Writing Acknowledgements: An Empirical Study of Some
Iraqi Theses and Dissertations

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The study of meaning within the pragmatic field seems to be interesting and effective, as it involves aspects of meaning which are not solely derived from the meanings that are attributed to the manipulation of a certain linguistic form by a speaker in an appropriate situation (Yule,1997 :127). This study deals with acknowledgement as a speech act that implies the use of positive politeness strategies. In every day communication, there are a number of speech acts used to reflect positive politeness is an expression of positive evaluation that takes place in every day conversational encounters among participants of equal or higher status . An acknowledgement may be used to open a conversation or to smooth conversational interaction by reinforcing the links of solidarity between the interlocutors.

Problem

Speech acts are difficult to perform appropriately in a second language because learners may not know all the idiomatic expressions or cultural norms in the second language or they may transfer their first language rules and conventions into the second language, assuming that such rules are universal. This is so because the natural tendency for language learners is to fall back on what they know to be appropriate in their first language .The study deals with the type of strategies Iraqi postgraduate students (IPGSs) adopt to express their acknowledgements, the types of constructions used, and if they realize of the speech act of acknowledgement appropriately in English settings.

Hypotheses

The present study aims at proving that:

1-acknowledgement A limited number of syntactic structures are used for expressing an.

2-When acknowledging thanking or advising could be expressed or requested.

Objectives

The study aims at:

1-Investigating how Iraqi postgraduate students express acknowledgements.

2-Finding out the most common strategies adopted by them .

3-Finding out the dominant constructions used to express acknowledgements .

Procedures

In the present study two procedures are used ,first examining the use of acknowledgements as an expression of positive evaluation that takes place in every day conversational encounters among participants of equal or higher status of the Iraqi postgraduate theses and dissertations to achieve the aims of the study and finding out the most commonly used structures to express an acknowledgement. Second, presenting a brief theoretical background about speech acts in general and speech act of acknowledgement in particular.

The researcher limits his study to direct illocutionary act of acknowledgement written by Iraqi postgraduate students in their theses and dissertations to find types of structures largely used for expressing what they do want.

There are infinite number of words that could be chosen to acknowledgement, but the set of lexical items and grammatical patterns we use in our daily life interaction when acknowledging and have high frequency in our daily discourse are very restricted .

The speech act of acknowledgement is regarded as phatic communion and functions as solidarity in many cases, though it can be a face-threatening act depending on the situation.

A speech act as a term used to an action done by two people or more by using language ,contains both constative and performative elements, is an utterance that serves a function in communication. Austin(1962) replaced his constative-performative terminology by three-fold distinction location(act of saying),illocution(what is done in saying something) and perlocution (what is done by saying something).   A speech act might contain just one word, as in "Sorry!" to perform an apology, or several words or sentences. Speech acts include real-life interactions and require not only knowledge of the language but also appropriate use of that language within a given culture. It is well known that Searle classifies speech acts into five classes assertives ,directives ,comissives and declaratives. Austin is the first who draw attention to utterances by which the speaker not only says something but also performs something .He (1962:3-6) calls such a type of utterances *performative* ,as they do not describe or constate information but rather perform action .He proceeds to refute the traditional philosophical view that focuses merely on the class of statements used to describe some state of affairs or to state some facts that can be either true or false .He calls such a type of utterances *constatives* .Constatives are propositions which can be stated positively or negatively, ie, are statements of facts which could be either right or wrong .He (1962:69) also draws attention to the distinction between implicit (primary) and explicit performatives.

Component of Speech Act

Searle (1969) develops the theory of speech act by presenting the already existing ideas more systematically, and adding further ideas such as 'indirect speech acts' .He (1969:24) offers a slightly different decomposition of speech act from that proposed by Austin .He distinguishes three distinct acts:

a-an utterance act (the production of speech sounds ,words and sentences) or locutionary act as Austin (1962) calls it,

b-an illocutionary act (the making of statement ,command promise ,…etc.) or illocutionary act takes place in means of uttering something (Austin's in 1962),

 c-a propositional act(referring to an entity and predicating some properties of that entity),it refers to the effects of the utterance on the listener ,i.e. the change in the mind or behaviour of the listener as a result of producing locutions and illocutions .He also mentions illocutionary and propositional acts result from the utterance of words in sentences in certain contexts, under certain conditions and with certain intentions. These three acts are mutually interdependent components which occur simultaneously. Lyons(1977:728) postulates that both types are used to perform the same speech act, although the second type (an explicit perfomative)seems to be more specific in the meaning than the first . Bach and Harnish (1979:44-55) distinguish six general classes on the basis of the speaker's psychological state which they call speaker's attitude. Two of these classes are conventional (effectives and verdictives),both of which belong to Searle's declaratives. The other four types are communicative speech acts: costatives ,directives ,commissives and acknowledgements .These four classes roughly correspond to Austin's expositives, excercitives ,commissives,and behabitives respectively , and they are close to Searle's representatives, directives ,commissives and expressives.The four classes of communicative speech acts correspond to Austin's of behabitives .

Speech Act of Acknowledgement

The situation in interaction with those of higher status include when: when one does a favor or receives one, when one has more knowledge or experience, when one is at advantage ,when one gives a compliment, when one invades the hearer's private territory, when one prefers to the hearers misfortune, when the hearer makes some sort of error. Speech act theory, developed by Searle's following Austin's work, is based on the idea that language is a form of behaviour and it is governed by rules (Searle ,1969:22). The speech act of acknowledgement expresses a certain feeling towards the hearer, especially in cases where the utterance is obviously perfunctory or formal. The speaker's intention is that his utterance would satisfy a social expectation to express certain feelings and his belief that it does. Moreover, these feelings and their expressions are appropriate to particular sorts of occasions .It covers eight   subcategories: apologize ,condole, congratulate, greet, thank, bid, accept and reject.(ibid:51-55) Verschueren (2003: 24) mentions that orthodox speech acts theory falls into five categories :

A-Assertives, statements commit the speaker to the truth of expressed proposition ,i.e., expressing a belief, making words fit the world and committing the speaker to the truth of what is asserted.(asserting ,concluding).

B-Directives, which are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something, making the world fit the words (requesting, questioning).

C-Commissves ,which commit the speaker to some future course of action, expressing an action, making the world fit the words, the speaker engages in a future course of action (promising, threatening).

D-Expressives ,expressing a variety of psychological states, having no direction to fit between words and world, and simply counted as expressions of a psychological state (thanking ,welcoming ,congratulating).They express the psychological state(pleasure, pain, likes ,dislikes or sorrow) specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content.

E-Declaration, which effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extralinguistic institution, not expressing any psychological state, making both the words fit the world and the world fit the words (excommunicating, firing from employment).

    Such classifications are difficult because verb meanings are often not easy to distinguish , and speakers' intentions are not always clear (Crystal 2006:278).

    As the interpretation of speech act is often governed by the fact that the speaker intends to achieve a certain effect on the hearer by utilizing the social conventions , Adams (1985:46) distinguishes between intentional and conventional speech acts , affirming that the most speech acts are intentional in the sense that they are communicative ,whereas conventional speech acts are greatly influenced by the circumstances in which speech acts occur.

    Austin (1962 :151) ,in terms of speech acts illocutionary forces, distinguishes five different groups of performative relying on the characteristics verb (verdictives,excerctives ,commissives, behabitives and expositive).Behabitives involve a miscellaneous group embracing expressions of attitude and social behavior.

    Speech acts are difficult to perform appropriately and differently in a second language because learners may not know all the idiomatic expressions or cultural norms in the second language or they may transfer their first language rules and conventions into the second language, assuming that such rules are universal. Because the natural tendency for language learners is to fall back on what they know to be appropriate in their first language.

    What is suggested is that it is not enough to build learners' linguistic competence and that it might be necessary to also develop their sociocultural competence,   which will in turn develop their .understanding of the frames of interaction and rules of politeness within the target culture

Rationale

Acknowledgement is a tool for establishing friendship that creates ties of solidarity. It is also an important social strategy in that it functions as an opener for a conversation and allows meaningful social interaction to follow. Neglecting to give acknowledgements may even be understood as a sign of disapproval, and the inappropriate use of acknowledgements may cause embarrassment and even offense. The speech act set of acknowledgements has highly structured formulas with rather simple linguistic structures.

It is hard to find an approach that highlights the cultural nature of Acknowledging, that requires learners' initiative in observing the linguistic and pragmatic rules, and that exposes learners to the motivating influence of authentic input.

In summary, instruction contributed to the learners' pragmatic awareness, increased their linguistic and pragmatic input, and improved their confidence.

Most students indicated strong interest in learning other speech acts, such as refusing an invitation, apologizing, giving condolences, and making a request.

Thus, learners' understanding of giving and receiving compliments helped broaden their interest in pragmatics.

Felicity Conditions

Establishing a satisfactory analysis of an illocutionary act requires that a certain necessary and sufficient conditions must be fulfilled if the performance of an act is to be achieved happily and successfully.

Bach and Harnish (1973:3)believe that a speaker conveying something to a hearer has a certain intention and that an act of communication cannot be said felicitously and successfully unless this intention is identified by the hearer.

Al-Sulaiman (2010:287)shows that felicity conditions are used in the theory of speech act to refer to the criteria which must be satisfied or fulfilled if the speech act is to achieve its purpose. They are part of the meaning of the perfomative verbs which express an illocution, but whether they are fulfilled or not must be judged by pragmatic inference. They are also necessary to the success of a speech act.

Yule (1996:50)shows that there are certain expected or appropriate circumstances known as felicity conditions used in organizing the performance of a speech act as intended .Hurford and Heasley(1983:25)state that felicity conditions are the conditions that must be fulfilled in the situation in which the act is carried out if the act is to be said to be carried out properly or felicitously . Austin (1962:14-5) presents a typology of conditions, as Levinson (1983:120)formulates them, which performatives must meet if they are to be happy, there are three main categories:

A-preparatory conditions, (i)There must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect and (ii)The circumstances and persons must be appropriate .

B-Condition for execution :the procedure must be executed correctly and completely.

C-Sincerity conditions: (i)The person must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions, as specified in the procedures and (ii)if consequent conduct is specified, and then the relevant parties must so do.

The violation of one of the conditions will make the performative utterance unhappy(see also Levinson(1983:229) and Oishi (2006:7-8) .

Searle (1969:62-4)develops Austin's conditions and he reclassifies them into four kinds:

A-Propositional content conditions specify restrictions on what can be expressed in the proposition of a sentence .

B-Preparatory conditions are related to whether the person performing a speech act has the authority to do so.

C-Sincerity conditions specify the required beliefs, intentions and desires of the speaker as they are expressed in the performance of an illocutionary act.

D-Essential conditions are the constitutive rules that determine the type of illocutionary act,i.e.,they are related to the way the speaker is committed to a certain kind of belief or behavior.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study covers written acknowledgements randomly chosen from fifteen MA theses and fifteen PhD dissertations to reveal whether or not the results support the hypotheses .The forms or expressions used are arranged according to the times used. The highest number of uses is attributed to the first syntactic structure *(NP+ Be + (Adv) Adj)* where the students use different lexical words for performing acknowledgement and here some of the forms .

1-NP+Be + (Adv) Adj .

I am very grateful to----------------

I am sincerely grateful for the -----

I am very much indebted to -------

I am very indebted to--------------

I am particularly grateful to--------

I am very much thankful to---------

The second structure used by the students is (*NP+ Main verb +NP*), this is to say that they explain their acknowledgements using this form with little difference both in number with the first structure and in lexical words among the students' uses.

2-NP+Main verb +NP

I wish to thank------------------------

I owe special thanks to----- ----------

I record my gratitude to-------------

I extend my deepest thanks to-------

My deepest thanks go to---------------

According to the number of uses, the third form used by the students is *(NP+ Would like + to infinitive + NP)* where students use different verb phrases to express the way they produce their acknowledgements.

NP+ Would like + to infinitive + NP-3

I would like to gratefully acknowledge---------.

I would like to express my deep appreciation.

---indebtedness.

-------------------------------------cordial thanks.

--------to seize the opportunity to record my gratitude to-----

Concerning the fourth structure *(NP+Be+ NP)*, the number of uses is half of that of first structure ,where the students use different noun phrases to write their acknowledgements .

NP+Be+ NP-4

Much gratitude is due to ------------------------

My sincere thanks are due to my --------------

My deep thanks and gratitude are due to------

Sincerest gratitude is due to ---------------------

The last form used by the students and the least in number is *(NP+ Main verb +NP)* where different verbs are used for producing acknowledgement.

NP+Main verb +NP-5

I offer my thanks to----------------------

I wish to------------------------------------

I owe much gratitude to----------------

I owe a special debt of gratitude to ---

I extend my deepest thanks to---------

I must record my gratitude to ----------

My deepest thanks go to------------------

Vote of thanks go to---------------------

My thankfulness and gratitude go to ------

Item No.	Uses No.
1	16
2	14
3	9
4	8
5	4

Table 1: Structures used by IPGSs

Conclusions

The social function of an utterance is an important part of its meaning, in addition, the results indicate that users utilize a restricted set of lexical items and syntactic structures appeared to be of common occurrence used at data for expressing acknowledgement based on the user's style and choice to be direct as much as possible, these specific items are almost realized to occur with a relatively high degree of frequency at data or the same idea in different words and they are ordered according to the times used at data, they are considered polite as well as the social and linguistic variables that affect this perception .It is also concluded that compliments are particularly interesting because they pose a politeness dilemma for the recipient ,who either has to violate the maxims of agreement or the maxims of modesty. The study reveals that IPGSs utilize the five constructions (shown in table 1) ,the large number of uses is written or expressed by the first two constructions. The study also reveals, in general, that there is a significant difference in the number of uses in the last three structures in contrast with the first two structures (1 and 2). As it is hypothesized ,the students use a limited number of slightly different constructions using a specific set of verbs for achieving their task ,this could be attributed to the value and occasion in which an acknowledgement is used. The students express their thanking and advising when writing their acknowledgements.

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