Part - III

Chapter 8: Summary and conclusions

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Appendix
Chapter 8

Summary and Conclusion

The present thesis has attempted to explore some aspects of the interlanguage pragmatics of English as used by Arabic-speaking learners, with particular reference to four speech acts: requests, invitations, corrections and apologies.

The first chapter presents an introduction to the study with a brief account of the position of English in the Arab world: its use and domains. The remaining part of this chapter is devoted for the theoretical framework of this research. The key concepts like: pragmatics, speech acts, politeness, interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics, pragmatic component in models of communicative competence are highlighted with the view of relating the results of the study to these theoretical constructs.

The second chapter is exclusively concerned with the research methodology followed in the present study. It consists of a number of sections which describe: the research questions, the subjects participating, the instrumentation, the type of analysis and the statistical measures.

Then a review of the literature follows in chapter three that presents the earlier studies which have investigated the four speech acts in second language acquisition research. Most of the studies found deal with these speech acts from both interlanguage and cross-cultural perspectives. In the end of the chapter, justifications for exploring this field of research are introduced.

Data analysis and interpretation of the results are the content of the next four chapters. The major findings and conclusions of each of these chapters are briefly presented below:

Requests: This chapter deals with three main concepts, namely realization patterns, politeness in interlanguage requests and pragmatic transfer.
The different strategy types used by Arabs using English to realize this speech act are: query preparatory, mood derivable, want statements, hedged performatives, direct questions for information, declarative conditional clause, hints (mild & strong) and finally opting out. The analysis explains how learners use various kinds of lexical and grammatical indicators in order to soften the imposition of this type of directive on the interlocutor’s negative face wants and to maintain politeness.

Generally speaking, it has been found that different strategies are used in different situations across the groups participating in the study. The most important finding is that there is a very clear difference in the use of various request strategies between the interlanguage users and native speakers of English. These differences are demonstrated in the following:

(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 behaviour 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.

(F) 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.

(G) 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.

(H) 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.

Invitations: The chapter on invitation speech act starts with explaining the importance of learning how to make an appropriate invitation in the second language in accordance with the socio-cultural rules of speaking in the target language. Then invitations are classified into ostensible and genuine. Invitations are found to vary cross-culturally and across languages following variation in the perception of what face is and what its constituents are. The realization patterns of invitations by Arab learners of English are presented in detail and are compared and contrasted with the patterns found in Arabic and English. In addition, the chapter describes strategy types and supportive moves in two situations: ‘inviting a close friend’ and ‘inviting a superior research student’ to a wedding party. 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 familiares 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.

**Apologies:** The chapter on apologies introduces a model of analysis which contains the possible apology strategies in various social situations. Three situations that elicit apologetic responses are analyzed against this model. Each situation is investigated separately and each section deals with apology strategies found in that specific situation. The various responses elicited from the three groups which represent four data sets are compared and contrasted and results are interpreted. 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 was 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 behaviour 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.

**Corrections:** The chapter that deals with the speech act of ‘correction’ is concerned with the realization patterns of this speech act and the variation in strategy selection across the groups in three socially differentiated situations. Each situation was analyzed in terms of the presence of positive remarks (adjuncts), softeners, other expressions and the variation in selecting strategies for realizing the main body of the speech act. The first three can play the role of modifying the main body of the speech act and making it less face-threatening. The main aim of this chapter is to highlight the differences in realizing politeness strategies of correction when the social status of the addressee varies: higher, equal or inferior. 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.
Limitations of the Study

It is an extremely difficult task to write a comprehensive thesis in the area of interlanguage pragmatics. Various types of limitations hinder reaching such an ideal objective. In this study, some limitations are related to the informants (sex of the participants and their whereabouts in India), others to the method of data collection and the nature of the interlanguage pragmatics research. Both types of limitations are interrelated.

The whole study is based on data collected by using the discourse completion questionnaire both orally (role-play interviews) and in writing (written completion of the questionnaire). The main reason behind the selection of this technique for data collection is that the Arab learners of English in India are not found at one place. They are enrolled in different universities and colleges which are scattered in different parts of the huge country. Therefore, the only possible techniques of collecting the required data within a reasonable time are: 1) discourse completion test and 2) role-play interviews. These two techniques may not allow for eliciting a full sequence of a speech act. Only one utterance is elicited for each situation from each respondent. However, they are the most convenient in this context.

The subjects who served in this study are mostly males. Unfortunately, sex variable could not be examined in detail. The number of Arab female students in India is very few and cannot be accessed easily due to some socio-cultural restrictions.

Another limitation of this research pertains to the difficulty of approaching native speakers of British English directly. It is not an easy task to find the native speakers who can serve as the base group. Therefore, the researcher had to cope with the problem and developed the technique “on-line elicitations” to overcome the obstacle and to collect the data electronically from English native speakers in the chat rooms.
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 the course of formation. 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.