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An Analytical Study of Speech Acts Classification at the University Level

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Abstract

The present study tries to analyse Iraqi EFL learners' ability of recognising speech acts classification and their strategies. It aims at investigating Iraqi EFL learners ' awareness of recognising the types of speech acts classification, finding out Iraqi EFL learners ' ability to realise the strategies of speech acts and discovering Iraqi EFL learners's ability to distinguish between explicit and implicit strategies. It's hypothesised that Iraqi EFL learners aren't competent in recognising speech acts classification, those learners of EFL are able to realise the strategies (direct and indirect) of speech acts and explicit speech act strategy strategies is the most frequently used by those learners. The population of this study is seventy Iraqi EFL learners at fourth year at English Department/ College of Education for Humanities/ Thi-Qar University. The data elicitation tool is a test which takes the form of multiple choices technique. The data is analysed statistically and the validity and reliability of the test are verified .The study concludes that Iraqi EFL Learners are aware of speech acts classification. The statistical analysis reveals that the representatives are the most frequently used type by those learners, those learners of EFL have the ability to recognise speech acts strategies, direct and explicit strategies are the most frequently used.

1. Introduction

Pragmatics can be defined as a branch of   linguistics which deals with aspects of meaning that aren't driven from grammatical form of utterances, but depends mainly on the context (Trask, 1997, P. 74). Similarly, Miller and Brown (2013,P. 353) claim that pragmatics deals with the language that is used in the context.The centre of pragmatics is speech act theory (Akinwotu, 2013, P. 45). Speech act is a part of communication which can be defined as an action which is performed by the use of an utterance to communicate. Dawson and Phelan (2016,P. 710) define speech acts as "actions that are performed only through using language." It means that speech act describes the use of speech which emphasises the speaker's intention or goal in producing an utterance. Hence, Introducing the speech acts classification in EFL settings can help students to deliver relevant knowledge and make them more capable of performing crystal and sound speech acts which leads them to use the language more efficiently and effectively. Iraqi EFL students should be taught different forms and classifications of speech acts in order to have the option to convey and communicate easily and appropriately. Utilising speech acts helps EFL learners in creating appropriate intercultural interaction. The present study tries to answer the following questions: do Iraqi EFL learners have the awareness of recognising the types of speech acts classification? do Iraqi EFL learners have the ability to realise strategies of speech acts? what is /are the most frequent speech act used by those learners of EFL?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Pragmatics

Pragmatics has been defined in several ways, such as being the study of language in use or the study of the intended meaning (Kroeger, 2018, P. 5). According to Birner pragmatics is a field of linguistics which deals with utterances in their immediate situation, who said that, to whom. Thus, one can draw inferences which aren't carried out by the literal meaning (semantics) or by looking how the string of words are constructed in linear sequences (syntax). It is generally concerned with intended meaning (Birner, 2013, P. 1). For Haung (2014, P. 2) "pragmatics is the systematic study of meaning by virtue of, or dependent on the use of language". The scope of pragmatics includes deixis, cooperative principle, presuppositions, conversational implicature and speech act theory.

2.2 Speech Act Theory

The frame work of this philosophy is traced back to J.L.Austin (1962) and his claim that speech is not only making statement , but people use words to make actions such as promising, invitation, warning and so forth (Baktir,2013 , PP. 200-202) .

The earliest version of speech act theory has focused on making distinction between constative and performative utterances, for instance:

1)The cat sat on the mat.

According to Austin, this sentence is purely descriptive statement and can be valued either true or false. Meanwhile performative utterances are not viewed as true or false, but either as felicitous or infelicitous. The latter version, Austin pays his attention to distinguish between the explicit and implicit performative sentences. For example:

2) I promise it will never happen again.

The implicit would be,

3) **It will never happen again**. (Cruse, 2006, P. 34)

 Performatives tell about some change in the world. This change would be in social relationships, institutional or facts (Chapman, 2011, P.58). Speech acts classification has been classified according to different scholars on the basis of different characteristics. Here a chronological review of speech acts classifications.

2.2.1 Austin's Speech Acts Classification (1962)

Depending on the illocutionary force, Austin divides the illocutionary act into five categories

1.**Verdictives**

" They are typified by giving a verdict as the name implies, by a jury arbitrator or umpire". (Austin,1962, P. 150).

4) I should call him industrious.

The set of verbs that are characterised as verdict speech act are reckon , place , put it at, grade, assess, analyse, rank, rate, measure, describe.(ibid)

2. Exercitives

"They are exercising the power, rights or influence "(Austin,1962, P. 150). The set of speech act types that fall under this class are appointing, voting, ordering, urging, advising, warning.

5) I declare war. (ibid)

3. **Commssives**

This class is characterized by committing the speaker to do something, such as promising. It also includes other acts which can't be described as a promise, like announcement and declaration of intentions (Austin,1962,PP.150-151).

4. Behabitives

"They are a very miscellaneous group and have to do with attitudes and social behaviour". (Astin,1962,P. 151). The SAs that are characterized as behabitives are commending, cursing, challenging, condoling, apologizing and congratulations.

6) I apologize. .(Ibid, P. 159)

5. Expositives

" They make plain how our utterances fit into the course of an argument or conversation …". .(Austin,1962, P. 151).Examples of this class, I assume, I reply, I postulate. . (ibid,P. 161).

2.2.2 Searle's Speech Acts Classifications (1979)

Searle (1979) divides speech acts according to different dimensions including the different in the point of speech act , direction of fit ,differences in psychological state and point of illocutionary acts (Searle, 1979, P. 2-4). Searle assumes that there are five types of illocutionary speech acts including:

1.Representatives

They are equivalent to truth conditions. They include social and physical facts, and the things that want to be described is available in the physical world. (Gran,2015,P. 11).   Searle has mentioned some assertive indicative words (most of them are verbs) consisting hypothesise, claim, insist, diagnose, deduce, conclude ,boast, suggest, believe, call, assume, and suspect (Qadir & Riloff, 2011, P. 752).

2. Directives

They are types of illocutionary speech acts. They are the speaker's attempt to convince the addressee to do something. Directives can be less powerful like asking, or there is great power imposed upon the hearer to accomplish the speaker's intention such as ordering. (Widiatmoko, 2017, P. 276).

3. Declarations

They have some subsequent on the immediate situation and affect the state of affairs such as declare war, christening and firing from job(Alvarez,2005,P. 696).

With declarative speech act, the speaker must have some authority that permits him to change the current state of affairs. The indicative words of declarative speech acts are declare ,baptize ,pronounce , sentence call ,bless , authorize , and nominate(Ruhayh et al., 2018,P. 78).

4.Expressives

They convey the emotional condition of the speaker that is showed by the content in particular context. They don't alter the world or part of it (del Champo Martinze,2013,P. 209). Expressive indicative words as they are set by Searle including thank, apologize, deplore, congratulation, condole, sorry and appreciate (Qadir & Rillof,2011, P. 752).

5.Commissives

Cruse (2006, P. 168) defines commissives as the commitment of the speaker to accomplish an action in the future course of time. Commissives include promise, threaten, offer. Qadir and Riloff (2011 ,P. 752)mention that Searle hasn't listed any indicative words that can be connected with commissives. Qadir and Riloff add some key words that sign the commissives like plan, commit, later , promise , tomorrow.

2.2.3 Bach and Harnish's Classifications of Speech Acts (1979)

Their taxonomy is based on types of expressed attitudes by the speaker. Their classification has six categories, two of them (effectives and verdictives) aren't conventional whereas the four categories are communicative illocutionary act. The taxonomy includes the following classes:

1.**Constatives** include the speech act of assertives, predicatives, retrodictives, descriptives, ascriptives, informatives, conformatives, concessives, retrodictives, assentives, dissentives, disputatives, responsives, suggestives,soppositives,

2. **Directives** include the speech act of requestives, questions, requirements, prohibitives, permissives and advisories.

3.**Commissives** consists of promises, offers,bid.

4.**Acknowledgements** contain the speech act of apologize, condole, congratulate, greet, thank, bid, accept. (Bach & Harnish, 1979, P. 39-53).

5.**Effectives**

They are utterances which are accomplished by the right person in the right situation. It's a matter of mutual belief, including the acts of resigning, bidding, vetoing, seconding, exampling, bequeathing. 6.**Verdictives**

They are utterances that determine the facts. The determined facts. could be natural or institutional (ibid, PP. 113-115).

2.2.4 Leech's Classification of Speech Acts (1983)

Leech divides SA according to semantic and syntactic characteristics. His taxonomy includes:

1.**Assertives**

Their construction consists of "S VERB (.....) that X". S is the subject, at the same time it is the speaker. 'That X' refers to proposition. The verbs that come under this classification are: affirm, allege, assert, forecast, predict, announce, insist.

2.**Directives**

They have their own construction "S VERB O that X ' or "S VERB O to Y'. S referring to the subject, O refers to the object. That X is an infinitive , it isn't used to indicated that clause. Verbs of this classification like demand, forbid, beg, bid ,ask, recomand, request.

3.**Commissives**

Their construction is" S VERB that X" or another construction "S VERB to Y'. 'to Y' is an infinitive construction . Offer, promise, swear, volunteer and vow are verbs of this class of speech act.

4.**Expressives**

The construction is 'S VERB (prep) Xn" .Prep refers to an optional preposition, Xn is used to indicate any abstract noun or gerundive. The set of verbs that fall under this category are apologise, comminserate, congratulate, pardon and thank.

5.**Declarations**

Leech points out that declarations have no an illocutionary force, but instead they are only conventional speech act and their force is driven from the role they play in rituals. This category includes the following verbs adjourn, veto, sentence, baptize. He state that they are

attributed as social acts rather than speech acts.

6. Rogatives

Leech sets this class depending on semantic and syntactic features. He treated them as a subclass of directives.

The verbs are ask, inquire, query, question (Leech,1984,PP. 205-206).

2.2.6 Yule's Speech Acts Classifications (1996)

Yule has classified speech acts into five categories including:

1.**Declarations** " are those kinds of speech acts that change the world via their utterances." For

2.**Expressives** " are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker feels." For instance:

3.**Representatives** "are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker believes to be the

4.**Directives** " are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to get someone else to do something."

5. **Commissives** "are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to some future actions." (Yule, 1996, PP. 53-54).

2.3 Direct and Indirect Speech Acts

Huang (2007, P. 109) assumes that there are three main types of sentence in all natural languages including declarative, interrogative , and imperative. There is direct relationship between the form and the function. Declarative sentence functions as a statement, interrogative has the function of question and imperative can work as command or request. For instance

7)You wear a seat belt. (declarative)

8) Do you wear a seat belt? (interrogative)

9)Wear a seat belt. (imperative) (Yule,1996, P. 54).

Idle and Lakoff (2005,P. 175) point out that indirect speech is global and natural to all human languages .Most of the utterances are uttered indirectly in which we perform one act , but implicitly we mean something else. Searle assumes that we have double illocutionary acts in single locution and that can be ordered hierarchically. The indirect speech act is used to communicate which is considered as primary act while the direct one is secondary act. For example

10)Student X ':Let's go to the movies tonight.

11)Student Y:' I have to study for an exam.

The inference of Y's speech is a rejection to X's proposal (directive) that he can't go to the movie and this is called the primary act or the communicated one while the secondary act is representative that he wants to study (Ruhlemann,2019 ,P. 23) .

2.4 Explicit and Implicit Speech Acts

Explicit and implicit speech act are used to perform an action. The main difference between the two is that with explicit speech act, one uses explicit performative verb (Birner, 2013, P. 180).

The implicit performatives are called primary performative which can be defined as "are performative utterances which are produced without a performative verb "

13) I shall be there.(implicit)

14)I hereby promise that I shall be there.(Explicit) (Senft, 2014, P. 15).

Austin makes it clear that explicit performative utterances are distinguished syntactically from other utterances. The subject should be first person, the tense must be present, the voice ought to be active and the mood is indicative.

15) I name this ship The Albatross. (Thomas, 1995, P. 32).

2.5 Felicity conditions

   Felicity conditions can be defined as "a term used in the theory of SAs to refer to the criteria which must be satisfied if SA is to achieve its purpose" (Crystal,2008,P. 188). The purpose of the Felicity conditions is to evaluate at which extent the performance of the utterance is satisfied in their contexts (Sbisa,2002, P. 2).

   Austin introduced a typology of conditions that the performatives must be satisfied. The conditions of felicity are as follow:

1. The conventional procedure must be there and it has a conventional effect.

2. The appropriateness of both persons and circumstances which are specified in the procedure.

3. The correctness and completeness of the procedure.

4. If the result of the conduct is specified, the relevant parties must do so.

5. People's feelings and attentions should be specified in the procedure. (Levinson,1983.229) .

Similarly, Searle has set certain rules of felicity conditions. They ought to be met in showing that a particular utterance is felicitous. His felicity conditions requires propositional , sincerity, preparatory and essential conditions . (Taguchi,2019, P.18). Searle's felicity conditions are as follows:

1.**The propositional** Searle states that the propositional content consists of referring and predicating. Referring means pointing to something by using a particular expression such as noun phrase whereas predicating describes or adds some information about the thing that we refer to (Drid,2018, PP. 6-7)

2.**The preparatory** condition involves The essentiality of context in which speech act is used to be appropriate in the right context, so that the speech act is called felicitous (Kroeger, 2018, P. 106).

3.**Sincerity condition** requires the psychological state of the speaker and the hearer (ibid). According to Searle (1969, P.65) " whenever there is a psychological state specified in the sincerity condition, the performance of the act counts as an expression of that psychological state " He (ibid) adds that the sincerity condition of assertive is " an expression of belief " , the sincerity condition of directives is " an expression or desire " , meanwhile, the sincerity condition of commissives is " an expression of intention ". Finally , the sincerity condition of expressives is " an expression of gratitude or pleasure ".

   4.**The essential condition** which requires the speech act with particular belief or intention (Wales,2011, P. 156). With the essential condition, the utterance must have a particular intended type of speech acts by the speaker and recognised by the hearer (Drid, 2018, P. 8).

2.7 The Role of Pragmatics in Language Teaching

   Teaching pragmatics of a foreign language is considered as a difficult task, since it requires the right use of the language in right settings. Foreign language class doesn't give the learners a chance to use the language appropriately. It has been subsumed that if one wants to learn or acquire second or foreign language pragmatics, he must pay a great attention not only to the form of the utterances, but rather to the function and to the context in which the utterance is used (Norouzian & Eslami,2016, PP. 26-27). The purpose of teaching pragmatics is to make students aware about the suitability of their speech in the context what they can say, to whom, when, how and where. Knowing grammar (phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics) isn't sufficient to communicate effectively in the target language so that learners should have some pragmatic ability in which learners understand the meaning that is communicated by the speaker and being capable of interpreting of the intended meaning, the goals, purposes (Cohen,2016, P. 563). There are two strategies that teachers can use them to teach pragmatics. One strategy which is raised by Bardovi-Harling , Cohen and Mahan includes online class and its focus with second and FL learners, whereas another strategy which is introduced by Cohen and Ishihara (2004) which proposes teaching pragmatics in the classroom beside self-access to webs that are specified for teaching (Bardovi-Harling et al., 2006, P. 175).

3.   Methodology

The method of this research is a quantitative approach in which the data analysed statistically. The participants of the present study are Iraqi EFL learners at English Department , College of Education, Thi-Qar University. All of them are fourth-year students enrolled in the academic year (2020-2021) . The total number of participants is seventy. The instrument that is used to elicit data is a test . The test is made up to measure the recognition level of Iraqi EFL Learners

of speech acts classification and their strategies . It contains twenty situations which are designed according to Searle's terms of classifying speech acts (1979) . The test is designed in form of multiple choice techniques . In this case, the participants should choose the correct answers among others distracting items. Each situation consists of three options (A,B and C) . In "A" option , which tests the EFL learners' ability in recognising speech acts types , so the participant has to choose one correct answer out of five alternatives whereas in "B" option which is designed to test EFL learners' ability in recognising the strategies that are used in each situations. Hence, the participant has to choose two correct answers out of four alternatives . In " C" option the participants have to choose one right strategy of speech acts (explicit and implicit).

4. Results
5.
4.1 Statistical Analysis of Speech Acts Classification

The statistical analysis of speech acts classification reveals that the frequency of (Representative) represents the ratio (24.7%), which is the most used in all the situations followed by (Directive) which represents the ratio (20.3%), the frequency of (Expressive) represents the ratio (17.9 %), the frequency of (Commissive) comes after that with the ratio (17.3%) whereas the frequency of (Declaration) which represents the ratio (12.6.%). The frequency of (None) that the students are able to distinguish among the speech acts which represents the ratio (7.0 %). See figure (1)
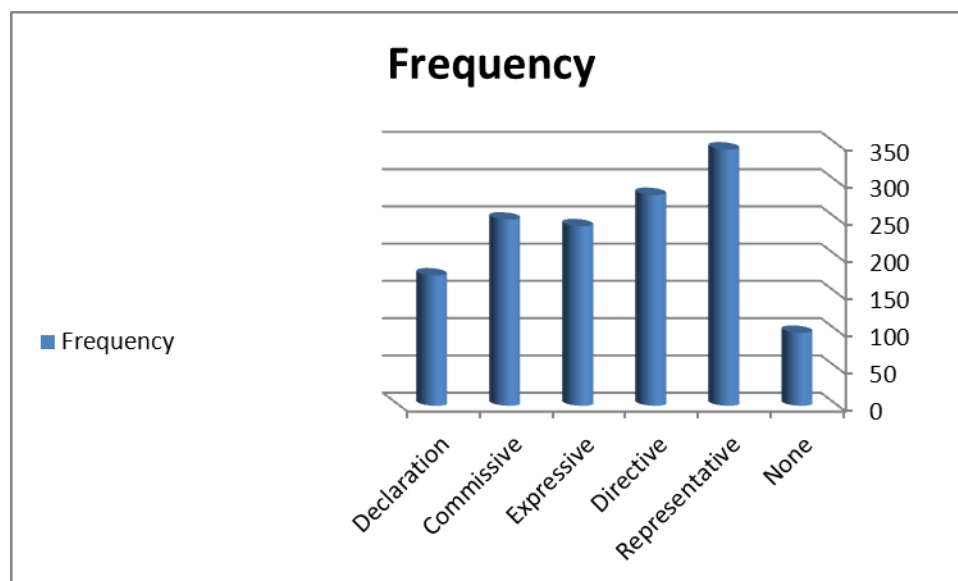

Figure (1) Bar Graphs for Types of Speech Acts Classification

4.2 Statistical Analysis of Speech Acts strategies (Direct, Indirect)

The statistical analysis reports that the frequency of (Direct) speech acts strategy represents the ratio (46.1%) whereas the frequency of (Indirect) speech acts strategy represents the ratio (30.7%) and the frequency of (None) represents the ratio (23.1%). See figure (2)
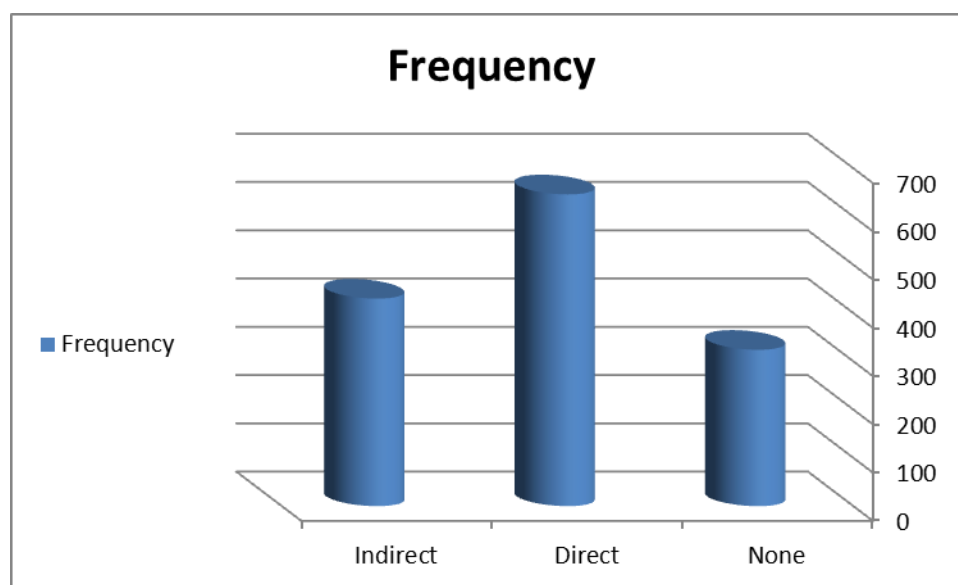

Figure (2) Bar Braphs for Types of Strategies (Direct , Indirect) Speech Acts

4.3 A Statistical Analysis of Explicit and Implicit Strategies

The statistical analysis shows that the frequency of (Explicit) represents the ratio (41.2 %) while the frequency of (Implicit) represents the ratio (29.4 %) whereas the frequency of (None) represents the ratio (29.4 %). See figure (3)
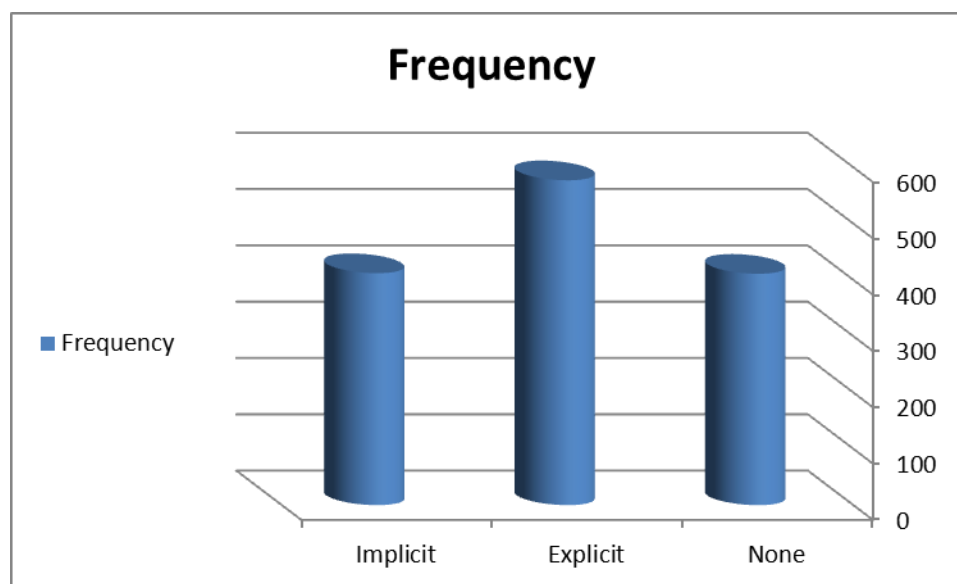
Figure (3) Bar Graphs for Types of Strategies (Explicit , Implicit) speech Acts

6. Conclusions

Based on the results obtained from the present study, the conclusions of the present study are shown as follows:

1.Most of Iraqi EFL Learners are aware of speech acts classification. The statistical analysis reveals that the representatives are the most frequently used type by those learners followed by directives, the expressives then   the Commissives while the less dominant speech act is declarations.

2.Those Learners of EFL have the ability to recognise speech acts strategies (direct, indirect) in which the DSA is the most frequently used strategy.

3.They are able to distinguish between explicit and implicit performatives. The statistical analysis reveals that the explicit strategy is the most frequently used by those learners.

4.The explicit strategy is the most frequently used by learners.

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