ABSTRACT

This study aims at exploring one important aspect of the communicative competence of the second language learners. This aspect is “the pragmatic ability to perform speech acts” and the subjects under investigation are the Arab users of English as a second language in the Indian context. The particular speech acts investigated are: requests, invitations, apologies and correction of a factual error. Three major features of the pragmatic competence of the second language learners of English are highlighted in each chapter:

a) Speech act realization patterns including the different types of modifications that play a role in deciding the illocutionary force of a speech act.

b) The ability to perform politeness functions and the cross-cultural variations implied.

c) Pragmatic transfer and the influence of cultural and linguistic background on the production of pragmatic performance in L2.

The dissertation content is presented below in a nutshell:

Chapter 1: Introduction and theoretical framework

This chapter introduces the international status of English and shows its position and domains of use in the Arab world. The importance of English use in the Arab world justifies the need for much more studies on the communicative aspects of the language.

The major remaining part of the chapter is devoted to describing the theoretical background of the study. It introduces the key concepts that are necessary for understanding such a study on the interlanguage pragmatics of second language learners, such as: pragmatics (its definition and scope), focus and content of pragmatics, speech acts (their definition, classification, their
importance in language teaching and learning), pragmatic principles, linguistic politeness, approaches to politeness (the social norm view, the conversational contract view, the conversational maxims view and the face-saving view). It is also mentioned that pragmatic studies in second language research can be either of interlanguage or cross-cultural nature. The domains of interlanguage pragmatics (pragmatic comprehension, production of linguistic action, and pragmatic transfer) are discussed. The chapter ends with elaborating on the pragmatic component in models of communicative competence.

Chapter 2: Experimental design

This chapter describes the methodology followed in collecting and analyzing the data. It comprises the following: research questions, subjects, instrumentation, type of analysis and statistical measures. The research questions are:

1. Similarities and differences in the realization patterns of the four speech acts across Arabic L1, IL, English L1 and Indian English.

2. Highlighting the concept of politeness and politeness strategies as employed in the data of Arabs using English and comparing that conceptualization cross-linguistically with the other three data sets.

3. The influence from Arabic language and culture on the learners’ interlanguage pragmatic performance.

4. The influence from Indian English and Indian culture on the Arab learners’ interlanguage pragmatic performance.

5. The practical pedagogical implications this study can provide for either learners of Arabic or learners of English as a foreign and a second language.

Three groups of subjects participate in this study:
1) 70 Arab learners of English who respond in English and 63 subjects of the same group provide responses to the same situations in Arabic.

2) 16 native speakers of British English.

3) 20 Indians who use English as a second language (Indian English).

In order to obtain the data on the Arab learners’ production of speech acts in English, a discourse completion questionnaire was designed so as to elicit four types of speech acts in a series of socially differentiated situations.

The methods for data collection from the three groups are:

1) Discourse completion test questionnaire
2) The role-play interview
3) Online elicitations

The type of analysis differs from one speech act to another. Directive speech acts, namely requests and invitations) are analyzed following the classification proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). The analysis of apologies follows the framework of Olshtain and Cohen (1983) and the CCSARP coding manual (Blum-Kulka et al, 1989). In analyzing the correction speech act, the researcher follows the model of Takahashi and Beebe (1993) with some modifications. Responses are analyzed on the basis of their frequency of occurrence in each data set.

Chapter 3: Literature review and justifications for the study

This chapter is concerned with describing the studies relevant to the current thesis in the area of speech acts in second language research. Surveying the literature on interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics shows that no study, so far, has investigated the production of speech acts by Arab learners of English in India. At the international level, very few studies have been found to
examine the pragmatic competence of Arab learners of English at any context.

**Chapter 4: Requests realization patterns and politeness in the English interlanguage of Arabs**

The main focus of this chapter is to describe the different request realization patterns as used by Arabs in English. Then, these realization patterns are looked at from the politeness theory perspective. The cases of pragmatic transfer at either sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic levels are highlighted. In the section devoted for realization patterns, the following are examined:

1) request patterns
2) request perspective
3) internal modifications

In discussing politeness in interlanguage requests, the following strategies are illustrated with examples from the data:

1) On-record softened strategy
2) Negative politeness strategy
3) Off-record strategy
4) Don't do the face threatening act

The chapter, further, elaborates on the lexical-grammatical pragmatic indicators in EL2 and in Arabic and their role in politeness. The major findings and conclusions of this chapter are:

(a) Although Arab learners use the strategy ‘query preparatory’ with highest frequency just as the native speakers do, they fail to use the modals observing the native language constraints. Modals are used indiscriminately which can lead to some pragmatic failures if so used in
the target language community. For instance, Arabs overuse the modal 'can' in situations where 'could' or 'would' are expected. This finding has two-fold pedagogical implications:

(1) Query preparatory' strategy can easily be acquired by learners in the early stages of second language acquisition,

(2) The appropriate use of modals has to be given great emphasis and special attention while introducing requests in the teaching materials for second and foreign language learners, particularly Arabs whose language does not have modality system similar to that of English.

(b) Requests in the imperative mood 'mood derivables' can be used by Arabs using English particularly while addressing their equals or inferiors and even superiors in some cases. This strategy is mostly avoided by native speakers of English due to some politeness considerations and conceptualizations typical of the Anglo-Saxon culture. Learners of English should be made aware of such socio-cultural norms so that they avoid any kind of miscommunication while interacting with the native speakers of English. Similarly, the use of elliptical forms of requests, particularly with interlocutors of higher status is not appropriate from the point of view of the native speakers of English. Thus, learners of English have to know such speaking rules so that their linguistic behavior becomes not only grammatically well-formed but also socially appropriate.

(c) Differences between learners' and native speakers' strategy use are clearly observed in stating request perspective. Results of the analysis of the use of perspective in requests show that Arabs using English feel more free to select the hearer-oriented requests even with their superiors albeit many softeners have to accompany the request utterance to reduce face risk. Native speakers, however, minimize imposition by selecting either speaker-oriented or impersonal perspective. Such subtle socio-pragmatic differences have to be highlighted by language educators and
syllabus writers who prepare materials for the second and foreign language learners of English.

(d) Due to the learners’ unawareness of using the proper request strategies as used by English native speakers, they compensate their insufficient pragmatic knowledge by unconsciously applying L1 norms to L2 use. Therefore, failure to make indirect requests of different types and to state the request perspective appropriately is recompensated by the use of more softeners, hedges and politeness markers which are in some cases imported from the mother tongue. In Arabic, more internal modifications make the request more polite, whereas in English, it is the degree of indirectness and the selection of modals and perspective which are responsible for lessening the hearer’s face threat, hence making the request more polite.

(e) Familiarity with and status of the interlocutor have shown to play a very important role in determining the selection/avoidance of a certain politeness strategy by learners. On-record strategies particularly imperatives (mood derivables) are likely to be used when P, D, and R are of low rate. Familiarity seems to be a leading factor in determining politeness in the learners’ responses. In addition, the relative status of the interlocutor plays a very important role in selecting the appropriate strategy by interlanguage users. The native speakers are not as sensitive to social relations as Arabs who show some cases of opting out to perform a certain speech act due to the relative social status of the addressee. Moreover, native speakers do not demonstrate sensitivity to sex differences. They have reported they would use the same requests with both sexes. Many respondents of the learners group, on the other hand, opt out and prefer not to request unfamiliar females. These observations lead to a conclusion that religious values and social judgments greatly influence the linguistic behaviour.
The interlanguage of Arabs using English comprises a mixture of features which can be attributed to the influence of English as a native language, English as used by Indians and Arabic L1.

In Arabic, the use of mood derivables suggests solidarity between the interlocutors, whereas the native speakers of English try to maintain distance with their interlocutors, hence they resort to indirect requests. On the basis of this finding we can draw the conclusion that to make a request in Arabic we require both positive and negative politeness strategies, however requests in English are intrinsically face threatening to the hearer’s negative face and, therefore, only negative politeness strategies are used to realize this speech act. In Arabic, not all requests are FTAs. Some of the requests, if directly accomplished, enhance intimacy between the interlocutors.

Syntactically complex requests are avoided by learners due to their pragmalinguistic deficiency. The study demonstrates that participants need sufficient exposure to various request strategies as used by native speakers which would help them communicate effectively in English. Learners have limited constructions which they use indiscriminately in different situations.

Chapter 5: Invitations in Arabic-English interlanguage: strategy patterns

The chapter on invitation speech act starts with describing the importance of the awareness of speaking rules related to performing the speech act of invitation in the target community which is not the same as the learner’s. Two types of invitations are identified: ostensible and genuine. In this chapter, invitation speech act is seen from the perspective of face and politeness. The responses of the Arab learners of English to the prompts calling for invitations in two socially differentiated situations are analyzed in terms of the main head acts and supportive moves.
The findings drawn after analyzing the production of this speech act indicate that Arab learners of English possess a range of various linguistic possibilities for realizing this speech act when addressing their intimates. There is a tendency on the part of the learners to be more direct when they invite their close familiars than when they address their superiors. They use invitations in the imperative mood with high frequency, obligatory statements, tacit declaratives etc. This high degree of directness would be interpreted as evidence for transfer of social norms from Arabic. However, in the case of inviting a superior interlocutor, directness is minimized considerably. This finding leads to the conclusion that Arabs, while using English, transfer the sensitivity to social relations from Arabic L1 to their English use.

While addressing someone of higher status, they tend to use personal desire statements, performatives, conditionally hedged invitations and interrogatives. Although interrogatives occur in the L2 responses, they are very low in percentage compared to the use of this strategy in 56.25% of the English native speakers' responses.

The selection of strategies by Arab learners of English to realize the invitation speech act supports the argument that Arabic is positive politeness oriented and that in the Arabic societies, emphasis is more on connectedness of people in a community than on their separatedness and self autonomy. This cultural feature is reflected in the English interlanguage of Arabs. A cultural norm is transferred from L1 to L2 use.

The pedagogical implications to be highlighted here is that learners of English as a second language should be taught the indirect invitation forms as used by the native speakers. Their attention has to be drawn to the fact that if they happen to stay in an English community or interact with English people, they should not transfer the coercive and impositive invitations as used in Arabic into their English. Otherwise, their interlocutors might feel offended because their negative face wants are put at risk.
Chapter 6: *Politeness strategies in Arabic-English interlanguage apologizing*

This chapter provides a definition of apologies and relates them to politeness and face. The apology strategies employed in three socially different situations are presented. The following points deal with the major findings and conclusions with regard to apologies with special reference to the English interlanguage of Arabs:

1. It is observed that religious beliefs, concepts and values are responsible for many deviations in the learners' language from that of the native speakers of English. In other words, religion concepts can help in interpreting some linguistic behaviors particularly in the discourse of Arabs. One of the main features of the English interlanguage of Arabs in India is the variation in the selection of IFIDs (illocutionary force indicating devices) such as 'sorry, forgive me, excuse me, pardon, please accept my apology' which is not the same in English. In English 'sorry' is an expression of regret and this feeling towards the offended can be sufficient to restore relationship and maintain social harmony. However, for Arabs, the concept of seeking the victim's 'forgiveness' to prevent 'the Hereafter's punishment' guides them to ask their interlocutors (the offended) to forgive, excuse, pardon and accept their apologies which results in IFIDs variation in their English. Moreover, Arab learners of English tend to the use of multiple IFIDs in some situations to increase sincerity of the apologetic action. This feature is almost lacking in the native English responses, perhaps because IFIDs seem to be routinized in English.

   IFIDs, mainly 'expression of regret' are found in every response in the interlanguage data. It seems that Arabs believe that apologies in English should consist of this expression as a compulsory component and any one of the optional components (any other strategy). In fact, in English this may not be the case. All strategies are optional and depend on the
situation.

The findings related to the use of IFIDs by IL users lead to the following conclusions:

a. The higher the degree of offence severity, the higher the frequency of occurrence of IFIDs.

b. The higher the degree of offence severity, the more the variation in using IFIDs.

c. The higher the degree of offence severity, the higher the frequency of occurrence of internal modifications in a given situation.

2) Arabs using English are more keen on 'taking on responsibility', whereas the English native speakers are more keen on formulaic 'offers of repair' or verbal redress. In the interlanguage data, the higher the degree of severity of the offence, the more the variation in the forms realizing this particular strategy.

3) The differences between the performance of interlanguage users and native speakers of English in using apology strategies stem from differences in weighing the rank of the offence in both cultures. The number of strategies used by English native speakers to realize the apology in situation (2) is more than the strategies the learners used in the same situation. There are examples of opting out choice by both groups. However, Arab learners opt out on psychological accounts (shyness) and English native speakers abstain from doing the FTA because of social restrictions.

A major finding of this study is that the selection of arrangement patterns of the major apology strategies in the Arab learners' English data is almost the same as those found in the Indian English data. The correlation between strategies arrangement in Indian English, the interlanguage data of the Arabs
group and Arabic L1 may be interpreted as a result of some aspects of cultural similarities

The conclusions drawn on this particular speech act suggest that some implications for language teaching have to be highlighted. First, apology is a speech act set and hence it should be introduced to language learners not as formulaic expressions but as a set of strategies which can be culture-, language-, and situation-specific. Another point to which attention should be drawn is that formulaic expressions like 'sorry', ‘Are you OK?’, etc are easily acquired. However, the use of appropriate intensifiers that precede the expression of regret and their position in an utterance should be made clear to learners and should be thoroughly presented. Greater emphasis should be on the use of strategies other than IFIDs. In addition, differences between Arabic and English apologies should better be highlighted so that language learners avoid cross-cultural miscommunications if they happen to stay in the target language community.

Chapter 7: Features of correction speech act in the English interlanguage of Arabs

The major focus of this chapter is to explore the various strategies used by Arabs in their English when they correct a factual error made by interlocutors of equal, superior or inferior status. The responses in the three situations are analyzed in terms of adjuncts, softeners and the main body of the speech act. Differences in realization patterns in the three situations are discussed in detail and features of style shifting are highlighted. The findings of the analysis as presented in the chapter suggest the following conclusions:

1) Arab learners' responses demonstrate a higher degree of directness while correcting others than their English counterparts. This conclusion is based on the following findings in the interlanguage responses:

   a) low percentage of hedges and questions is observed,

   b) perspective is either hearer-oriented or speaker-oriented whereas
the native speakers of English prefer the choice of impersonal perspective,

c) preference for the use of ‘direct corrections’ and ‘disagreement statements’ to realize the main body of the speech act,

d) the use of more direct questions which can be face-threatening, etc.

2) Interlanguage users resort to positive politeness strategies such as positive remarks and the use of in-group identity markers particularly when they address their equals or juniors. The native speakers of English do not depend heavily on such strategies. They mostly depend on negative politeness strategies like ‘indirect questions or interrogatives and various forms of hedges.’

3) Arab learners of English do more face work to minimize threat to their equal interlocutors than to both interlocutors of higher or lower status. Equal interlocutors receive more positive remarks, more hedges and more expressions that lighten the gravity of the situation. Superior interlocutor (professor), however, is found to receive the highest frequency of interrogatives which is a very effective strategy in minimizing the potential intellectual threat.

From a pedagogical point of view, learners of a second language should be made aware of the appropriate strategies while correcting factual errors made by different types of addressees. Learners of English need to know how to use hedges properly in English. It has been observed that they overuse the softener “I think” indiscriminately in a formulaic manner, whereas, the English native speakers seem creative in using them. Variation in the use of appropriate hedges makes the style very effective and even helps in enhancing politeness with the interlocutor. Arab learners of English do not possess the appropriate pragmatic competence that enables them to use the interrogative form of correction. Syllabus designers and material preparers and teachers are advised to put more
emphasis on how languages differ in terms of directness. Learners should be acquainted with the fact that indirectness is highly valued in the Anglo-Saxon societies, hence being direct in most of interpersonal communication while staying in the target language community or communicating with the native speakers of English may cause communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. Mechanical training without making second language learners aware of cultural dimensions of language use may not be helpful in second language learning.

A concluding remark:

The analysis and interpretations of results reported in this study are illustrative and not comprehensive. Further studies in this area are still needed to cover a wider range of speech acts with various sociolinguistic variables. The area of interlanguage pragmatics of Arab learners of English is still in its infancy. It is hoped that the present thesis has contributed to some extent to the exploration of this field of research. It is also expected that the findings of the study may contribute to a better understanding of cross-cultural variation in the production of speech acts and to a better presentation of second and foreign language materials to language learners.