives and modality and so on.

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