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Thanks Giving and Responding among Iraqi EFL Learners of English: An Inter Language Pragmatics Study

Dr. Baidaa' A. G. Al-Zubaidy

Instructor, Department of English, University of Baghdad, Iraq

Abstract:

This study investigates the realization strategies of thanks giving and responding by Iraqi EFL Learners. Three research questions are formulated to achieve the aim of this study, and these questions are (i) how do Iraqi EFL learners realize the speech act of thanks giving? (ii) how do Iraqi EFL learners realize the speech act of thanks responding?; and (iii) does pragmatic transfer occur when Iraqi EFL learners realize the speech act of thanks giving and responding?. To answer these questions, a random sample of 50 Iraqi EFL learners are tested on 20 discourse completion situations. Results reveal that to realize the speech acts of thanks giving and responding, Iraqi EFL learners use nine and seven strategies respectively. Besides, evidence of both pragmatlinguistic and sociopragmatic transfers are found. Due to the limitations of the present study, future research is suggested.

1. Introduction

Expressing gratitude is one of the most frequently occurring communicative acts in most human languages and cultures. It is a pragmatic function that is crucial in establishing and maintaining social bonds. Expressions of gratitude have the effect of enhancing positive rapport between interlocutors in communicative interaction. In this regard, Eisenstein and Bodman (1986, p.167) stress the fact that expressing gratitude is a language function that has important social value. A mark of its importance is the amount of time and effort invested by adults in teaching small children how and when to thank others. When expressed appropriately, the language function of expressing gratitude can engender feelings of warmth and solidarity among interlocutors. On the contrary, failure to express thanking takes risk on being regarded as being rude, and resulting in negative social consequences. Expressing gratitude might not be merely a language function that existed as a response to a beneficial event, but might be a negotiated and interactive event that had greater social significance. Thus, expressions of gratitude satisfy both the speaker's and the hearer's face wants.

Expressions of gratitude are considered as textbook examples of politeness. They are among the first words to be learned in a first as well as in a second language. Knowing when and how to thank helps to get on smoothly with others, and indeed acquiring such knowledge is part of the socialization process. And despite its social importance and the high frequency of their use in daily social interactions, the speech act of expressing gratitude seldom draws researchers' attention, and has been rarely researched compared to other widely investigated speech acts such as apology, request, compliments, etc. (Jautz, 2008). Both illocutions of thanks giving and responding are chained actions or units of discourse termed as adjacency pairs. The present study investigates the interlanguage pragmatics of Iraqi EFL learners' realization of the speech act of expressing gratitude. Accordingly, this study has dedicated itself to address the following questions:

1. How do Iraqi EFL learners realize the speech act of thanks giving ?
2. How do Iraqi EFL learners realize the speech act of thanks responding ?
3. Does pragmatic transfer occur when Iraqi EFL learners realize the speech act of thanks giving and responding ?

To the best of researcher's knowledge, no empirical study has been conducted to investigate the speech act of thanks giving and responding as used by Iraqi EFL learners. Thus, this study aims at closing a gap in applied linguistic research.

2. Related Literature

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) is a subfield of both interlanguage studies, which belong to the domain of second language acquisition research, and pragmatics. The concept of communicative competence has been extended to include various components. Cohen (1996) proposes that the communicative competence of any learners has two interrelated components; sociocultural and sociolinguistic, and each one of them is responsible for controlling certain abilities. The sociocultural component (or sociopragmatic) refers to the respondent's skill or ability at selecting speech act strategies which are appropriate given (1) the culture involved, (2) the age and sex of the speakers, (3) their social class and occupation, and (4) their roles and status in interaction. Sociolinguistic component (or pragmatlinguistic), on the other hand refers to the respondent's skill or ability at selecting appropriate linguistic forms to express the particular strategy used to realize the speech act (p. 22). ILP examines the way L2 learners comprehend and produce a given speech act in a target language and investigates how their pragmatic competence develops over time (Schauer, 2009, p.15). Central to the domain of ILP is the study of pragmatic transfer. That is, the nature of pragmatic transfer and its influence on second language acquisition is a

major area of investigation in ILP research. Pragmatic transfer is defined as “the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production, and learning of L2 pragmatic information” (Kasper, 1992, p.207). Kasper (1992) divides pragmatic transfer into pragmalinguistic transfer and sociopragmatic transfer. Pragmalinguistic transfer is related to how learners' use of conventions of means and form affects the illocutionary force and politeness value of their utterances. Whereas, sociopragmatic transfer appears to govern learners' perceptions of contextual factors such as interlocutors' relative social distance, and assessment of appropriateness in carrying out a particular speech act.

According to Edmondson and House (1981), thanks giving and responding can be classified as expressive speech acts whose paradigms of expressive verbs include: congratulate, apologize, deplore, welcome, condole, etc. In Searle's words, expressive speech acts express the speaker's actual psychological state, specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content condition. Thanks giving is defined as an act by which a thanker expresses gratitude for the thankee's participation in a prior action that is beneficial to the thanker, while thanks responding is an act by which the thankee expresses appreciation for thanker's acknowledgement (Aijmer, 1996, p.35).

A number of studies have explored the speech act of expressing gratitude in the interlanguage performance of non-native speakers representing diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These studies report that expressing gratitude turns out to be a serious issue for nonnative learners because L2 learners may fail to perceive the differences between their first language and the second language they attempt to learn in a way that they apply L1 pragmatic rules to L2, and hence, miscommunication induces. Moreover, even advanced L2 learners have difficulty in effectively expressing thanks in the target language, and this can be due to socio-pragmatic limitation and some instances of L1 transfer (Bodman & Eisenstein, 1988; Clankie, 1993; Cheng, 2005; Chang, 2008; Farnia & Suleiman, 2009; de Pablos-Ortega, 2010).

Schauer and Adolphs (2006, p.122) find that advanced L2 learners' inability to produce the conversational routines of gratitude expressions might be due to the fact that thanks giving and responding are reactive acts, and the speaker does not have time to plan the utterance in advance, but is instead forced to react quickly to the action that prompts the necessity for an expression of gratitude. Clankie (1993), on the other hand, notes that Japanese learners of English transfer their L1 apologetic strategy to express their gratitude in English since they tend to equate gratitude with a feeling of guilt (p.56). Also, Bodman and Eisenstein (1988, p.13) find that Arab learners of English use their L1 proverbial expressions to express their gratitude in English.

3. Method

3.1. Subjects

A random sample of 50 Iraqi EFL learners is selected from the Department of English of the College of Arts in the University of Baghdad. All those learners are at their 4th year stage. Background information survey is used to obtain a snapshot of the participants' basic demographic characteristics. Such a tool is adopted to find out more about the participants' background to select the most representative study sample, since such personal information could have an influence on the subjects' answers and simultaneously secure the homogeneity of the group of subjects. The survey consists of some questions regarding age, sex, education, and experience of living in another country. The age average of this group is between (21-24) and all subjects have had about (12-14) years of formal instruction in English up to their last university year. To reduce the possible effects of earlier experience in the target-language community, the subjects chosen have no previous experience living in the target-language community. Thus, all subjects do not have previous experience of studying or living in English-speaking countries, and all subjects are native speakers of Iraqi Arabic. As far as gender is concerned, seventeen participants are male subjects, while thirty-three are females. Generally, subjects share some common basic demographic characteristics such as L1, major, etc.

3.2. Instruments

To elicit pragma linguistic data from the study subjects, a discourse completion task (DCT) has been designed. The DCT consists of twenty situations requiring two turns of thanks giving and responding sequentially. The situations presented in the DCT are either adopted with some modifications from previous studies including Cheng (2005); Chang (2008), or from the researcher's own creation. Those modified situations adopted from previous studies are chosen because they have already been piloted.

To simulate real life, most selected situations are chosen from university campus life as all of our participants are university students. So, the influence induced from unfamiliarity of situations can be avoided. Besides, the situations are enhanced with detailed prompts or description to make participants incarnate the roles specified in the given situations in contrast to situations with short prompts. The DCT has been designed in an open-ended format rather than in a limited-line type. In this way, subjects are free to write down whatever they might say in reality as if they are in face-to-face oral interaction, and not constrained by space limit, and such a limit might reinforce the artificiality of DCT. The following is an illustrative situation from the study DCT:

[Situation 10] You have asked one of your professors, Dr. Ahmed, to write five recommendation letters for you to use when applying for graduate schools. He promised to help you, and is now handing you all the recommendation letters. What would you say to express your gratitude to Dr. Ahmed? And how would he, in turn, respond to your gratitude?

You

Dr. Ahmed

3.3. Coding Schemes and Procedures

After the DCT data have been collected, the responses of the DCT are categorized. Each response is coded into semantic units. A semantic unit is the smallest, most complete unit of semantic information that can stand alone and be understood by itself, and can fulfill a communicative function (Cheng, 2005,p.39). The classification of strategies of thanks giving and responding is coded in terms of their underlying speech act. The coding scheme of the present study is based on previous coding schemes developed in related studies like Eisenstein and Bodman 1993; Chang, 2008 for thanks giving, and, Aijmer 1996; Schneider, 2005 for thanks responding. Extra strategies of thanks giving and responding are developed to accommodate the present data. As a result, nine strategies are coded for thanks giving and seven strategies for thanks responding. Strategies of thanks giving include: (a) thanking, (b) complimenting, (c) expressing benediction, (d) apologizing, (e) acknowledging the imposition, (f) reciprocating, (g) expressing endearment, (h) alerting, and(i) other. Whereas, strategies of thanks responding include: (a) minimizing the debt, (b) expressing pleasure, (c) reciprocating, (d) acknowledging the thanks, (e) expressing endearment, (f) alerting, and (g) other. These strategies are briefly defined and explained in the following paragraphs .

As far as the description of the strategies of thanks giving is concerned, first, the thanking strategy consists of those expressions that explicitly involve words of thanking such as thanks, thank you, grateful, appreciate, etc. Second, complimenting strategy is used to express a positive reaction to the favor giver. More positive evaluation or appreciation of the benefactor is expressed by the beneficiary. Third, expressing benediction is used to indicate that the thanker invokes God for the help and protection of the favor giver. Fourth, apology is offered to express gratitude where the speaker may feel that doing a favor is a notable event which usually creates a sense of guilt and indebtedness in the recipient. As a result, under the ethics of indebtedness, the speaker tends to equate gratitude with a feeling of guilt after receiving a favor, service, etc. Fifth, acknowledging the imposition indicates that the thanker acknowledges the imposition or the burden caused by the favor on the part of the thankee to minimize the imbalance incurred in the thanking exchange. Sixth, reciprocating is another option employed by the thanker to express gratitude implicitly. Generally, with this strategy the thanker commits him/herself to carry out repayment in the future, in return for the thankee's kindness or consideration. Seventh, expressing intimacy is used where the thanker shows solidarity and harmony with the thankee in the thanking exchange. To express intimacy among interlocutors, the thanker may use kinship terms of endearment terms. These devices work as social lubricants as they keep the wheels of human relations running smoothly. Eighth, alerting is an element functioning as an attention getter or an address term preceding or following the actual speech act to gain the hearer's attention or to signal some interpersonal relationship (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p.17). Alerters are utilized with other strategies, and occur either before or after the thanking act, serving as a modification to the thanking act. Finally, other category includes a number of sub-strategies falling under different types, and because of either their relative diversity or low frequency in the present study data are so-called "other". Expressions that do not belong to the above strategies are categorized as the other strategy. It includes one of the following; here-statement, opting-out, refusal, stating results, and expressing liking. And this strategy comes either alone or with other strategies .

As for the strategies of thanks responding, first, minimizing the debt can be understood as linguistic elements employed to downplay the social benefits bestowed on the speaker by virtue of the thanks received. Aijmer (1996, p.40) states that the motivation for the use of this strategy is to restore the imbalance between the participants by minimizing the debt of gratitude incurred. Second, expressing pleasure is another strategy used to respond to thanks by means of which the focus is on the benefactor's pleasure in doing the favor. With this strategy, the thankee expresses pleasure of either the thanking act or of the thanker. Third, reciprocating is simply meant that a gratitude expression such as thank you is responded to by another 'thank you' expression. This results when both interlocutors share and exchange the benefit. Fourth, with the strategy of acknowledging the thanks, the thankee indicates that the act of thanking is accepted and the thankee may merely acknowledge the preceding thanking act by uttering expression like yes and yeah. Fifth, expressing intimacy is used for thanks responding as well. It includes affectionate terms and kinship terms, and these sub-categories can be characterized as in-group markers. They mark a strong emotional bond between interactants (Sifianou, 1992, p.73). Sixth, as mentioned above, an alerter is an element whose function is to alert the hearer's attention to the ensuing speech act. Finally, the other strategy includes the following four subcategories; reassuring, wishing, opting-out, and greeting. To reach a relative degree of consistency and objectivity, the researcher has coded written responses by herself first. Then, the coding scheme has been checked and confirmed with two university professional experts in linguistics domain, and the coding scheme has been approved after some modifications and revisions .

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Strategies of Thanks Giving

This section presents the realization strategies of thanks giving as used by Iraqi EFL learners. It details the overall use of strategies of thanks giving. As mentioned above, to give thanks, Iraqi EFL learners employ nine strategies. Table 1 below displays the distribution of these strategies;

Strategy Type	Frequencies	Percentages
A. Thanking	957	47.82%
B. Complimenting	245	12.24%
C. Expressing benediction	51	2.54%
D. Apologizing	76	3.79%
E. Acknowledging the imposition	161	8.04%
F. Reciprocating	86	4.29%
G. Expressing intimacy	26	1.29%
H. Alerting	346	17.29%
I. Other	63	3.14%

Table 1: Raw frequencies and percentages of strategies of thanks giving

The statistical results displayed in Table 1 above reveal the preference order of strategy types as used by Iraqi EFL learners. It can be noted that the thanking strategy occupies the first rank position compared to other strategies. The same finding has been reported in previous research (Chang 2008; Farnia and Suleiman, 2009). This strategy is realized as either bald thanks or extended thanks either alone or accompanied by other strategies. The following are examples extracted from the study data:

1. Thank you. (bald thanking)
2. I appreciate your getting me these lectures. (extended thanking)

The second position is occupied by the strategy of alerting. The following are illustrative examples:

3. Oh dear, thank you so much. (attention getters)
4. I am so grateful Professor. (address terms)

The complimenting strategy occupies the third position. It is subdivided into two main categories: complimenting the thankee or the thanking act. Aijmer (1996, p.38) stresses that although this strategy does not express gratitude explicitly, it can also be used to express this act implicitly. That is, in receiving a favour, the beneficiary feels grateful and expresses his appreciation and positive evaluation of either the benefactor or the act itself. This strategy comes either alone or with other strategies.

5. You are an angel. (complimenting the thankee)
6. It's really too much. (complimenting the thanking act)

The fourth rank or position is occupied by the strategy of acknowledging the imposition. The use of such strategy can mitigate the imposition incurred, when the thanker feels that the favour done has caused the thankee relatively much expenditure of time, effort, etc. The thanker expresses his recognition of the imposition as an implicit strategy of expressing gratitude. This strategy comes either alone or with other strategies, and can be sub-divided into the following two strategies :

Recognizing the imposition and expressing the unnecessary of the favor:

7. I've troubled you. (recognizing the imposition)
8. You shouldn't buy such an expensive watch. (expressing the unnecessary of the favor)

The strategy of reciprocating occupies the fifth position in the present data. The use of such strategy implies that the thanker, implicitly or explicitly, promising the thankee of reciprocating the favour that s/he has done for him/her by either expressing the heartfelt lasting indebtedness or repayment in the future. Reciprocating can be interpreted as implicit or explicit promising act on the part of the thanker. This strategy occurs either alone or with other strategies, and can be sub-divided into two sub-strategies as follows:

9. I owe you. (expressing indebtedness)
10. I wish I can make something in return. (expressing repayment)

Apologizing has the sixth position in the present data. Coulmas (1981,p.79) states that thanks and apology share one basic feature that is of indebtedness. Thanks implying the indebtedness of the recipient of the benefit closely resemble apologies where the speaker actually recognizes his/her indebtedness to his/her interlocutor. In the present data, an apology is used as an implicit strategy of expressing gratitude, and such use of an apology in expressing thanks is known as an apologetic thanking. The same strategy is used in expressing gratitude in different languages (Coulmas, 1981 for Japanese; Farnia and Suleiman, 2009 for Persian). This strategy is a cover term for three sub-strategies employed to express gratitude indirectly, and used either alone functioning as a head move or with other strategies functioning as a supportive move. The following are illustrative examples:

11. I am so sorry for your waiting. (expressing apology)
12. Feel quite embarrassed to ask you. (expressing embarrassment)
13. I don't deserve such an expensive watch. (expressing self-denigration)

Other strategy occupies the seventh position. It includes five sub strategies as mentioned above, and comes either alone or with other strategies. The following are some examples :

14. Here it is. (here-statement)
15. No thanks because it is his duty (opting out)

The eighth position is occupied by the strategy of expressing benediction. In expressing benediction, thankers use either blessings or wishes which increase the sincerity and effectiveness of the gratitude expressed, and in turn, maximizing politeness. Laver (1981,p.303) remarks that benedictions are consolidatory comments that are addressed to the positive aspect of face in which use esteem for the other participant is implied. The use of such strategy is based on the belief that one cannot repay a person enough, and that Allah Taqala (God) is able to reward the person best. It is divided into two sub-strategies as follows:

16. May God bless your efforts. (explicit benediction)

17. Keep you safe. (implicit benediction)

Finally, expressing intimacy has the last position compared to the different strategies. To express intimacy among interlocutors, the thanker may use kinship terms, or endearment terms. These devices serve as markers of friendly informal politeness, and as a means of establishing or reaffirming a solidarity framework for the interaction. The following are some examples:

18. Thanks a lot dude. (endearment terms)
19. Thank you so much my brother. (kinship terms)

4.2. Strategies of Thanks Responding

This sub-section presents the use of strategies of thanks responding by Iraqi EFL learners. Table 2 below provides a picture of the overall distribution of the seven strategies of thanks responding. Statistically, it can be noted that the strategies of minimizing the debt, expressing pleasure and other occupy the first, second and third ranks respectively.

As far as the distribution of the strategy of minimizing the debt is concerned, this strategy comes about because thanking is a hearer supportive act, such that the recipient is potentially embarrassed, and according to the hearer-supportive maxim s/he should suppress or underplay his/her benefits (Edmondson and House, 1981, p.166). It seems that the benefactor seeks to play down the cost involved to him/herself in having done deed or favour in the interest of the hearer. To make the interaction less face-losing, the benefactor might say something to reduce the debt. It comes either alone or with other strategies. The following are some illustrative examples from the study data :

1. It is nothing .
2. Don't mention it .

The strategy of expressing pleasure is another strategy employed in the study data to respond to thanks by means of which the focus is on the benefactor's pleasure in doing the favour. With this strategy, the thankee expresses pleasure of either the thanking act or of the thanker. Unlike the strategy of minimizing the debt, in which the thankee denies gratitude, the thankee, here, accepts the gratitude, expressing pleasure in doing so .

This strategy comes either alone or with other strategies. These are some examples :

3. Glad I was of help .
4. I would love to .

With the other strategy, five sub-strategies have been identified and assigned the cover term "other" due to either their relative diversity or low frequency in the present study data. It includes the following; reassuring, wishing, opting-out, and greeting. These categories occur either alone or with other strategies. The following are some examples :

5. This is what friends are for. (reassuring)
6. My best wishes. (wishing)

On the other hand, strategies of expressing intimacy, reciprocating, alerting and acknowledging the thanks occupy the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh position respectively. Reciprocating is simply meant that a gratitude expression such as "thank you" is responded to by another "thank you" expression. It is a process of returning thanks between the participants in the thanking exchange. It seems that the use of this strategy indicates that thanking exchange may be viewed as a cooperative activity in that the participants' express appreciation for each other rather than simply accepting gratitude from the other party. This strategy comes either alone or with other strategies to respond to thanks in the present data. Consider the following illustrative example:

7. Thank you too .

The strategy of acknowledging the thanks indicates that the thankee confirms the act of thanking as being accepted. Expressions used are alternative for those which do not minimize the debt, but rather to accept the gratitude. Here, the thankee may merely acknowledge the preceding thanking act by uttering expression such as yes or yeah in English. The following is an example :

8. Yeah, Sure .

Expressing intimacy is a strategy used not only for thanks giving, but for thanks responding as well. This category includes affectionate terms, and kinship terms. The use of such terms enables speakers give clues to participants and observers of the social interactions about where each participant stands in the social structure. All these devices are signals of closeness and harmony in relationships among members of the same ingroup. This strategy is used either alone or with other responding strategies to maximize the efficiency and politeness of gratitude expressed. The following are some examples extracted from the study data :

9. Welcome dear. (endearment terms)
10. Don't thank me, brother. (kinship terms)

Alerting is an element that functions as either an attention getter or an address term preceding or following illocutions to gain the hearer's attention or to signal some interpersonal reactions. These expressions are used with both thanks giving and responding. The following are some examples :

11. Oh, no problem at all. (attention getters)
12. No problem, man. (address terms)

Strategy Type	Frequencies	Percentages
A. Minimizing the debt	861	59.09%
B. Expressing pleasure	437	29.99%
C. Reciprocating	18	1.23%
D. Acknowledging the thanks	5	0.50%
E. Expressing intimacy	51	3.79%
F. Alerting	9	0.61%
G. Other	76	5.21%

Table 2: Raw frequencies and percentages of strategies of thanks responding

4.3. Pragmatic Transfer

This section focuses on negative transfer as it is more observable and it is the domain that causes serious miscommunication. In deciding that certain gratitude expressions are examples of negative pragmatic transfer from Iraqi EFL learners' L1 backgrounds, two native speakers have been asked to judge the acceptability of certain gratitude expressions. More specifically, Iraqi EFL learners' gratitude expressions are judged by two Americans who have agreed that those expressions do not occur in American English, and most of them are literal translation of some L1 expressions or formulas.

Pragmatic transfer has been dealt with here qualitatively through extracting some illustrative examples from Iraqi EFL learners' data. Both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic types of transfer are observed in the present data. Precisely speaking, it has been found that the occurrences of negative sociopragmatic transfer are rare in comparison with those of negative pragmalinguistic transfer in the present data. Some examples of pragmalinguistic transfer of expressions of thanks giving are the following:

1. God bless you .
2. I feel shy from this favor .
3. Those who are like you are rare in our society .
4. God keep you safe .
5. I would do anything to return this great favour I wish I can help you back in happiness .
6. Why you disturbed yourself .
7. You are a model to be followed .
8. Thank you for your respect .
9. I'm more than grateful for your sincerity toward us .
10. I'm sorry if I impose on you .

Some examples of pragmalinguistic transfer of expressions of thanks responding are the following :

11. There is no imposition at all .
12. Don't thank me .
13. No just say it .
14. No, No bothering at all .
15. There is no need to thank me .
16. You are more expensive than the gift .
17. It's not a favor .
18. No thanks .
19. On the contrary dear .
20. It's my happiness .

As far as sociopragmatic transfer is concerned, it has been noted that most examples of sociopragmatic transfer are attributed to Iraqi EFL learners' misjudgment of the size of imposition caused to their benefactor. Specifically, Iraqi EFL learners have produced bald thanks utterances in high-imposition situations where more elaborate utterances or expressions are expected and vice versa.

The following examples are extracted from the Iraqi EFL data:

21. Thank you. (Situation No. 18)
22. Thanks indeed. (Situation No. 18)

Here, the thanker has used bald thanks in situation No. 18 in which more elaborate expressions of thanks are expected. On the contrary, in situation No. 9, the thanker has used more elaborate expressions of thanks in a situation where some mechanical bald thanks are more expected. Consider the following example from the study data:

23. I am so grateful for your help. (Situation No. 9)
23. You are my best friend. (Situation No. 9)

Again, the thanker has used a profuse expression of gratitude that is unnecessarily prolix. In both types of situations, the thanker has wrongly encoded the amount of politeness required, and seriously misjudged the size of imposition. Likewise, Thomas (1983, p.104) asserts that misjudgment of the size of imposition is one major causes of sociopragmatic failure among nonnative speakers of English. The examples cited above can indicate that Iraqi EFL learners rely relatively on their L1 pragmatic competence resulting in pragmatic transfer or failure. This might suggest that Iraqi EFL learners have relative limitations in conforming to the target language formulas or routines. Though they are at their last university year before graduating, Iraqi EFL undergraduates have experienced both types of pragmatic failure. This can lead to the inference that learners with a good mastery of the grammatical structures of a language may

nevertheless be extremely unsuccessful in their interactions with native speakers of the target language if they do not have some understanding of their norms of politeness. And an advanced mastery of grammatical rules does not guarantee an advanced mastery of sociolinguistic rules. Likewise, Eisenstein and Bodman (1986, p.176) find out that even advanced nonnative speakers have considerable difficulty of expressing gratitude in the target language. Some problems are pragmalinguistic in nature in that learners are often unable to approximate native idioms and routines. While others are related to sociopragmatic limitations that are so severe because the socio-cultural incongruities they revealed have created the potential for more serious misunderstanding .

5. Conclusions

The present study has examined the realization strategies of thanks giving and responding by Iraqi EFL learners. Nine strategies of thanks giving are used by Iraqi EFL learners and seven for the act of thanks responding. The speech acts of thanks giving and responding are somehow formulaic in nature compared to other speech acts. Although a wide variety of expressions is theoretically possible, learners are remarkably consistent in their choice of language- almost as if there is a finite number of options from which one selects, i.e., a mutually shared script.

Iraqi EFL learners rely on their L1 competence when realizing the speech acts of thanks giving and responding, and that transfer occurs. Iraqi EFL learners' performance shows that their L1 influence does affect their use of strategies of expressing gratitude. As a result, Iraqi EFL performance exhibits evidence of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfers. Being grammatically proficient does not necessarily guarantee a concomitant pragmatic proficiency. This means that even grammatically advanced learners may use language inappropriately and show differences from target language pragmatic norms. Learners should be aware of the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic rules of English .

This study could be replicated using different data collection methods, such as ethnographic observation or role-plays, which would provide more insight into the advantages and disadvantages of each data collection method, leading to the development of a more grounded approach to speech act studies. Future research on Iraqi EFL learners should include longitudinal studies, the most suitable means of monitoring the developmental aspects of expressing gratitude act performance .

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