

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages
Branch of English

**The Impact of Sociolinguistic Competence on EFL
Learners' Performance of the Speech Act of Requesting
The Case of Third Year Students at the Department of
English
University of Biskra**

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master
degree in Sciences of Language

Submitted by: SOUGOULE Moussa

Supervised by: Mr. SEGUENI

Board of Examiners:

Member: Mr. Temagoult

University of Biskra

Member: Mr. Smati

University of Biskra

Supervisor: Mr. Segueni

University of Biskra

2013

Dedication

To my father and mother

To my sisters and brothers

*To all my family: Adama, Ami, Djeneba, Nana, Alou, Youba, Souleymane, Siaka,
Mamadou, Balaye...*

To all my friends wherever they are from:

*Algeria: Warda Zaghoul, Mehdi Meghr, Mohamed(s), Nefti, Safa, Fatima, Meriem, Insaf,
Wafa and all that I did not mention*

*Mali: Ramata, Harouna Dao, Djakaridja, Yacouba, Mariko, Diop, Tiecoura, Sekou (s),
Abdoulaye, Nouhoum, Mohamed, Koné and all I did not mention*

Niger: Aziz, Touré, Barry, Djibo Mazou, Diallo...

Acknowledgment

Firstly, I should thank my supervisor, Mr. SEGUENI, for his wonderful and insightful comments and suggestions. His rigorous attention to the details over the course of the research from the beginning to end has greatly improved my skills as a researcher.

I should also thank all my teachers of the department of English, Biskra University, from first year till this year; without them, I would not be the person I am today.

I should also thank all the students and my friends who took part of this project.

Special thanks are due to my family for their encouragement and support.

Abstract

This dissertation investigates sociolinguistic competence in relation with the performance of speech act of requesting. We mean by sociolinguistic competence, the one's ability to select the appropriate linguistic means regarding all the socio-cultural aspects like taking account the interlocutor's status, gender role, and age... when realizing a given speech act, specially the speech act of requesting. It examines students' productions and perceptions of speech of requesting of third year English students at the University Mohamed Kheider, Biskra. Throughout this study, we tackled the problem of students' ignorance of strategies and linguistic means used to realize speech act of requesting regarding socio-cultural dimensions. The lack of this knowledge affects seriously their performance. The aim of this research work is to raise students' awareness of sociolinguistic knowledge and to see to what extent this consciousness contributes to the improvement of their productions. Accordingly, we believe that if the students are conscious (know) of sociolinguistic knowledge, they will be able to produce speech act of requesting appropriately. In attempting to raise the students' awareness of sociolinguistic knowledge, we have directed a questionnaire. The results from the questionnaire have confirmed the research hypothesis. These results reveal that the majority of the students can make difference between different interlocutors and adapt their requests accordingly. This awareness of the socio-cultural knowledge enables them to perform requests appropriately.

Key terms

Communicative competence, sociolinguistic competence, speech act, pragmatic transfer, appropriateness, request.

Lists of Abbreviations

NS: Native Speaker

EFL: English as Foreign Language

ESL: English as Second Language

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

USA: United States of America

UK: United Kingdom of Great Britain

Lists of Tables

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 01: Students' age..... | 46 |
| Table 02: Gender..... | 47 |
| Table 03: Years of study..... | 47 |
| Table 04: Students' background knowledge of language..... | 48 |
| Table 05: Students' responses about their levels..... | 48 |
| Table 06: Students' responses to been in English speaking country..... | 49 |
| Table 07: Students' responses of their choice of English..... | 49 |
| Table 08: Linguistic means used to realize request 01..... | 50 |
| Table 09: Students' level of imposition in request 01..... | 50 |
| Table 10: Linguistic means used to realize request 02..... | 51 |
| Table 11: Students' level of imposition in request 02..... | 51 |
| Table 12: Linguistic means used to realize request 03..... | 52 |
| Table 13: Students' level of imposition in request 03..... | 52 |
| Table 14: Linguistic means used to realize request 04..... | 53 |
| Table 15: Students' level of imposition in request 04..... | 53 |
| Table 16: Linguistic means used to realize request 05..... | 54 |
| Table 17: Students' level of imposition in request 05..... | 54 |
| Table 18: Linguistic means used to realize request 06..... | 55 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 19: Students' level of imposition in request 06..... | 55 |
| Table 20: Linguistic means used to realize request 07..... | 56 |
| Table 21: Students' level of imposition in request 07..... | 56 |
| Table 22: Linguistic means used to realize request 08..... | 57 |
| Table 23: Students' level of imposition in request 08..... | 57 |
| Table 24: Students' responses about appropriateness 01..... | 59 |
| Table 25: Students' responses about appropriateness 02..... | 59 |
| Table 26: Students' responses about appropriateness 03..... | 60 |
| Table 27: Students' perceptions about formality and informality of request..... | 61 |
| Table 28: Students' perceptions about formality and informality of request..... | 61 |
| Table 29: Students' perceptions about formality and informality of request..... | 62 |
| Table 30: Students' perceptions about formality and informality of request..... | 30 |

Lists of Graphs

Graph 01: Proportions of eight situations of part two.....58

Graph 02: Proportions of level of imposition of request of eight situations, part two.....58

CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| Dedication..... | I |
| Acknowledgement..... | II |
| Abstract | III |
| Lists of Abbreviations..... | IV |
| Lists of Tables..... | V |
| Lists of graphs..... | VII |
| Introduction..... | 1-2 |
| 1. Statement of the problem..... | 2 |
| 2. Significance of the study..... | 2 |
| 3. Aim of the study..... | 3 |
| 4. Research questions..... | 4 |
| 5. Hypothesis | 4 |
| 6. Methodology and Research Tools..... | 4 |
| 7. Limitations | 4 |
| 8. Organization of the study..... | 5 |

Chapter One

Society and culture in second or foreign language learning

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction..... | 7 |
| 1.1 What should be known in learning a language | 7 |
| 1.1 Early hypothesis..... | 7 |
| 1.1.1 Communicative competence..... | 9 |
| 1.1.1.1 Canale and Swain’s model..... | 9 |
| 1.1.1.2 Bachman’s model..... | 10 |
| 1.2 Appropriateness in language..... | 11 |
| 1.2.1 Cultural knowledge..... | 11 |
| 1.2.2 Speech community and discourse communities..... | 12 |
| 1.2.3 Traditions..... | 13 |
| 1.3 Definitions of Sociolinguistic competence..... | 14 |
| 1.3.1 Sociolinguistic transfer..... | 16 |
| 1.3.2 Intercultural communication..... | 17 |
| Conclusion | 22 |

Chapter Two

Speech acts and requests

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 25 |
| 2.1. Definitions of speech acts..... | 25 |
| 2.2. Types of speech acts..... | 26 |
| 2.2.1. Locutionary acts..... | 26 |
| 2.2.2. Illocutionary acts..... | 27 |
| 2.2.3. Perlocutionary acts..... | 27 |
| 2.3. Types of Illocutionary acts..... | 28 |
| 2.3.1. Representatives..... | 29 |
| 2.3.2. Directives..... | 29 |
| 2.3.3. Expressive..... | 29 |
| 2.3.4. Commissives..... | 30 |
| 2.3.5. Declaratives..... | 30 |
| 2.4. Empirical studies on speech acts..... | 30 |
| 2.4.1. Speech acts sets..... | 30 |
| 2.4.2. Speech act of apology..... | 31 |
| 2.4.3. Speech act of requesting..... | 32 |
| 2.4.4. Speech act of request analysis..... | 32 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 2.5. Socio-cultural and sociolinguistic abilities..... | 33 |
| 2.5.1. Socio-cultural ability and speech act..... | 34 |
| 2.5.2. Sociolinguistic ability and speech act..... | 34 |
| 2.6. Realization of speech act of requesting..... | 34 |
| 2.6.1. The direct approach..... | 35 |
| 2.6.2. The use of modals..... | 35 |
| 2.6.3. The use of indirect speech..... | 35 |
| 2.7. Request and Politeness..... | 36 |
| 2.8. Speech Act of Requesting and grammar..... | 38 |
| 2.9. Teachability of speech acts behavior..... | 39 |
| Conclusion | 41 |

Chapter three

Students' questionnaire

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction..... | 44 |
| 3.1. Description of questionnaire..... | 44 |
| 3.2. Analysis of the results..... | 46 |
| 3.2.1. Part one: Background information..... | 46 |
| 3.2.2. Part two: Students' production of requests..... | 50 |
| 3.2.3. Part three: Students' perceptions of requests..... | 59 |
| Conclusion..... | 63 |
| General conclusion..... | 64 |
| Lists of References..... | 67 |
| Appendix..... | 69 |

INTRODUCTION

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Introduction..... | 1-2 |
| 9. Statement of the problem..... | 2 |
| 10. Significance of the study..... | 2 |
| 11. Aim of the study..... | 3 |
| 12. Key words..... | 3 |
| 13. Research questions..... | 4 |
| 14. Hypothesis | 4 |
| 15. Methodology and Research tools..... | 4 |
| 16. Limitations | 4 |
| 17. Organization of the study..... | 5 |

INTRODUCTION

English language has been a widely used language internationally. Therefore, many kinds of people who do not share the same language are learning this language as lingua franca. There are different types of learners according to the context they are learning English. In addition to native speakers, we have English as a second language learner (ESLL) and English as a foreign language learner (EFLL). So, we have three kinds of English speakers, NS, ESL and EFL. A learner learning English in an environment in which the majority of the people speak that language for example, a French citizen learning English in the UK or the USA is regarded as a second language learner. Someone learning English in an environment where English is not spoken by the majority of people is considered as a foreign language learner. Therefore, we have two contexts one which is ESL and the other which is EFL. In our study, we are more interested in the development of sociolinguistic competence of EFL learners, the ones who have fewer opportunities to speak with native speakers when learning the language. We believe that sociolinguistic competence can have a great impact on EFL students' performance of speech act of requesting. Each speech community has got its own rules and conventions how to make a request taking account to social class, gender... etc. English language has got ways of requesting too.

1. Statement of the problem:

We have noticed that many EFL learners fail to realize different speech acts particularly the speech act of requesting in a given context. In our present study, we attempt to show the impact of sociolinguistic knowledge in the realization of the speech act of requesting. Students, in EFL context, cannot perform speech acts due to the lack of sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistic knowledge, we mean the ability to select the appropriate linguistic means to make request regarding the interlocutor's status in the society.

2. Significance of the study:

The acquisition of sociolinguistic competence by our students is very crucial for establishing and maintaining successful communication with native speakers. If our students are not aware of conventions or social patterns used when executing a specific speech act like requesting, they are likely to appear impolite or even cause breakdown in communication. This study is important because nowadays language is a social phenomenon. Talking about need analysis, this study can also be beneficial for professionals working with foreign companies or will be working in English-speaking countries. If they know all the linguistic expressions used in relation to socio-cultural norms, they will properly perform any speech act of request in different contexts with different interlocutors and reduce face threatening acts.

3. Aims of the study:

The aim of this study is to show the role of socio-cultural norms into language use in a given context, which means knowing the appropriate linguistic means used regarding interlocutor's status. Our students will better perform the speech act of requesting if they know the social patterns underlying it. It also aims to prevent our students from being regarded as rude or being completely misunderstood in front of native speakers by helping them to develop their sociolinguistic knowledge. Therefore, it aims to make our students sociolinguistically competent so that they will be able to deal with language in daily use in the speech community, specifically the appropriate realization of the speech act of requesting.

5. Research questions:

This dissertation attempts to answer the following questions:

- Does sociolinguistic competence have a positive effect on EFL learners' performance of speech act of requesting?
- Does the lack of the knowledge in sociolinguistics have a negative effect on EFL learners' performance of speech act of requesting?
- How can sociolinguistic competence contribute in improving learners' speech act of requesting?
- Is the speech act of requesting in the Algerian speech communities similar to the English speech community?

6. Hypothesis:

The present research is based on one (1) hypothesis that we will try to confirm through our dissertation. We hypothesize that if our learners acquire sociolinguistic competence, their realization of the speech act of requesting will gradually improve.

7. Methodology and Research Tools

We intend to adopt a descriptive interpretive method to acquire and gather data for this dissertation. We can only content to describe theories said about our work. Experimental method could also be appropriate, but because of its time consuming feature, we have been told not to use it. Moreover, we plan to get information from any material relevant to our field of interest which is a new and a fresh area in our department as far as we are concerned. Concerning data collection, we have directed a questionnaire to see their productions and perceptions about speech act of requesting.

8. Research Limitations: The research will deliberately focus on:

- 1- Finding out the factors/causes leading to students' lack of knowledge in sociolinguistics in the realization of the speech act of requesting.
- 2- Finding and providing solutions to cater for sociolinguistic transfer.

9. Organization of the study:

This research work is divided into three chapters. The first two chapters are the theoretical part, while the third chapter is about the field work. It will analyze the students' performance of speech act of requesting through the questionnaire administered to them.

Chapter one:

Society and Culture in Second and Foreign language Learning

| | Page |
|---|-------------|
| Introduction..... | 7 |
| 1.4 What should be known in learning a language | 7 |
| 1.1 Early hypothesis..... | 7 |
| 1.4.1 Communicative competence..... | 9 |
| 1.4.1.1 Canale and Swain’s model..... | 9 |
| 1.1.1.2 Bachman’s model..... | 10 |
| 1.5 Appropriateness in language..... | 11 |
| 1.5.1 Cultural knowledge..... | 11 |
| 1.5.2 Speech community and discourse communities..... | 12 |
| 1.5.3 Traditions..... | 13 |
| 1.6 Definitions of Sociolinguistic competence..... | 14 |
| 1.6.1 Sociolinguistic transfer..... | 16 |
| 1.6.2 Intercultural communication..... | 17 |
| Conclusion | 22 |

Chapter One

Society and Culture in Second and Foreign Language Learning

Introduction

This chapter deals with the relationship between language, society and culture. In other words, the way language is used in a given society in relation with culture. Language use is influenced by the society and its culture. We will talk about the early views about language which limited the knowledge of language to the mastery of grammatical competence to newly view, communicative competence, coined by Dell Hymes. We will also talk about culture which plays an important role in learning a foreign language.

1.1. What Should Be Known in Learning a Language?

Doing something requires knowing how it is done. Similarly, speaking a language requires some kind of knowledge about the language. As Thornburry (2005) explained that playing guitar well requires some kind of musical knowledge; driving a car requires knowing something about how it works, as well as knowing the Highway Code. (p.11)

He also categorized knowledge relevant to speaking into knowledge of features of language (linguistic knowledge) and extra-linguistic that is independent of language. The same view has been developed by other scholars like Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman (1990), which we will discuss in the following sections.

1.2. Early hypotheses about the communicative competence

Language is difficult to characterise, in part at least because the term is used in so many different ways. Competence is the ability to do something well and performance is how well or badly you do something or something works. (Oxford Dictionary)

Competence and performance distinction has been made by Chomsky (1960). According to him, competence is akin to what we call the formal pattern of the language, the knowledge of the grammar rules. And the performance is the ability to apply these rules in speech as stated,

Linguistic theory is primarily concerned with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of language in actual performance. (p.03)

Widdowson (2008) defines competence as the language user's knowledge of abstract linguistic rules and linguistic performance, for him, it involves the simultaneous manifestation of the language system as usage and its realization as use. (p.03)

Therefore, the competence is speaker-hearer's knowledge of the language and the performance is the actual use of language in concrete situations (Chomsky). In Chomsky's distinction, we can notice that the mastery of a language equals to the mastery of the grammar and the actual use of these grammatical rules in concrete situations. However, Hiddowson also stated "someone knowing a language knows more than how to understand, speak, read and write sentences. He also knows how sentences are used to communicative effect" (p.01). Moreover, empirical studies have shown that language use goes beyond the mere mastery of grammatical rules. (D. Hymes 1972, Canale and Swain 1980, Bachman 1990 et al).

1.2.1. Communicative competence

The concept of communicative competence was coined by Dell Hymes as a reaction to Chomsky mere definition of competence. He did not agree that competence is restricted to the knowledge of grammar rules. When a native speaker speaks, he or she does not only have the grammatical rules in mind. But he or she knows also how to use the language when, with whom and in which context. This ability has then been called the socio-cultural abilities.

When we acquire a language we do not only learn how to compose and comprehend correct as isolated linguistic units of random occurrence; we also achieve a communicative purpose. We are not just walking grammars. (Widdowson, p.01)

So, we agree with Hymes as he says that “a communicatively competent speaker is the one who is able to produce socially and culturally appropriate utterances” (Hymes, p.38)

The best support of Hymes’ view is illustrated in the response of a student when asked which aspects of his English he wants to improve. He says: “I know I need to practice my speaking a lot. During all my life, I have been doing grammar and reading, but nobody has taught me how to speak English...”

The most efficient communicator in a foreign language is not always the person who is best at manipulating its structures. It is often the person who is most skilled at processing the complete situation involving himself and his hearer, taking account of what knowledge is already shared between them, and selecting items which will communicate his message effectively. (Littlewood, p.04)

1.2.1.1. Canale and Swain’s Model

In this model, they divided communicative competence into grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic components and discourse component later added by Canale (1980).

The grammatical component is the mastery of the formal pattern of the language like orthography, semantics, lexis, phonology and morphology.

The sociolinguistic component is the mastery of socio-cultural norms of the speech community of the target language in foreign language learners' case. It embodies knowing which linguistic means are used to realize a given speech act regarding the way we address to a superior, the use of formality and informality. It requires from the speaker and the hearer to be cooperative in the conversation.

The strategic component is the ability to avoid breakdowns in communication and in case it will happen, the ability to repair it. Some people describe it as a compensatory technique.

The discourse component is concerned with cohesion and coherence. The speaker and hearer should be able to produce cohesive and coherent utterances or sentences. As a conclusion, Canale and Swain divided communicative competence into four subcategories. The first two subcategories reflected the use of the linguistic system and the last two defined the functional aspects of communication.

1.2.1.2. Bachman's Model

In this model, Bachman (1990) categorizes communicative competence into organizational and pragmatic competencies which in turn are divided each into two sub-components, textual and discourse competences and illocutionary and sociolinguistic competences. Bachman's organizational competence is the sum of Canale and Swain's grammatical and discourse competences and the pragmatic competence, the sum of sociolinguistic and strategic competences. As a conclusion, we can say that the first model stressed on the sociolinguistic competence and hardly mentioned the pragmatic competence which Bachman pointed it out. He placed sociolinguistic competence inside of pragmatic competence because this competence has an important role in language use.

According to him, the model consists of both knowledge; competence and performance, the knowledge about the language and the capacity to execute this knowledge in appropriate context as claimed by Hymes. He also claimed in favour to Hymes' definition of competence which is not limited to linguistic competence as defined by Chomsky (1965). According to him, there is a difference between competence and performance. He perceived competence as the ability (knowledge), while performance refers to the actual execution of tasks. (Brown, p.148)

1.2. Appropriateness in Language

1.2.1. Cultural Knowledge

Sociolinguists assumed that language teaching or learning cannot be done without the teaching of culture that goes along with this language. Some even go further in their comment by saying that language without culture is not communication. So, culture should be the fifth skill of language according to them. Kramsch (1998) states: "language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways." (p.03)

She identified that people's speech refer to common experience. Therefore, all that we express, attitudes, beliefs and points of views reflect our 'cultural reality.' (ibid)

She also explains that language embodies cultural reality because "the way in which people use spoken, written, or visual medium itself creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to, for example, through a speaker's tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures and facial expressions." (ibid)

She correlates that language is a system of signs which has a cultural value for the speakers of such language. It reflects somehow their social identity.

And any prohibition of its use is often perceived by its speakers as a rejection of their social group and their culture. People who belong to the same social group view things in the same way. And those views are reinforced through institutions like family, the school, the workplace, the church, the government, and other sites of socialization throughout their lives. (Kramsch, 1998, p.06)

Therefore, they developed common attitudes, beliefs, and values; for example, what they choose to say or not to say and how they say it.

1.2.2. Speech community and Discourse communities

Kramsch (1998) argues that: “speech community (is) composed of people who use the same linguistic code, and discourse communities refer to the common ways in which members of a social group use language to meet their social needs”.(p.p.6-7)

She confirms that not only the grammatical, lexical, and phonological features of their language differentiate them from others, but also the topics they choose to talk about, the way they present information, the style with which they interact in other words, their ‘discourse accent’.

Hence, Americans always say ‘thank you’ to any compliment to acknowledge a friendly gift, as in the example:

Speaker: “I like your sweater.”

Hearer: “Oh, thank you.”

However, in some culture, it would be different. For example in France, it could be considered as an intrusion into people privacy. Consequently, French would rather downplay the compliment and minimize its values and say something like in the example:

Hearer: Oh really? It is already quite old!

From this, we can conclude that these groups have been socialized differently and have different reply to compliments. What can be good in one culture may be considered bad or reproaching in another culture.

1.2.3. Traditions

Tradition is belief, principle or way of acting which people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time, or for all these beliefs, etc..., in particular society or group. (Microsoft Encarta Premium 2009)

Kramsch (1998) writes that it is:

“...another way of viewing culture- one which takes a more historical perspective. For the cultural ways which can be identified at any one time have evolved and become solidified over time, which is why they are so often taken for natural behaviour. They have sedimented in the memories of group members who have experienced them firsthand or merely heard about them on in speech and writing from one generation to the next”. (p.07)

Therefore, culture is summarized by Kramsch as follows:

- Culture is always the result of human intervention in the biological processes of nature
- Culture both liberates and constraints. It liberates by investing the randomness of nature with meaning, order, and rationality and providing safeguards against chaos; it constraints by imposing a structure on nature and by limiting the range of possible meaning created by the individual.

- Culture is the product of socially and historically situated discourse communities, which are to a large extent imaged communities, created and shaped by language.
- A community's language and its material achievements represent a social patrimony and a symbolic capital that serve to perpetuate relationships of power and domination; they distinguish insiders from outsiders.
- But because cultures are fundamentally heterogeneous and changing, they are a constant site of struggle for recognition and 'legitimation'. (p.10)

1.3. Definition of Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence is the combination of two words, sociolinguistics and competence. Broadly speaking, sociolinguistics is the study of language and society. The term sociolinguistic competence appeared in many scholars' works in their attempt to define what is meant by communicative competence. Therefore, sociolinguistic competence is concerned with the appropriateness of language use in a given context. (Canale and Swain 1980) Generally, the term is used to mean the knowledge of the socio-cultural rules or norms of a given speech community. Sociolinguists believe that language use is always sensitive to the social relations among the participants in a speech event. We speak differently to superiors, to colleagues, to friends, and to children. Our speech patterns regularly change when another person (especially a stranger) enters the conversation. Skehan explains,

Sociolinguistic competence is concerned with such things as the ability to use language appropriately and to take account of one's interlocutor by varying the type of speech used. It is also concerned with the way we infer meanings, as in cases of sarcasm and irony, or more often, when we have to work out the connection between two utterances. (P.02)

Thornbury identified that sociolinguistic competence is concerned with two elements, the socio-cultural knowledge and the extra-linguistic knowledge. The first one is the knowledge about social values and the norms of behaviour in a given society, including the way these values and norms are realized through language. And extra-linguistic knowledge is to know whether people in a given culture shake hands on meeting, or embrace, or bow.

Accordingly, this distinction echoes Leech and Thomas' division of pragmatics into 'pragma-linguistics' which is the "particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions" and 'socio-pragmatics' which is "the sociological interface of pragmatics". (Leech and Thomas 1983)

Learning a language requires more than grammatical rules; one should also be able to use these language patterns in accordance with socio-cultural rules because what may be accepted in grammar must not be accepted in society. For this reason, there should be a kind of harmony with these two aspects for a successful communication. Hymes argued:

Being communicatively competent in a language involves more than simply being able to construct and decode grammatical sentences. It also includes being able to use language appropriately (sociolinguistic knowledge) in conversations which take account of who is saying what to whom. (Hymes quoted in the Journal of TESOL.fr, P.02)

Sociolinguistic competence plays a great role in getting to talk with native speakers. Someone who lacks or has not developed this competence can face situations of embarrassment due to breakdowns in communications. The cause of this is usually due to the sociolinguistic transfer, the use of one's own language use rules when speaking another language. Sociolinguistic transfer is sometimes referred as pragmatics transfer.

Sociolinguists agreed that: the use of sociolinguistic competence (respect of socio-cultural norms into language use) demonstrates cultural awareness and sensitivity within a particular culture. It allows the speaker to successfully convey his intentions and meaning, assuming his or her intentions coincide with what is regarded as respectful to the culture. Therefore, culture is basic elements in development of sociolinguistic competence. For example the French use of “vous” and “tu” according the status of addressee; when addressing to someone who is superior to the speaker like an authority, teacher. The speaker should use the “vous” form instead of “tu” form which is used with friends usually. So:

Pouvez- vous m’expliquer cette partie? Is more appropriate when asking a teacher in French than Peux-tu m’expliquer cette partie?

1.3.1. Sociolinguistic transfer

Sociolinguistic transfer refers to the use of rules of speaking of one’s own speech community or cultural group when interacting with members of another community or group. Intercultural miscommunication results in sociolinguistic transfer. Chick confirms, “The overall or gross frequencies of performance of particular speech acts by different cultural groups, different frequencies of choices of different strategies for realizing such speech acts are potential sources of intercultural miscommunication”. (P.332)

Learners’ language transfer is probably due to the lack of knowledge in the target language. When they have few words and little idea about language use, they go back to the native language to help themselves. This going back to native language as an aid is called inter-language or communication strategies. Accordingly, Hinkel (1999), in her research about request pointed out two important things. She carried out her research on EFL learners in Hong Kong. She investigated on the performance of requests of Hong Kong Chinese-English bilinguals.

She noticed that they use direct request which is obviously inappropriate in English-speaking countries (native speakers). She said that the preference of direct request has two explanations. The directness could be the result of low proficiency in English, or at least of limited pragmatic development due to limited opportunity to direct conversation with native speakers of English. Another possible explanation is that direct requests may be more appropriate in Cantonese than in English. Therefore, these speakers may be experiencing pragmatic transfer or sociolinguistic transfer.

1.3.2. Intercultural communication

Speech act theory and interactional sociolinguistics have given to questions concerning the miscommunication that often occur when people with different life experiences and different cultural pattern of communication interact with one another.

The source of intercultural miscommunication has been described to be due to cultural differences. Each society has its own cultures and individuals living in are shaped according to these cultures. So if there is a cultural difference, different values, it can also shape the way those individual use the language in daily life.

Wolfson (1992) points out that what members of particular cultural groups thank or compliment on, usually reflects values because, in performing these speech acts, people are often implicitly assessing the behavior, possessions, accomplishments, character, or appearance of others. (p.329)

Kramsch (1998) says:

“Culture can be defined as membership in a ‘discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings. Even they have left that community, its members may

retain, wherever they are, a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting.” (p.10)

This means that wherever one goes, his or her culture follows him or her because this culture shaped the person. So, the same thing may happen to EFL students, but if we make them aware of this, they may be able to deal with each situation if they are faced to. There is a theory called ‘linguistic relativity’ which argues that language affects people’s thoughts, in other words, it affects their mental processes. Thus, each social group is shaped by their language.

Kramersch (1998) says that the advocates of this theory “...put forward the idea that different people speak differently because they think differently and that they think differently because their language offers them different ways of expressing the world around them.” (p.11)

So, if this is the case, what should we do to show our EFL students that these views about the world given them by their language (culture) may be different in another language? Forgetting to think according their language culture to someone else, who does not share the same speech community as we do like English, creates misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication. One of the famous advocates of this theory is Edward Sapir and Whorf’s. They proposed a hypothesis which claimed that the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one thinks and behaves. (Kramersch, 1998, *ibid*)

The theory infers that we are prisoners of our language which in turn is prisoner of the culture- shaped by culture. Therefore, “if speakers of different languages do not understand one another...it is because they do not share the same way of viewing and interpreting events; they do not agree on the meaning and the value of the concepts underlying the words.” (*ibid*)

Kramersch (1998) summarized Sapir and Whorf’s work into two insights:

- There is nowadays recognition that language, as a code, reflects cultural preoccupations and constrains the way people think.
- More than in Whorf's days, however, we recognize how important context is in complementing the meaning encoded in the language. (p.14)

Therefore, the teachers' duty shall be to unlock this prison and let our EFL students realize that language is cultural related, and what is accepted in their culture may not be in English. One way to make them aware of this is to teach them through 'context of situation' and 'context of culture' (Sapir and Whorf). In other words, teaching them the culture of target language in relation with language use. Kramersch (1998) writes that the work of B. Malinowski showed that so that one understands a social group, what they are doing, one has to know more than being able to write down the meaning of words of this given language. More importantly, one has to understand why they said and how they said it to whom in a specific context of situation. These words should be related to cultural context of speech communities. Hence, there should be relationship between semantic and pragmatic meanings. (p.26)

Without this relation, communication does not occur because as Kramersch says: "the encoding of experience differs also in the nature of the cultural associations evoked by different linguistic signs." (p.17)

She also added that beyond the semantic meaning of a speaker's individual words, the hearer has to understand how these words relate to the pragmatic context of their utterances. For the listener to interpret what is being said, there certain cues that Kramersch called 'contextualization cues'. Contextualization cues are, as she states, the verbal (like pronouns), the para-verbal (stress and intonation, tempo and laughter) and non-verbal signs (gaze direction, gesture, body posture, tone of voice) that guide the listener's interpretation. (p.27)

With contextualization cues, the listeners can make the relevant situated inferences.

Cross-cultural studies results point out that sociolinguistic transfer is the source of intercultural miscommunication. Thus, sociolinguistic transfer refers to “the use of rules of speaking of one’s own speech community or cultural group when interacting with members of another community or group”. (Chick, 1996, p.332)

It happens when different interlocutors using a common language which is not their native language but applying the rules of speaking of the latter one, their own. For example, French and Algerian using English and applying each their own native language speaking rules in interaction. Chick argued that it may even happen with individual sharing the same native language but different speaking rules like American and British. (p.332)

All languages have special behavior expected, from its users, in specific situation with people of different ranks. Thus, they are required to say ‘thank you’ in response to receiving gifts, and ‘goodbye’ as a way of closing encounters. Accordingly, Kramsch (1998) explains: “language users have not only learned to interpret signs and to act upon them; they have also learned to expect certain behaviours from others as well.” (p.26) and if these expected behaviours are not done, it can be considered as social disrespect- inappropriate. She added that they expect to be greeted upon a first encounter, to be listened to when they speak, to have their questions answered. However, these expectations vary from one culture to another. For example, French speakers from France may expect to be greeted with handshake; Americans may expect a smile instead. (ibid)

As a conclusion, all these expectations are cultural related. So, when speaking one’s language, the speaker should account these cultural expectations. Or they will have problems of communication with the native speakers of that language.

Studies about complimenting giving and responding behavior are illustrative examples showing how sociolinguistic transfer can be a source of miscommunication. Because, as Wofson (1983) states that differences in the distribution of compliments in different communities are potential sources of intercultural miscommunication; that is, there is frequently interactional trouble when members of one cultural group compliment in situations in which compliments are inappropriate for members of other groups. Another example in requesting, the use of direct request may be acceptable in some cultures, but May or, at least in some situations, not acceptable in other cultures. Individuals coming from these two cultures, which are different and where the rules of requesting differ can possibly witness intercultural miscommunication like it was the case with Kenneth R. Rose. She said that when she went in Hong Kong, she noticed that people use direct request in Hong Kong, and she was somehow embarrassed. “What is appropriate for a situation in one cultural may not be so in another; indeed, it is important to recognize the different sorts of situations that exist across cultures, which, although they may be similar in terms of kind and function to situations in other cultures, are unique. (Braj B. Kachru and Cecil L. Nelson, p.90)

Nowadays, language teaching is based on the communicative approach which in turn seeks to develop communicative competence into learners of language. Or the key element in communicative competence is just these sorts of considerations of appropriateness in all facets of language, including rate of speech and level or register of lexis. (p.90)

Therefore, it is worth noting that our language programs reflect the development of communicative competence. Now the question of how can our teachers help our EFL students to develop their socio-cultural and sociolinguistic abilities is answered by many scholars and SLA researchers. Deborah Schiffrin answered in her “*Interactional sociolinguistics*”. She states that interactional sociolinguistics is a theoretical and methodological perspective on language use that is based in linguistics, sociology, and anthropology. (p.307)

In other words, interactional sociolinguistics provides ways of describing and analyzing social events and situations-the contexts that help define particular utterances as socially and culturally appropriate. (Schiffrin, p.323)

She then proposed, for example, when teaching students how to make requests, teachers could incorporate into lessons that cover the use of different forms (e.g., modals, questions, commands) information about whom, when, why and where such forms are considered appropriate. And tell them what forms are considered inappropriate too like imperatives depending on to who they will be talking- interlocutor's status or social status of the participants.

Conclusion

As we have seen, language teaching and learning was mainly based on the teaching and learning of grammar. And the syllabuses were designed accordingly; the best known is the structural syllabus. However, many scholars and SLA researchers approved that language teaching and learning is not restricted to grammar. They proposed that when teaching or learning a language, one must seek to develop communicative competence (Hymes, 1970) which means the appropriate use of the well-form utterances in a given context. Thus, in addition to organizational competence (Bachman, 1990), language learners must also master pragmatic competence (Bachman, 1990) or sociolinguistic competence (Canale and Swain, 1980). Sociolinguistic competence, as the knowledge of socio-cultural norms of a given language, its lack can result into misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication. As a solution, many people proposed the teaching of the culture of the target language. According to them if our students are aware of cultural differences, they may avoid sociolinguistic transfer.

Chapter two:
Speech Acts and Requests

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Introduction | 25 |
| 2.1. Definitions of speech acts..... | 25 |
| 2.2. Types of speech acts..... | 26 |
| 2.2.1. Locutionary acts..... | 26 |
| 2.2.2. Illocutionary acts..... | 27 |
| 2.2.3. Perlocutionary acts..... | 27 |
| 2.3. Types of Illocutionary acts..... | 28 |
| 2.3.1. Representatives..... | 29 |
| 2.3.2. Directives..... | 29 |
| 2.3.3. Expressive..... | 29 |
| 2.3.4. Commissives..... | 30 |
| 2.3.5. Declaratives..... | 30 |
| 2.4. Empirical studies on speech acts..... | 30 |
| 2.4.1. Speech acts sets..... | 30 |
| 2.4.2. Speech act of apology..... | 31 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 2.4.3. Speech act of requesting..... | 32 |
| 2.4.4. Speech act of request analysis..... | 32 |
| 2.5. Socio-cultural and sociolinguistic abilities..... | 33 |
| 2.5.1. Socio-cultural ability and speech act..... | 34 |
| 2.5.2. Sociolinguistic ability and speech act..... | 34 |
| 2.6. Realization of speech act of requesting..... | 34 |
| 2.6.1. The direct approach..... | 35 |
| 2.6.2. The use of modals..... | 35 |
| 2.6.3. The use of indirect speech..... | 35 |
| 2.7. Request and Politeness..... | 36 |
| 2.8. Speech act of requesting and grammar..... | 38 |
| 2.9. Teachability of speech acts behavior..... | 39 |
| Conclusion | 41 |

Chapter Two

Speech Acts of Requesting

Introduction

This chapter will primarily deal with the speech acts, and more particularly the speech act of requesting. That is why; we will talk about the different elements in an utterance. A request can be defined as getting the hearer to do what you want, and is generally perceived as a threat to face. Thus, it is considered as an imposition. In English, there are specific strategies used to mitigate the threat that we will be talking along this chapter.

2.1. Definitions of Speech Acts

The term speech act was explained by John. R. Searle, an American Philosopher, as “doing by saying”. According to him, there are many utterances which do not communicate information but are equivalent to actions. Yule (1996) points that actions performed by means of utterances are technically called “speech acts”. In various languages, the widespread actions in expressing speech acts are apologies, orders, complaints, commands and requests. For example, a priest saying: “I pronounce you husband and wife”. This utterance conveys the performance of declaring a marriage rather describing a given situation. Some utterances when said do not inform but performs; thus we have performatives and constatives. It was accepted, for many years ago, that the main purpose behind uttering words is to describe a certain state of affairs or what is technically called by Austin (1962) ‘constatives’. However, this view was defeated by the recent findings which have been derived from various philosophical investigations in languages. The assumption behind those findings is that the process of uttering words is a kind of performing actions, generally known as ‘speech acts’.

Yule (1996) states “actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts and, in English, are commonly given more specific labels, such as apology, complaint, invitation, promise, or request”. Austin (1962) notes that a performative utterance is considered to be if it satisfies the following conditions:

- They do not describe or report anything at all (they are not true or false)
- The uttering of the sentence is a part of doing an action, which also would not be described as stating something. (p.05)

Furthermore, Searle (1969) argues that articulation of an utterance without performing a propositional act would be to utter words without saying anything. Therefore, we can simply conclude that speech act is performing actions through uttering words. A speech act is composed of three sub-acts which are locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act.

2.2. Types of Speech Acts

Speech acts classifications have been done by Searle. According to him, there are three sub-acts in a speech act: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary.

2.2.1. Locutionary Acts:

Locutionary act is saying a meaningful utterance. So an ill-formed sentence is not a locutionary act. Austin illustrates:

We first distinguished a group of things we do in saying something, which together we summed up by saying we perform a locutionary act, which is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to meaning in the traditional sense.(p.108)

Similarly, Yule (1996) explains locutionary act as a fundamental concept in performative utterances, because the articulation of ‘locutions’ involves the creation of certain words having determine sense and reference. (p.48)

Therefore, “locutionary act is an act of saying something: it is the act of uttering sequences of words drawn from the vocabulary of a given language.” (Perrault and Allen, 1980, p.169)

This means that locutionary act is simply the construction of words into phrases, sentences or even paragraph. Its production requires the knowledge of vocabulary, phonology, semantic, morphology, graphology and grammar.

2.2.2. Illocutionary Acts:

These are actions that have a communicative force when they are uttered. Austin (1962) states, “I explained the performance of an act in this new and sense as the performance of an ‘illocutionary’ act, i.e., performance of an act in saying something as opposed to performance to performance of an act of ‘saying something.’” (p.99)

He added also that the illocutionary act is a matter of performing actions through uttering particular words in specific circumstances. In sum, the speaker utters these kinds of speech acts with the intention to reach a goal. When I say: “It is cold in here”; my intention (communicative goal) can be that I’m cold and I want the hearer close the window or turn the thermostat on.

2.2.3. Perlocutionary Acts:

These are the effects of the utterance on the hearer; Austin (1962) argues that:

Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the

audience, or the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them... we shall call the performance of an act of this kind the performance of a perlocutionary act or production. (p.101)

The typical example can be found in comedy. The comedian plays the comedy in front of the audience so that so they can laugh. If they do not laugh, we cannot talk about taking place of perlocutionary act. Correspondingly, Yu (2002, p.04) and Wiggins (1971, p.20) define that the perlocutionary act is an act of bringing about or achieving some consequences by saying something such as convincing, persuading, deterring or surprising. More importantly, Yule (1971) claims that the main purpose behind uttering such speech acts is seeing the hearer behaving differently after the action uttered. Thus, when I say: “it is cold in here”, the perlocutionary is when the hearer closes the window or make the place warmed.

2.3. Types of Illocutionary Acts

Illocutionary act is the force of the utterance or locutionary act. It is the intended meaning what the speaker means by saying an utterance. The speaker’s intentions are conveyed by an illocutionary force. So, the illocutionary force can be considered as the core of the speech acts. The use of some expressions to realize specific speech act like apology, request may be perceived differently in different situations. Societies differ in their use of “social distribution of expressions” (Labov. W) – pragma-linguistics. Cohen puts forward, “it has become increasingly clear that the teaching of second language words and phrases isolated from their socio-cultural context may lead to the production of linguistic curiosities which do not achieve their communicative purposes.” (P.383)

Speech act behavior development must be a focus for language learners since they are repeatedly faced with the need to utilize speech acts such as, complaints, apologies, requests,

and refusals. All these speech acts can be realized by means of strategies. Thus, the objective of language teachers is to teach these strategies into its socio-cultural dimensions to learners so that they can realize any speech acts appropriately. Speech acts have been classified according to five categories (Searle):

2.3.1. Representatives

Yule (1996) says that the representative utterances state what the speaker thinks to be the case or not. Therefore, they convey assertions, claims, reports, statements, descriptions as in the following example (p.53):

Speaker: it is wonderful day!

2.3.2. Directives

Hurford *et.al.* (2007) claim that “A directive act is any illocutionary act which essentially involves the speaker trying to get the hearer to behave in some required way”. Therefore, the performance of directive speech acts entails the addressee to do what the speaker wants like ordering, requesting, commanding and suggesting. These are some illustrations of directives. (p.294) Example can be:

Could you pass the salt?

2.3.3. Expressives

Pratt (1977) believes that expressive speech acts have to deal with the psychological states of speakers. Hence, they report persons’ emotions and attitudes, such as pleasures, pains, likes and dislikes. (p. 81) Like in the following example:

Speaker: “I’m sorry to miss your birthday”

2.3.4. Commissives

Hurford *et.al.* (2007) point out that “A commissive act is any illocutionary act which essentially involves the speaker committing himself to behave in some required way”. Consequently, this category of speech acts is related to future actions such as promises, threats, and pledges. (p.294)

Speaker: I promise you to be in the meeting

2.3.5. Declarations

Yule (1996) points that declarative speech acts serve to change a given situation or reality in the world via utterances. Similarly, Pratt (1977) says that declarative speech acts are: “illocutionary acts that bring about the state of affairs they refer to.”(p.81)

Priest: I now pronounce declare husband and wife.

Austin (1962) and (1969) described speech acts theoretically. However, empirical studies made by Cohen, Olshtain et al gave more sight in the area. These empirical studies have focused on the perception and production of speech acts by learners of a second or foreign language (in most cases, English as a second or foreign language; ESL and EFL) at varying stages of language proficiency and in different social interactions. As conclusion, they aimed at establishing “cross-language” and “language specific norms” of speech act behavior.

2.4. Empirical Studies on Speech Acts

2.4.1. Speech Acts sets

Speech Acts sets refer to the set of realization patterns used by native speakers of the target language. (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983)

Therefore, speech act sets can be considered as the techniques or rules used when performing a particular speech act. Apologizing, requesting, complimenting, or complaining

would be recognized as the speech act in question, when uttered in the appropriate context. Researchers agreed that the partial mastery of such speech act sets may hinder or even cause breakdowns in communication.

2.4.2. Speech Act Sets of Apology

The act of apologizing is called for when there is a social norms violation. “When an action or an utterance (or the lack of either) results in one or more persons perceiving themselves as deserving an apology, the culpable person(s) is (are) expected to apologize” (Cohen, p.386)

Cohen added that according to Searle, a person who apologizes for doing something expresses regret at having done. So, the apology takes place when the sincerity condition is respected- meaning that “the speaker believes that some act A has been performed prior to the time of speaking and that this precondition has resulted in an infraction which affected another person who is now deserving an apology”. (Cohen, p.386)

Therefore, the apologizer should assume that she or he is responsible for the offense and intends to make amends. The act of apology is separated into performative verb, i.e. verbs which name the speech act or illocutionary force of the sentence like “I apologize” or “I’m sorry” and semantic formulas such as an explanation and justification for the offense. E.g., “the bus was late and I could not possibly get here on time” or an offer of repair. E.g., “I will do it tomorrow.” Together, performative verbs and semantic formulas could result in acceptable apology realizations.

2.4.3. Speech Act Sets of Requesting

The investigation of speech act of requesting is based on the scale of imposition rules since speech act of requesting is by definition getting the hearer to do something. The scale of imposition is classified as follows:

From the most direct and imposing request to the most indirect and least imposing one. (Blum-Kulka, 1989; Olshtain and Blum-Kulka, 1984; Weizman, 1989)

The first empirical studies done on request was about having native and nonnative speakers of English assign a rank to the degree of politeness of a series of request strategies in the context of making a purchase. The theoretical view behind the ranking of request strategies claims that “when requests are made, imperatives are less polite than declaratives, which in turn less polite than questions.” (Lakoff, 1977)

Important developments in speech act research have been the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Research Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989), which compared speech act behaviour of native speakers of a number of different languages with the behaviour of learners of those languages.

2.4.4. Speech Act of Request Analysis

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain in their work on “*requests and apologies: A Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns*”, analyzed the speech act of request into three segments: (a) address term(s); (b) Head act; (c) Adjunct(s) to head act. The segmentation is meant to delimit the utterance(s) that constitute the nucleus of the speech act (the head act), i.e. the part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements. (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain)

This is the illustrative example given by Blum-kulka and Olshtain. As we can see, they parted the sentence into many parts.

e.g., Danny / could you lend me 100 dollars for a week / I have run into problems with the rent for my apartment.

“Danny” is the address term

“Could you... is the head act

“I’ve run... is the Adjunct to head act

The head act can stand alone to make a whole request and the adjunct to head act is the added information to give more credit to one’s request. Therefore, adjunct to head act is serve to strengthen or support an act realized other verbal means. (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain)

However, in some cases the utterances used as adjuncts to head act can constitute the act itself. For example:

Would you mind cleaning up the kitchen? / You left it in a mess last night.

“Would you mind...” is the head act

“You left it in...” can be the head act and at the same time the adjunct to head act like in this exchange:

A: You left the kitchen I n the mess last night or would you mind cleaning up the kitchen?

2.5. Socio-cultural and Sociolinguistic Abilities

A successful speech acts realization depends on certain factors, socio-cultural and socio-linguistic abilities.

2.5.1. Socio-cultural Ability and speech Act of requesting

According to Cohen, socio-cultural ability refers to the respondents' skill 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 occupations, (4) their roles and status in the interaction. (p.388)

For example, in some cultures, using repair strategies after missing a meeting is allowed by the employee to propose a next meeting, whereas in some others it is the boss or employer who will decide if the next meeting will be. So when making request, the speaker should account for the features mentioned by Cohen.

2.5.2. Sociolinguistic Ability and Speech Act of requesting

“Sociolinguistic ability refers to the respondents' skill at selecting appropriate linguistic forms in order to express the particular strategy used to realize the speech act.” (Cohen, p.388)

Sociolinguistic ability is the student's mastery of grammar and their ability to use this grammar in specific situations. Therefore, when making the request, the students should be able to select the appropriate linguistic elements used. For example, after knowing that the hearer is superior (socio-cultural ability), the students should then select the appropriate linguistic elements (sociolinguistic ability) accordingly like the use of “would” in this context because the hearer is superior.

2.6. Realizations of Speech Act of Requesting

The speech act of requesting is realized by three ways. The speaker can opt for a direct, indirect or the formal (use of modals). This section concerns the linguistic means used to realize the speech act of requesting taking account of the participants' role in the society.

2.6.1. The direct Approach

In the direct approach, the speaker directly states the intended meaning. To realize a direct request, the speaker uses the correct grammatical, lexical or semantic items. As in example below:

E.g., please lend me a pen. Or lend me a pen

The direct request is usually used when the speaker and the hearer have the same social status, for example between friends; sometimes with colleagues.

2.6.2. The Use of Modals

The speaker opts for the formal way of addressing by using the modal verbs (could, would...) which are request devices. So instead of saying “lend me a pen”, the speaker will say “could you lend me a pen.” This type is usually used in formal situations like between a student and a teacher, speaker and hearer respectively. So the pattern is “Could + subject + predicate.

2.6.3. The Use of Indirect Speech

Requests can also be realized by the use of indirect speeches. These speech act of requests can be either in interrogative form or declarative. So, the hearer has to infer the meaning of the speaker, i.e. the listener must work out to understand the illocutionary force. Let have some example. When someone says “it is cold in here”, the intended meaning can be requesting the hearer to close the window or make the place warm. The speaker can opt for an interrogative form; for example, he or she can say “do you have a pen”. The hearer must know that it is not a question here, but a request for a pen.

2.7. Request and Politeness

Broadly speaking, politeness is the willing to save another person face. Brown and Levinson (1978) said that everybody loves to preserve his or her face. For this reason, we have thus, two aspects of face: “positive face”, which is the self-image, and self-respect that a person has; and “negative face” which is the claim to privacy, freedom of action, and other elements of personal autonomy. (Cited in Odlin, 1989, p.49)

Hence, “politeness consists of this recognition of the listener and his or her rights in the situation.” (Spolsky, 1998, p.19) this means that the speaker, when uttering should keep a positive attitudes towards the listener. For example when making request, the speaker should know that this speech act is an imposition in nature and use strategies to mitigate the imposition. In other words, make the listener feel comfortable. Spolsky,: “requests, which are an imposition on the listener, are mitigated by being made indirectly as questions (could you possibly pass the salt?) Or, as statements (I think that is the salt beside your plate.), or by adding formulas like ‘please’ and ‘if you would be so kind’ (ibid)

Spolsky (1998) says that in certain languages, there are elaborated sets of politeness formulas, like in Arabic saying *mabruk* to someone who has just bought something new. And for each formulas, there is an appropriate reply like *allah ybarik fik* (May God bless you). However, in American English, the equivalent is saying ‘you are welcome’ in reply to ‘thank you’.

The relation between politeness and speech act of requesting is that in society, speakers and hearers are obliged to cooperate so that a conversation can take place smoothly. The success of a conversation depends upon the various speakers’ approach to the interaction. The way in which people try to make conversations work is sometimes called the cooperative principle. (Grice)

For this reason, request, by its nature of imposition, should be reduced or mitigated to avoid face threatening act. Mitigation is the basic characteristics of politeness. Therefore, speech act production, especially requests, was analyzed solely at the directness levels of linguistic forms used to produce speech acts. For instance, saying “please write a reference letter for me” to a professor when requesting for a letter of recommendation is considered too direct and thus considered inappropriate for the situation. Odlin (1989) said: “when learners violate norms of conversation in the target language, the violations are potentially much more serious than syntactic or pronunciation errors since such violations can affect what is often termed ‘the presentation of self’. (p.48)

Politeness and coherence have been considered as the two areas of discourse in which effects on the presentation of self can be especially dangerous. Though, politeness is a universal notion, the expression of politeness in different societies varies considerably. Odlin added that “the notion of coherence is applicable to conversations and monologues in every society, but the relations between sentences, phrases, and other units can vary a great deal in the discourse patterns of different languages.” (p.48)

Therefore, the languages differ from each other greatly; especially in sociolinguistic dimension, learners may transfer his or her native norms because of the lack of knowledge in the target language which in turn create misunderstanding. “If native language patterns influence learners in inappropriate ways, the language that a learner uses may seem impolite or incoherent.” (Odlin, 1989, p.48)

So, cross-linguistic differences in discourse may affect comprehension as well as production. A target language learner may utter utterances in accordance with his or her native language norms and may believe that the target language native speaker is not following him or her and may even blame the native speaker of being rude while he or she

also is behaving in accordance to his language norms too. So, to solve this solution, language teachers and EFL researchers should create programs which will stress on this area. Many researchers brought their contribution to overcome “discourse transfer”. Odlin (1989) said that one of the basic challenges in the study of politeness is to understand the differences of interpreting that different cultures make of certain kinds of behavior. And added that what constitutes a proper request in one culture may seem very rude in another. (p.49)

2.8. Speech Act of Requesting and Grammar

This section deals with the relationship between the teaching of grammar and request taking account the socio-cultural aspect. The realization of request is done by the mastery of linguistic items. For example, at the level of directness, the modal verbs (could, would...) are used. We can also notice the use of interrogative forms and statements each to realize a specific level of directness (more direct or least direct).

According to Brown and Levinson (1978), a grammatical mood is one area of linguistic structure where the positive-negative distinction appears very useful. They said that questions are correlated with negative politeness and statements with positive politeness. (Cited in Odlin, p.50)

Therefore, “grammatical mood can be viewed in terms of a politeness scale: interrogative mood is somewhat ‘more polite’ than indicative mood and imperative mood is the ‘least polite’ (Odlin, 1989, p.50)

Indicative mood does more to diminish threats to face, whereas imperative forms seem to be face-threatening acts. Language teachers can make learners aware of this. Or the authorities can add a new module, called “sociolinguistic grammar” where the focus will be on teaching learners to make the difference about the use of interrogative forms, statement

forms and imperative form in relation with the target language norms. The course can be divided into two parts, the theoretical part and the practical part. In the first one, learners will be taught the various strategies and linguistic means used to realized a given speech acts. And the second one will be on practice of the first one through oral and written production.

2.9. The Teachability of Speech Acts Behavior

In This section, will try to see if we can teach speech acts behavior. And if yes, how can it be taught? The answer to this question is yes. Speech acts behavior can be taught since it is everyday language use. “The fact that speech acts reflect, for the most part, routinized language behavior helps learning in the sense that much of what is said is predictable” (Cohen, p.408)

Why predictable because most of the time an adjective is used in a compliment like nice or good. Olshatian and Cohen (1990) conducted a study with advanced EFL learners in Israel to see if the explicit teaching of speech act behavior can improve or help EFL learners to use linguistic means appropriately. Native speakers of American English provided baseline data for comparative purposes. They were taught twenty minutes lessons aimed at filling in the gaps. The study was done on apology. So, information about the strategies within the apology speech act set and about modifications of apologies through the use of intensification and emotional were taught. Researchers did a pretest first, and then after teaching them the behavior, they did another test, posttest, to determine what was learned. The results suggested that the types of intensification and downgrading, different speech act strategy realizations and situational or feature consideration can be taught. They also discovered that after training students, they opted for shorter utterances to make an apology instead overcompensate form, using too many words.

As in this example, a student responded to a situation of forgetting to meet a friend with “did you wait for me? You must forgive me. I could not come because of problems and I tried to warn you by phone but...” (Cited in Cohen, p.40)

After training, the utterance became short: “oh, I’m sorry. It dropped out of my mind.” The researchers also discovered the rise in the use of intensifiers like “deeply sorry” which were initially absent. Many other studies have been done in the field about complimenting and responses (Billmyer, 1990) and refusals (King and Silver, 1993). They used a pretest and posttest and all the findings showed that students can acquire speech acts when explicitly taught to them. However, some of the studies have shown their limits. This concern with the tools used in the research. For example, in the research about speech act of refusal, researcher has used a written discourse questionnaire in addition to spoken refusal to elicit. They discovered that results from the questionnaire indicated that instruction had had little effect, and the telephone interview indicated no effect. Although, teaching strategies of speech acts and linguistic means used in its socio-cultural dimension is probably the only way for EFL learners to develop their sociolinguistic ability.

Dunham (1992) described a series of ten techniques for teaching complimenting behavior after doing an informal study of forty Southeast Asian high school students, employing the complimenting outlined by Wolfson. The techniques are: reviewing how it is done in the native culture, reviewing how it is done in the United States, vocabulary phrase lists, student practice, role playing in pairs, teacher role play with students in front of the class, projects in which learners must compliment natives, students’ oral reports to the class following their field experiences with native speakers, connecting techniques to lengthen conversation, and paired interaction with complimenting and connecting techniques. (Cited in Cohen, p.411)

Conclusion

What is meant by a speech act and what is it composed of have been one of questions answered along this chapter. Austin and Searle are one of the advocates to clarify us. Therefore, a speech act is defined as saying by performing meaning that when we speak we are not only uttering words but also acting something. Hence, a priest saying “I pronounce you husband and wife” is wording and at the same time performing. Once this utterance uttered an action takes place, an action of joining two people together for life. This utterance is divided by Austin into three sub-acts which are: locutionary act (wording), illocutionary act (meaning) and perlocutionary act (effect) . Accordingly, Searle classified illocutionary act into five sub-acts too:

- Representatives
- Directives
- Expressive
- Comissives
- Declaratives

We have also highlighted a particular speech act which we are more interested to, the speech act of requesting. Speech act of requesting and (other speech acts, apology) have been separated for more clarification in empirical studies i.e. the way native speakers realize requests. These requests are realized in various ways using direct request, modal verbs and indirect speech. All can be used to make requests, but of which to use depends on whom one will be talking to. In another words, the way one should realize request taking account the socio-cultural dimensions i.e. how one should make a request regarding interlocutor’s status. Since request is an act of imposition, not with everyone request is realized in the same way.

The relationship of request and grammar has also been highlighted because making request requires the use of modals verbs. After the description of speech acts and its different sub-acts, we have asked ourselves if we can teach the speech act behavior. Many scholars proved that we can teach speech act behaviors. They proposed the explicit instruction as developing learners' speech act behaviors. Besides, explicit teaching is probably the only way for EFL learners to develop this skill.

Chapter Three:

Students' questionnaire

| | Page |
|---|-------------|
| Introduction..... | 44 |
| 3.1. Description of questionnaire..... | 44 |
| 3.2. Analysis of the results..... | 46 |
| 3.2.1. Part one: Background information..... | 46 |
| 3.2.2. Part two: Students' production of requests..... | 50 |
| 3.2.3. Part three: Students' perceptions of requests..... | 59 |
| Conclusion..... | 63 |
| General conclusion..... | 64 |
| Lists of References..... | 67 |
| Appendix..... | 69 |

Chapter three:

Students' questionnaire

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the analysis and discussion of the students' questionnaire. We start with the description of the different situations in this questionnaire. In the next step, we examine the students' answers to this questionnaire.

The questionnaire is composed of three parts. The first part contains seven questions. The second contains eight situations in which students are asked to produce speech act of requesting and the last one contains four questions which are about the appropriateness. The objective is to examine students' perception and production of speech act of requesting regarding the directness and linguistic means used. In other words, it seeks to find out if our students (EFL students in Biskra University) can make request appropriately and correctly.

3.1. Description of the questionnaire

Since the aim of this study is to examine students' awareness about using speech act of requesting appropriately, it seems appropriate to direct a students' questionnaire to investigate this issue. The questionnaire aims to explore the third year English students' perceptions and productions of speech act of requesting. The main objective behind this questionnaire is to verify the research hypothesis that stipulates that if students master sociolinguistic knowledge, they will be able to realize speech act of requesting appropriately.

In this study, we have a sample that consists of forty students out of a population of three hundreds and eighty seven (387) students. These students are selected randomly so that they will represent the whole population of third year English students at the University of Biskra.

Part one: Background information (Questions from 1 to 7)

This section aims to gather the information about students' previous knowledge of the language and the linguistic elements which were the focus in their early study of English. It also highlights their choice of English. We also wanted to know if they have been to an English speaking country and how they assess their levels in English.

Part two: Students' production of requests (Questions from 1 to 8)

This section deals with the way students make requests in different situations with different persons. They are given different situations in which they make requests. In all the eight situations, they are placed in the speaker role to make requests but with different interlocutors, sometimes it is their professor, friends, friend's parents, a stranger, a neighbor.

Hence, students are required to perform a request by asking a neighbour to turn down his or her music. The second one is about asking for a colleague notes. The third requires students asking his or her teacher to report the test for him or her because of a wedding. The fourth requires students asking a stranger to take a photo of them. The fifth is about a student asking another student to help him or her with the upcoming test. The sixth requires students asking another student to move in the bus so he or she can get in. the seventh is about a student asking his or her friend's mother, during a dinner party, for more food. And finally the eighth is about a student asking a professor to open the door for him or her because his or her hands are busy. The aim is to see if they can make requests taking account the role of the hearer status in the society. In this part, we have analyzed two things in each situation given to students to perform requests. The first one is the linguistic items used to make requests, it analyses if the students are able to construct correct request sentences, and the second one concern the level or degree of imposition used when realizing such requests.

Part three: Students' perception of Requests (Questions from 1 to 4)

Unlike the second part, which is about the production of students' speech act of requesting, this part is about their perceptions of the same speech act. Thus, they are required to say whether a situation is appropriate or not. The first three questions are about to judge if the requests are appropriate according the situation and the last one, the fourth is composed of four sub-tasks, and is about whether the requests are formal or informal.

3.2. Analysis of the Results

3.2.1. Part one: Background Information

1- Age

| Age/ Years | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| 20 | 6 | 14,63 |
| 21 | 16 | 39,02 |
| 22 | 12 | 29,27 |
| 23 | 5 | 12,20 |
| 25 | 1 | 2,44 |
| 26 | 1 | 2,44 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 01: Students' age

This part was about background information of the students. In the table, students were classified according to their ages. And we obtained about twenty two years old for each.

2- Gender

| Gender | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|--------|---------|-----------------|
| Male | 4 | 9,74 |
| Female | 37 | 90,56 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 02: Gender

We noticed that the majority of the participants were females. About ninety one percent of the respondents who participated in the experience were females while only less than ten percent were males.

Questions:

3- How long have you been studying English?

| Years of Study | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------------|---------|-----------------|
| Eleven Years | 2 | 4,87 |
| Ten Years | 21 | 51,21 |
| Nine Years | 6 | 14,63 |
| Seven Years | 2 | 4,87 |
| Three Years | 8 | 19,51 |
| Zero Year | 2 | 4,87 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 03: Years of study

4- Did your Teacher at previous school levels focus on?

| Options | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|-------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Grammar | 21 | 51,21 |
| Vocabulary | 2 | 4,82 |
| Pronunciation | 3 | 7,31 |
| Grammar + Vocabulary | 7 | 17,07 |
| Grammar + Pronunciation | 2 | 4,82 |
| All of them | 6 | 14,63 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table: 04 Students' background knowledge of language

Table 03 shows that the majority of the students' previous knowledge they received during their study of English were focused mostly on the grammatical aspect of the target language. The second majority responded that the focus was on grammar and vocabulary. This means that they were taught through the grammar translation method which overemphasizes the acquisition of grammar rules together with a list of vocabulary without paying any attention to language use.

5- How would you assess your present level?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Good | 9 | 21,95 |
| Average | 30 | 73,17 |
| Low | 2 | 4,87 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 05: Students' responses about their levels

This table revealed that the highest majority of students judged their levels of English language as average. Less than twenty five percent said that their levels were good. And small number of them, just two students said that their levels were low.

6- Have you been to an English speaking country?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|---------|---------|-----------------|
| Yes | 1 | 2,43 |
| No | 40 | 97,56 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 06: Students' responses to been in an English speaking country

The above table revealed that the majority of the students have never been in an English speaking country. This means, fewer opportunities to speak with native speakers. Having opportunities to speak with the native speakers is very important in learning a language. Because they can learn the grammar as well as the socio-cultural knowledge since they are speaking directly with native speakers.

7- Was your choice to study English?

| Options | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------|---------|-----------------|
| Personal | 31 | 75,60 |
| Imposed | 10 | 24,40 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 07: Students' responses of their choice of English

On the table above, the vast majority of the students' choices to study English were personal. As a conclusion, can say they should be motivated to learn English since it is their own choice. Less than twenty five said it was imposed on them to learn English.

3.2.2. Part two: Students' Production of Requests

Situations:

- 1- In the room nearby, someone is playing music and you want him or her to turn the music down. What would you say?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Correct construction | 36 | 92,31 |
| Wrong construction | 1 | 2,56 |
| Acceptable | 2 | 5,13 |
| Total | 39 | 100 |

Table 08: Linguistic means used to realize request 1

The results displayed on the above table shows that the majority of the students can make a correct request. This means that they know the linguistic means used to realize requests. This is because, in their previous school, the majority of them said that their teachers focused on the teaching of grammar. As a matter of fact, request realization is done with the use of modal verbs (could, can, would...) which are part of their syllabus. Two students did not answer.

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Direct | 2 | 5,26 |
| Less polite (informal) | 5 | 13,16 |
| More polite (formal) | 31 | 81,58 |
| Total | 38 | 100 |

Table 09: Students' level of imposition in Request 1

The results on the above table revealed that the majority of the students' requests were polite or formal. The request was addressed to a neighbour so, the best way is to use formal request. However some students did not answer and we were obliged to take them out.

2- You miss a class and you ask a friend to give his or her notes. What would you say?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Correct construction | 32 | 80 |
| Wrong construction | 3 | 7,5 |
| Acceptable | 5 | 12,5 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |

Table 10: Linguistic means used to realize request 2

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|-------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Direct | 2 | 5,41 |
| Less polite (informal) | 17 | 45,94 |
| More polite (formal) | 18 | 48,65 |
| Total | 37 | 100 |

Table 11: Students' level of imposition of request 2

Table 09 shows that the majority of the students make requests as it should be done. Less than eight percent didn't know how to make request, they have used "shall you..." which is not "request device" but used for suggestions. Less than thirteen percent answers were judge acceptable. However, four students did not reply. This was the linguistic means used by our students. Now, table 10 is about making requests taking account the context in which request is used- the status of the interlocutor. The context is asking a friend for help. Our table shows that less than forty nine percent use formal request; less than forty six percent use informal requests and fewer than six percent use direct request.

We can then notice that the slight majority use the formal request (more polite) in a situation where informal request is required. One can be direct or informal (less polite) with one's friend.

3- You ask your professor to postpone your test because you will be absent because of a wedding party. What would you say?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Correct construction | 21 | 56,76 |
| Wrong construction | 10 | 27,03 |
| Acceptable | 6 | 16,21 |
| Total | 37 | 100 |

Table 12: Linguistic means used to realize request 3

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|-------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Direct | 4 | 10,81 |
| Less polite (informal) | 12 | 32,43 |
| More polite (formal) | 21 | 56,76 |
| Total | 37 | 100 |

Table 13: Students' level of imposition of request 3

Table 11 and 12 revealed that the majority of the students could construct correct request sentence and were aware of level of imposition, i.e., they know when to be formal or more polite because here, the request was about a professor who is someone superior to them. They have chosen the appropriate items in this context. Four out of forty one answers were useless.

4- You see a man walking and you ask him to take a photo of you and your friend. What would you say?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Correct construction | 29 | 76,32 |
| Wrong construction | 3 | 7,89 |
| Acceptable | 6 | 15,79 |
| Total | 38 | 100 |

Table 14: Linguistic means used to realize request 4

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Direct | 0 | 0 |
| Less polite (informal) | 18 | 50 |
| More polite (formal) | 18 | 50 |
| Total | 36 | 100 |

Table 15: Students' level of imposition of request 4

On table 14, we noticed that about seventy seven percent made the correct requests and less than eight percent did not succeed to make correct requests. This can be explained by the fact that the focus of their previous study was grammar. On table 15, about the choice of formality and informality, we noticed that the numbers are equal. Fifty percent for each, no one has been direct with the man passing by. This means that they were aware what they should say in this kind of situation.

5- You want a friend to help you with an upcoming test. What would you say?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Correct construction | 22 | 59,46 |
| Wrong construction | 7 | 18,92 |
| Acceptable | 8 | 21,62 |
| Total | 37 | 100 |

Table 16: Linguistic means used to realize request 5

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Direct | 11 | 31,43 |
| Less polite (informal) | 10 | 28,57 |
| More polite (formal) | 14 | 40 |
| Total | 35 | 100 |

Table 17: Students' level of imposition of request 5

As can be seen on table 16, which was about the linguistic means used to make the request, the vast majority succeed to make correct request. However on table 17 which was about the level of imposition, we noticed that the slight majority, forty percent, used the formal request (more polite) with their friend which one can use direct or informal request. As conclusion we can say that our students were not aware of this rule.

6- A student blocks your way from getting in the bus and you ask him or her to move on the bus. What would you say?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Correct construction | 32 | 91,43 |
| Wrong construction | 1 | 2,86 |
| Acceptable | 2 | 5,71 |
| Total | 35 | 100 |

Table 18: Linguistic means used to realize request 6

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Direct | 4 | 11,43 |
| Less polite (informal) | 11 | 31,43 |
| More polite (formal) | 20 | 57,14 |
| Total | 35 | 100 |

Table 19: Students' level of imposition of request 6

The same thing can be noticed in the tables 18 and 19. The majority of the students made requests correctly and used the formal or more polite way to ask another student to unblock the way so that they can pass. It is always better to use formal request when addressing someone you do not know. And it was obvious that the majority of them were aware of that. However less than thirty two percent used informal request (less polite) and less than twelve percent used direct request (most imposing)

7- During a dinner at your friend's house, you ask your friend's mother for more food.

What would you say?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Correct construction | 20 | 60,61 |
| Wrong construction | 10 | 30,30 |
| Acceptable | 3 | 9,09 |
| Total | 33 | 100 |

Table 20: Linguistic means used to realize request 7

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Direct | 5 | 16,67 |
| Less polite (informal) | 10 | 33,33 |
| More polite (formal) | 15 | 50 |
| Total | 30 | 100 |

Table 21: Students' level of imposition of request 7

The table 20 revealed that the majority of the students could make correct request here too. And in table 21, the majority, fifty percent, opt for formal request (more polite) because they were talking someone who is distant or superior. As a conclusion, we can say that they are aware of when to use formal request with someone who is distant or of a higher status.

8- Your hands are busy and you want to ask a professor to open the door for you. What would you say?

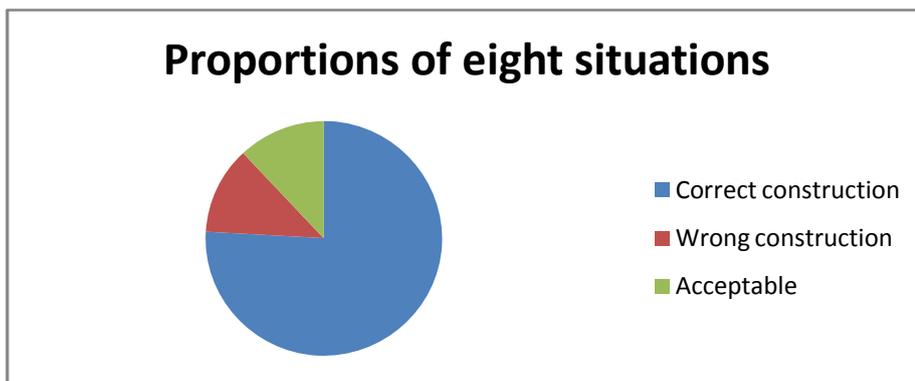
| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Correct construction | 27 | 84,37 |
| Wrong construction | 2 | 6,25 |
| Acceptable | 3 | 9,38 |
| Total | 32 | 100 |

Table 22: Linguistic means used to realize request 8

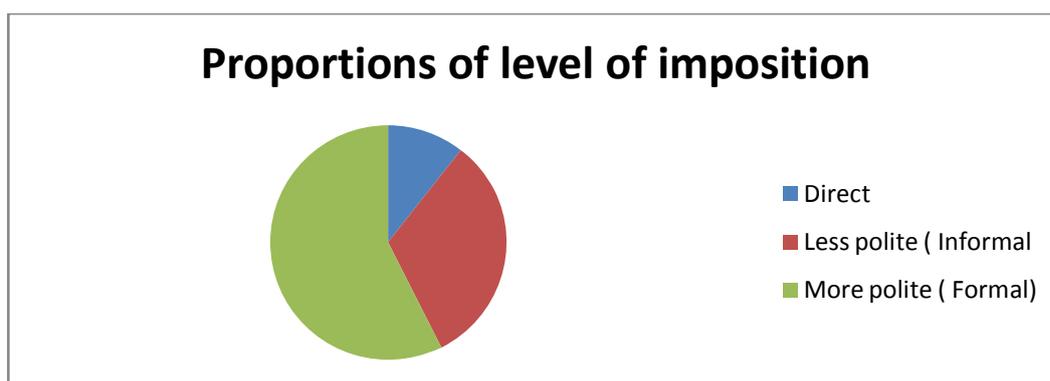
| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|-------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Direct | 1 | 3,13 |
| Less polite (informal) | 7 | 21,87 |
| More polite (formal) | 24 | 75 |
| Total | 32 | 100 |

Table 23: Students' level of imposition of request 8

The tables 22 and 23 showed that the students made correct requests with the appropriate manner. About eighty five percent used linguistic means used to make requests, less than seven percent failed and less than ten percent's requests were acceptable. Concerning the level of imposition seventy percent used the polite requests since they are requesting their teacher, about twenty two percent used informal ways to make request and fewer than four percent used the direct request. As a conclusion, the majority of the students are aware of making requests.



Graph 01: Proportions of eight situations of part two



Graph 02: Proportions of level of imposition of request of eight situations, part two

In general, the vast majority, as you can see in the graph 01, were able to make correct request sentences. This is because they have mastered the grammatical rules of English language or, making requests requires the use of modal verbs which were parts of grammar instruction. In the graph 02 also, we noticed that our students were aware of the use of language, precisely making requests, taking account the interlocutors' status. This shows that they are aware if the hearer is superior or equals to them and the way they should request. As a matter of fact, we can conclude from this that the knowledge of the socio-cultural norms affects students' realization of requests.

3.2.3. Part three: Students' perceptions of requests

1- A student say to his teacher:

Give me your book.

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|---------|---------|-----------------|
| Yes | 0 | 0 |
| No | 41 | 100 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 24: students' responses about appropriateness 01

In this table, all the students judged inappropriate to speak with a teacher in this way. They said that formal and polite requests are required in the situations with a person of a higher position than the speaker. They also said that it looked like an order not a request and it was not appropriate to give order to your teacher. So, as a conclusion, we can say that all the students are aware of strategies used when talking with someone with higher rank.

2- A man says to his friend:

Could you come with me to the cinema?

| Answers | Number | Proportions (%) |
|---------|--------|-----------------|
| Yes | 32 | 78,05 |
| No | 9 | 21,95 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 25: Students' responses about appropriateness 02

The majority of the students responded appropriate because they thought that polite ways is always required even if one is talking with a friend as you can notice in the table 24.

However, it is good to be polite with friends, but it does not mean that we cannot use informal way or less polite way with them. “Could you...” is considered to be the more polite and formal request; using with a friend is useless as some students said.

Therefore, “can you come with me to the cinema?” would be appropriate and not impolite. There are many ways to make request in this situation and which are not considered as impolite. We can use hints like “Good movie tonight in the cinema”. We can also say “do you like going to the cinema?” We can conclude that the majority prefer to use polite or formal requests with their friends even not necessary. This is not because they do not know the socio-cultural information behind, but because they think it is always better to be polite. Some even said that it is appropriate to “could you...” but justified useless because with friends we can be natural and normal. This choice of using formal or more polite requests with friends may be explained by simply that they are experiencing sociolinguistic transfer i.e. in their speech communities; it may be required to be polite with everyone, friends, higher rank etc.

3- A student says to his classmate:

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|---------|---------|-----------------|
| Yes | 40 | 97,56 |
| No | 1 | 2,44 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 26: Students’ responses about appropriateness 03

On the table above, the majority of the students were aware of the possibility of being informal with a friend or a classmate. About ninety eight percent responded appropriate and only less than three percent responded inappropriate. Some students argued that when talking with a classmate, one can make request without using modals and no need for formality. However, “can” is used to make an informal request too.

Therefore, it can be used between friends, classmates, colleagues...etc. There are ways to make request. One can choose to be direct; it depends on the kind of relationship between them.

4- Request can take several verbal forms depending with whom you are talking. Select whether the following requests are formal or informal or both.

a- I would like a piece of candy.

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------|---------|-----------------|
| Formal | 20 | 48,78 |
| Informal | 18 | 43,90 |
| Both | 3 | 7,32 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 27: students' perceptions about formality and informality of request

This table revealed that the majority of the students are aware of the formality of this request. However, it also means that less than forty four percent are not aware of the use of “would” as a formal way or more polite way to make request. Only less than eight percent responded as both formal and informal. This table also reveals that the stress should be put on the teaching of modal verbs use regarding the socio-cultural dimensions.

b- May I please have a piece of candy?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------|---------|-----------------|
| Formal | 31 | 75,61 |
| Informal | 6 | 14,64 |
| Both | 4 | 9,75 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 28: students' perceptions about formality and informality of request

This table also revealed that the majority of the students were aware of the formality of the request. About seventy six percent responded appropriate, less than fifteen percent said inappropriate and less than ten percent responded that the request were both formal and informal.

c- Do you have a piece of candy?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------|---------|-----------------|
| Formal | 9 | 21,95 |
| Informal | 18 | 43,90 |
| Both | 14 | 34,15 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 29: students' perceptions about formality and informality of request

The table above revealed that the majority of the students, less than forty four percent, perceived this request as informal, less than twenty two percent perceived it as formal. However, about thirty five percent perceived as formal and informal.

d- Give me a piece of candy?

| Answers | Numbers | Proportions (%) |
|----------|---------|-----------------|
| Formal | 1 | 2,44 |
| Informal | 38 | 92,68 |
| Both | 2 | 4,88 |
| Total | 41 | 100 |

Table 30: students' perceptions of formality and informality of request

The majority of the students classified this request into the informal rank. About ninety three percent responded informal, less than three and five percent for formal and both respectively.

Conclusion:

Results from the analysis of students' questionnaire support our research hypothesis which postulates that if our learners acquire sociolinguistic competence, their realization of the speech act of requesting will improve. Accordingly, we have seen in the first part that the majority of the students said that the focus of the language element was grammar in their previous school level consequently the correct construction of the request was higher. Besides, we have also seen that the majority of them were aware of making requests in different context with different interlocutors. Therefore, our students have developed the socio-linguistic competence which in turn affects their realization of speech act of requesting.

CONCLUSION

Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of socio-cultural norms of a given language. Hence, sociolinguistic competence of English is the socio-cultural norms which influence their language use. Society and culture are related to language. Language understanding will be very difficult without the knowledge of the socio-cultural rules related to that language. EFL students have few opportunities to interact with native speakers which in turn will affect the development of their sociolinguistic competence. They are learning English in a society which is different from the English society. For that reason, scholars proposed hypotheses which can help learners to develop their overall language ability. Among them, we can cite Dell Hymes who first coined the concept of “communicative competence”; the knowledge of language and language use appropriately. Later, the concept was redefined and developed by other scholars such as Canale and Swain and Bachman... etc. They redefined it and added other components: grammatical, sociolinguistic/pragmatic, discourse and strategic components.

A successful realization of the speech act of requesting should take account the level of directness, the use of formal and informal depending on the person.

The results of our study showed that the majority of our students are aware of linguistic means used to realize requests. However, we have noticed an overuse of the formal or more polite request in every situation, for example the use of formal or more polite request with a friend which is not necessary. Besides, most of them are not aware that the use of formal or more polite request (could you..., would you..., May I...) with friends is unnecessary. Therefore, we conclude that students may be experiencing sociolinguistic or pragmatic transfer i.e. students may be thinking in the culture of their language.

The overuse of such form (more polite or formal) out of context with English person may be embarrassing for him or her. Therefore, we would like to put forward the following recommendations as how to improve our students 'use of the speech act of requesting.

- Teachers of grammar module should give more explanations of modals verbs regarding socio-cultural aspects, for example, stressing on the use of "could, would..." as more polite forms used to realize a given speech act. And give examples in all situations mentioning if the hearer is superior or inferior as well the speaker's status.

For example:

The use "would": teacher can introduce how "would" is used in which context and with what kinds of persons (social rank) then ask them to perform like in the following illustration.

Speaker: inferior

Hearer: superior

Situation: teacher says: you are the speaker; ask the hearer to lend you a book or whatever; and after he will play the role of the speaker (superior) and so on.

We should teach the culture of the target language use i.e., the way different speech acts are realized according to socio-cultural norms, for example, how one should behave when greeting someone in English society, how one should compliment and respond to it.

- The inclusion of a new module which covers the instruction of different speech acts, requesting, complimenting, and ordering..., in relation of socio-cultural norms of the target language. In EFL context, the instruction is the only and possible way to develop our students' language ability since they have no opportunities to interact with native speakers. Therefore, this new module will be only composed of different speech acts: requesting, complimenting and responding compliment, ordering, greeting...etc.

Students will be taught what linguistic means are used and how they should be used appropriately in the course of the lessons. The practical part can take place in oral expression courses i.e. that oral expression and this new module must closely be linked. It can be introduced in the first two years of the University (first and year and second year) i.e. during the year of internalization of language knowledge. During these two years, how come we have grammar (words are combination), phonetics (pronunciation), and culture (history about the language) but no such a thing which covers different speech acts are used appropriately.

Accordingly, results reveal that the vast majority of our students are aware of linguistic means used to realize requests, but at the level of directness (level of imposition) and perceptions, there are many ambiguities. Therefore, this new module can be considered as a supplement.

List of references

- Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Bright Harley, et al. (1990). *The development of second language proficiency*. USA: Cambridge Applied linguistics, CUP
- Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Bachman, L. and Palmer. A. (1982). *The construct validation of some components of communicative proficiency*. TESOL Quarterly
- Billmyer, K. (1990). *The Effect of Formal Instruction on the development of sociolinguistic competence: the performance of compliments*.
- Canale, M. and Swain. M. (1980). *Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing*. Applied Linguistics
- Claire, A. M. (1997). *Teaching Sociolinguistic competence in the ESL classroom*
- Crystal, D. (1997). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, second edition. USA
- Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and Culture*. New York: Oxford University
- Kenneth R. R. (1999). *Teachers and students learning about requests in Hong Kong*. In Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language teaching and learning* (pp.167-180). London: Cambridge University Press
- Hinkel, E. (1999). *Culture in second language teaching and learning*. London: Cambridge University Press
- Mckay, S. L and Hornberger, N. H. (1996). *Sociolinguistics and Language teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Naoko T. (2006). *Analysis of Appropriateness in a Speech act of Request in L2 English*
- Perrault, C.R and Allen, J.F. (1980). *A plan-based Analysis of Indirect Speech Acts*. American Journal of computational linguistics, vol.6. Issue 3-4. 167-182

Searle, J.R. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Spolsky, B. (2010). *Sociolinguistics*. New York: Oxford University Press

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. New York: Oxford University Press

Wiggins, D. (1971). *On sentence-sense, word-sense and Difference of word-sense. Towards philosophical theory of dictionaries*. In Danny, D. Steinberg and Leon, A. Jakobovits (eds). *Semantics: An interdisciplinary Reader in Philosophy, Linguistics and Psychology*. 14-34. London: Cambridge University Press

Shoshana. B. and Elite.O. (1989). *Requests and Apologies: Across-cultural study of speech act realization pattern*.

Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to teach speaking*. USA: Longman

Trudgill, P. (2000). *Sociolinguistics: An introduction to language and society*. Fourth Edition, UK, England

Widdowson H. G.. (2008). *Teaching language as communication*. London: Oxford University Press.

Websites:

Yu, C.H. (2002). Applications of John Austin's speech Acts theory to Chinese and American contexts: retrieved on April 18, 2010 from: www.seamonkey.ed.asu.edu/-alex/

Appendix

Students' Questionnaire

This questionnaire serves a data tool collection for a research work that aims at investigating how EFL learners use requests. This questionnaire is administered to third year students at the department of English, University of Biskra. I would be very grateful if you take time to share your experience by answering questions below. Your answers will be kept anonymous and will be of great help in completing our study. You will be given number of situations in which you will have to make requests and also answer what requests are appropriate or not appropriate in the final part (part 03).

Your contribution is very important for our study.

Part one: Background information

1- Age:

2- Gender: Male Female

3- How long have been studying English?

.....

4- Did your teacher at previous school levels focus on?

Grammar

Vocabulary

Pronunciation

All of them

5- How would you assess your present level?

Good

Average

Low

6- Have you been to an English speaking country?

Yes

No

7- Was your choice to study English?

Personal

Imposed

Part two: Students' Production of Requests

1- In the room nearby, someone is playing and you want him or her to turn the music down. What would you say?

.....
.....

2- You miss a class and you ask a friend to give you his or her notes. What would you say?

.....
.....

3- You ask your professor to postpone your test because you will be absent because of a wedding party. What would you say?

.....
.....

4- You see a man walking and you ask him to take a photo of you and your friend. What would you say?

.....
.....

5- You want a friend to help you with an upcoming test. What would you say?

.....
.....

6- A student blocks your way from getting in the bus and you ask him or her to move on the bus. What would you say?

.....
.....

7- During a dinner at your friend's house, you ask your friend's mother for more food. What would say?

.....
.....

8- Your hands are busy and you want to ask a professor to open the door for you. What would you say?

.....
.....

Part three: Students' Perception of requests

Could you say whether these requests are appropriate or inappropriate according to the situation?

1- A student says to his teacher:

Give me your book.

Yes No

Justify:

.....
.....
.....

2- A man says to his friend:

Could you come with me to the cinema?

Yes

No

Justify:

.....
.....
.....

3- A student says to his classmates:

Can you lend me your notes?

Yes

No

Justify:

.....
.....
.....

4- Request can take several verbal forms depending with whom you are talking. Select whether the following requests are formal or informal or both.

a- I would like a piece of candy

Formal

Informal

Both

b- May I please have a piece of candy?

Formal

Informal

Both

c- Do you have a piece of candy?

Formal

Informal

Both

d- Give me a piece of candy!

Formal

Informal

Both

Thank you for your contribution!!!

L'impact de la connaissance sociolinguistique sur la performance de l'acte de parole de demande des étudiants de l'Anglais comme langue étrangère.

Le cas des étudiants de Troisième Année

Université de Biskra

Résumé

Cette thèse étudie la compétence sociolinguistique en relation avec l'exécution de l'acte de parole de la demande. Nous attendons par compétence sociolinguistique, la capacité de l'un à sélectionner les moyens linguistiques appropriées concernant tous les aspects socioculturels comme la prise en compte de l'état, le sexe et l'âge de l'interlocuteur ... en réalisant d'un acte de parole donnée, spécialement l'acte de langage de demande .Il examine les productions et les perceptions de l'acte de parole de demande des étudiants de troisième anglais à l'Université Mohamed Kheider, Biskra. Tout au long de cette étude, nous avons abordé le problème de l'ignorance des stratégies et des moyens de linguistique utilisée pour réaliser l'acte de parole de demande en ce qui concerne les dimensions socioculturelles. L'absence de cette connaissance affecte sérieusement leur performance. L'objectif de ce travail de recherche est de sensibiliser les élèves sur la connaissance sociolinguistique et de voir dans quelle mesure cette prise de conscience contribue à l'amélioration de leurs productions. En conséquence, nous pensons que si les étudiants sont conscients (savoir) de connaissances sociolinguistique, ils seront en mesure de produire l'acte de parole de demande de manière appropriée. Pour tenter de sensibiliser la connaissance sociolinguistique des élèves, nous avons réalisé un questionnaire. Les résultats du questionnaire ont confirmé l'hypothèse de recherche. Ces résultats révèlent que la majorité des étudiants peut faire la différence entre les différents interlocuteurs et d'adapter en conséquence leurs demandes. Cette conscience de la connaissance socioculturelle leur permet d'effectuer des demandes de façon appropriée.