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Title:

**A Cross-Linguistic Study of the Speech
Act of “Offer” across Persian and
English**

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To My Dear Parents,

For Their Endless Love

And Support

In The Name Of God

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Abstract

The development of Pragmatic knowledge of EFL learners involves advancement in their ability to achieve success in handling interactions by utilizing such communicative means as speech acts.

The present cross-linguistic descriptive study is an attempt to identify Persian sociocultural norms and values with respect to the speech act of offer and the strategies used to realize it, and to recognize areas of possible pragmatic transfer committed by EFL learners. Furthermore, this study was to find out pragmatic deficiencies in the area of language learning which might lead to miscommunication or to communication breakdowns.

For this purpose, 195 male and female native Persian speakers were selected from diverse age ranges, educational backgrounds and social classes and were assigned a 36-item Discourse Completion Task (DCT) to elicit the speech act offer. In addition 30 field workers (both male and female, graduates and students) recorded naturally occurring interaction containing the speech act of offer. Also an Oxford Quick Placement test was administered to 70 male and female EFL learners in order to determine their proficiency levels as low, intermediate and advanced; who were then given the English version of the Discourse Completion Task.

At the data analysis phase, the responses were coded using 12 categories to determine the strategies used. The corpus gathered through field observation

and DCT was analyzed in terms of social factors of relative power and social distance. Likewise, the responses provided from EFL learners were analyzed using a scale consisting of 8 strategies.

The results of investigation provided from Chi-square statistical procedure showed that none of the factors of age, gender, offer type, social distance and relative power proved to be significantly effective in the choice of offer strategies used by native Persian speakers or EFL learners. In general it could be concluded that Persian speakers tended to be more indirect and “locution derivable”, query preparatory” and hedged “imperative” are favorite strategies among Persian speakers. This could be explained through their tendency for being indirect and not imposing themselves on their addressees, hence, respecting the hearers’ negative face. EFL learners, on the other hand, opted for “locution derivable”, “query preparatory” and “state preparatory”; which is similar to the patterns used in English. Traces of transfer could be seen in the speech behavior of EFL learners. It may imply the necessity of designing material and strategies to provide a clear picture of the target sociocultural norms of speech behavior.

Key words: pragmatic competence, speech act, offer, pragmatic transfer, Discourse Completion Task (DCT), field observation.

چکیده

ارتقای دانش منظورشناسی زبان‌آموزان شامل پیشرفت توانایی آنان در بدست آوردن موفقیت در تعاملات کلامی از طریق استفاده از ابزارهای ارتباطی همچون گفتار کنش‌هاست.

مطالعه‌ی توصیفی-مقایسه‌ای حاضر تلاشی برای تعیین هنجارها و ارزشهای فرهنگی-اجتماعی فلوسی مرتبط با کنش گفتاری پیشنهاد و استراتژی‌های بکار رفته در آن و همچنین تشخیص زمینه‌های انتقال منظورشناختی توسط زبان‌آموزان است. هدف دیگر این تحقیق یافتن ناتوانی‌های منظورشناسی در حیطه‌ی آموزش زبان است که باعث شکست در ارتباط می‌شود.

برای رسیدن به این اهداف، 195 فارسی زبان مرد و زن از گروه‌های سنی، سطح تحصیلات و طبقات اجتماعی مختلف انتخاب شده و به آزمون تکمیل گفتمانی با 36 موقعیت پاسخ گفتند. همچنین 30 مرد و زن مسئولیت ثبت نمونه‌های پیشنهاد در تعاملات روزمره مردم را به عهده گرفتند. علاوه بر این 70 زبان‌آموز که از طریق نتایج آزمون تعیین سطح آکسفورد در سه سطح ابتدایی، متوسط و پیشرفته قرار گرفتند به معدل انگلیسی آزمون تکمیل کلام پاسخ گفتند.

در بخش تحلیل داده‌ها، داده‌های جمع‌آوری شده در مقیاسی با 12 استراتژی برای فارسی و 8 استراتژی برای انگلیسی کدگذاری شدند و عوامل سن، جنسیت، نوع پیشنهاد، فاصله اجتماعی و بوتری نسبی در انتخاب نوع استراتژی شرکت‌کنندگان مورد بررسی قرار گرفت.

تحلیل‌های به عمل آمده از طریق آزمون خی-دو حاکی از این بود که هیچ‌یک از عوامل بررسی شده در انتخاب استراتژی‌ها تأثیر چشمگیری نداشت. به طور کل فارسی‌زبانها مایل به استفاده از استراتژی‌هایی نظیر "قابل اشتقاق از بیان"، "پرسش در مورد آمادگی" و "جملات امرانه" بودند که بیانگر عدم علاقه‌ی آنان به تحمیل کردن خود به شنونده و در نتیجه حفظ وجهه منفی شنوندگان است. از طرفی دیگر زبان‌آموزان "قابل اشتقاق از بیان"، "پرسش در مورد آمادگی" و "بیان آمادگی" را به عنوان استراتژی‌های برتر انتخاب کردند که شبیه الگوهای رایج در انگلیسی است. شایان ذکر است که ردی از انتقال منظورشناختی در رفتار زبانی زبان‌آموزان قابل مشاهده است، چراکه انتخاب شایع‌ترین استراتژی در دو زبان متفاوت می‌باشد.

نتایج تحقیق بر لزوم تدوین لوازم و رویکردهای آموزشی به منظور تأمین تصویری واضح از هنجارهای فرهنگی-اجتماعی رفتارهای کلامی در زبان مقصد تأکید میکند.

کلمات کلیدی: توانش منظورشناسی، انتقال زبان، کنش گفتاری، پیشنهاد، آزمون تکمیل‌گفتمان، مشاهده.

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List of Abbreviations

DCT	Discourse Completion Task
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FDCT	Free Discourse Completion Task
H	Other (addressee)
ILP	Interlanguage Pragmatics
S	Self (speaker)
P	Relative Power
D	Social Distance
R	Social imposition

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Preliminaries

As successful communication has become one of the foremost goals of any language teaching philosophy, a great deal of attention has recently been paid to the learners' ability to appropriately use the communicative norms of the target language in the target-like interactional contexts both in terms of instruction and assessment. Therefore, language pedagogies are now trying to include in their syllabus, as much as possible, the instruction of 'pragmatic rules' of a language besides its phonological, morphological and syntactic rules. This highlights the role of pragmatic competence in nowadays language learning field. In these lines, Crystal (1985) defines pragmatic competence as "the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language have on other participants in the act of communication" (p.240). Also pragmatic competence is defined as the ability of the speakers to understand and produce appropriate communicative acts (utterances) (Kasper, 1997). Accordingly deficit in the pragmatic knowledge of the EFL learners will lead them to use the available knowledge of the norms of their native language; hence pragmatic transfers. Kasper (1992) believes that such a pragmatic transfer is more considerable than the formal properties of languages.

One consequence of pragmatic transfer is pragmatic failure which is a misunderstanding or not understanding the illocutionary force of an utterance or the speaker's intended meaning as Thomas (1983) puts it. When a miscommunication

occurs, native speakers are at advantage over non-native speakers in that they can easily and quickly distinguish the reason behind their pragmatic failure and find a way to fix it; whereas for the non-natives the deficient knowledge of pragmatics may be the reason for a failure to fix the ambiguities in interaction (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986). To appropriately explore pragmatic knowledge, transfer and failure, there is a need for definition of some important issues. One of the key concepts introduced is speech act which is significant at achieving successful communication. Knowledge of speech acts involves sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge. Sociocultural knowledge involves the competence to apply proper speech act strategies according to social factors such as age, gender of the speaker and social class and status. Sociolinguistic competence on the other hand, refers to the ability of the speaker to appropriately apply vocabulary, linguistic forms, registers, and politeness in a particular context. As a result a variety of cross-cultural studies have been conducted on different speech acts such as requests, complaints and refusals.

‘Offer’ is one of rarely attended speech acts in terms of cross-linguistic (or cross-cultural) studies. The most frequent types of offers are offers of help, hospitable offers and gift offers. Other non-frequent offers do exist, namely offers of proposals and offers of compensation. Searl (1976) categorizes them as commissive in nature since the speakers commit themselves to some act in future. Edmonson and House (1981) categorizes offers as attitudinal illocutions, more specifically as a type of ‘Willing’ in that the speaker asserts that s/he intends to perform a future action in the interest of the hearer. Therefore, the role of the speaker is highlighted.