

Conversational Norms in Speech Acts: A Study of the Effect of Deficits on Communication

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Abstract—The present study aimed to investigate secondary school students' lack of mastering the conversational norms of speech acts, and the ability to express themselves in a foreign language. The case study was in Gezira State-Al-Manaqil Locality- El-Kremiet Secondary schools. The research used a descriptive-analytical method; the tool for collecting data was a questionnaire consisting of 12 distinct items administered to 60 teaching members, encompassing both male and female participants. Results showed that participants overwhelmingly agreed on the significance of the lack of conversational norms both inside and outside the classroom, with an average agreement rate of 73.42%. Moreover, a substantial majority, totaling 91.77% of participants, strongly agreed on the influential role of disability among EFL learners in executing situational speech acts. Additionally, a significant consensus was reached, with 84.6% of participants strongly agreeing that weaknesses in pronunciation contribute to the non-productivity of EFL learners in the classroom. The findings of the study emphasized the necessity for EFL Learners to acquire the basis core of conversation to perform the various speech acts in different situations.

Index Terms—deficits on communication, lacking conversational norms, speech acts production

I. INTRODUCTION

Since every language has a distinct system that is governed by a set of linguistic criteria, speakers of that language attempt to use their communicative skills to be able to produce appropriate and understandable utterances during communication (Aprianto & Zaini, 2019). Similarly, for pupils to speak a foreign language correctly, they must be aware of the speaking skills and cultural criteria that underlie the language's linguistic patterns. Acquiring an understanding of the pragmatic applications of language in the target culture is just as important as learning all the grammatical and structural rules (Leech, 1983). Therefore, it is impossible to achieve successful cross-cultural communication in second language in mastering vocabulary, but also learners are required to master pragmatic competence and knowledge about the culture of the target language. There has been a great consensus among second language acquisition (SLA) scholars that negative pragmatic transfer in which the L2 learners assimilate their first language (L1) speech acts (apologizing, requesting, inviting, complimenting, and so forth) can lead to communication breakdowns due to their lack of L2 pragmatic competence. For example, Meznah (2018) notes that "the negative pragmatic transfer occurs usually when the L2 learners erroneously generalized to L2 context from pragmatic knowledge of L1" (p. 18). Additionally, English as foreign language (EFL) students need to understand that speech acts have a clear relationship between language forms, language functions, and social context. Speech acts include requests, greetings, refusals, apologies, and more. Syntactic forms and tactics for achieving speech acts are typically taught alongside context factors that dictate how indirect and courteous the forms should be (Al-Khateeb, 2009; Taguchi, 2013). According to Austin (1962), speech acts are actions that allude to the action.

Statement of the problem

The study's issue is that many EFL students struggle to communicate in English in the classroom (Günes & Sarigöz, 2021). Additionally, because they are unaware of the fundamental rules of the speech act, pupils avoid face-to-face interactions and miss out on chances to acquire language through real-world interactions (Al-Ahdal, 2020). With the advent of the communicative approach, the emphasis has changed to obtaining functional competency in the target language, with the goal being the comprehension and production of language appropriate for communicative contexts within socio-cultural bounds. It is acknowledged that there are challenges in conveying such abstract knowledge directly to pupils whose command of the English language may be insufficient. With this difficulty in mind, the current study explores the status of speaking problems associated with lack of understanding speech acts in the Sudanese context. This study aimed at:

1. Investigating the effect of the lack of conversational norms of speech act inside or outside the classroom of EFL students.
2. Highlighting the influence of the ability of EFL learners to perform situational speech acts during their English classroom.
3. Clarifying the difficulties involved in presenting speech acting directly to EFL learners whose English fluency may be limited.

Research questions

1. To what extent does the lack of conversational norms regarding speech acts impact Sudanese EFL students, both within and outside the classroom?
2. What is the influence of the notability of EFL learners in performing situational speech acts in their English classroom?
3. What are the difficulties that engaging in giving direct speeches to English language learners, some of whom may have low fluency in the language?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching speech acts to EFL students

Because they do not yet fully understand the conversational norms that are necessary to produce speech acts, foreign language learners may have challenges when conversing with native speakers. Interethnic communication breakdowns may result from these conversational challenges (Gumperz, 1990). Nonnative speakers frequently run the eternal risk of unintentionally breaking conversational (and politeness) norms and losing their claim to be treated as social equals by their interactants when they deviate from speech act realization patterns that are typically used by native speakers of a target language (Escandell-Vidal, 2012; Kasper, 1990). When conversationalists are not equally aware of the nuanced laws of conversation, communication problems arise.

Speech Acts

Austin (1962) developed the speech act theory, which is a theory of language that Searle (1969) expanded upon. The speech act theory considers non-linguistic communication situations as well, in contrast to linguistics and semantics, which limit their work to the linguistic structures produced. In this sense, Austin (1962) focuses on the connection between act and language. This suggests that when people use language, they do more than just construct discrete sentences—they also act. To put it another way, they either act or force others to act through the language they use. Among them are expressions of gratitude, requests, assurances, and so forth (Marquez, 2000).

According to Searle (2000), speech acts are demonstrated in contexts where language is used. As a result, he claims that the fundamental tenet of the speech act theory should be that the performance of kinds of acts constitutes the smallest unit in human communication. Bachman (1990) links these acts in communication scenarios to the functional aspects of language. The pragmatic dimension is related to creating and comprehending speech acts, as opposed to the morphological, syntactic, and rhetorical dimensions, which deal with the arrangement of language structures. When it comes to communication, these two aspects work together.

Furthermore, Hidayat (2016) claimed that speech acts, a subset of pragmatics and a type of verbal communication, frequently occur in both verbal and nonverbal communication. When a speaker speaks, some goals go beyond the words or phrases. According to Austin (1962), making a statement can involve three acts happening at once. Among these is the act of locution. This merely explains the act of speaking. Conversely, an illocutionary act is the act of doing something by saying something. The act of perlocution has to do with how something is said in the end. It describes the impact it has on the listener.

Depending on the speaker's intent and attitude, Searle (1975) divided speech acts into five major categories: Assertive: the speaker portrays the propositional content—reporting, announcing, responding, etc.—as a depiction of a situation in the actual world; Commissive: the speaker promises, swears, guarantees, or takes some other action in the future; Directive: the speaker tries to persuade the listener to adopt a specific.

Recognizing the particular speech act a speaker performs is a basic aspect of pragmatic competence. Many different things can be done with language. Furthermore, a key element of effective language use is the capacity to identify the actions that individuals carry out through their utterances (Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006). Therefore, in the target language classroom, it is imperative to teach students appropriate pragmatic realization patterns of speech acts.

Research conducted in classrooms focusing on the pragmatic development of FL/L2 learners strongly suggests that teaching pragmatic components (such as speech acts) explicitly is more effective (Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Takimoto, 2008). With explicit instruction, FL/L2 learners seem to accelerate their ability to express more native-like speech act performance. According to Koike and Pearson (2005), the results of the studies in SLA support the use of explicit or implicit instruction to help English language learners (ELLs) recognize pragmatic norms and, as a result, produce speech acts in a contextual dialogue.

In actuality, the most researched aspect of pragmatics is speech acts. Most studies concentrate on one or more speech acts, such as requests (Holtgraves, 2008). Many empirical studies have used speech acts to investigate how instruction affects pragmatic features (Grossi, 2009).

In a study conducted in the UK by Halenko and Jones (2011), Chinese ESL students who received six hours of explicit instruction on request strategies exhibited a notable enhancement in their pragmatic comprehension on a post-test, in contrast to those who did not receive any instruction. This research underscores the potential impact of instruction in accelerating learning, despite both groups of learners being regularly exposed to an English language environment.

Alzebaree and Yavuz (2017) investigated request and apology strategies among Kurdish EFL undergraduate students (KEFLUS) compared to native English speakers (NSE), utilizing a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and

researcher-developed rating scale. Results revealed differences between KEFLUS and NSE groups, as well as among universities, but no significant gender-based distinctions among KEFLUS. Overall, KEFLUS responses were deemed pragmatically and structurally appropriate.

Hussein and Albakri (2019) highlighted the growing emphasis on mastering English language skills, particularly pragmatic aspects like the speech act of request, in non-English speaking countries such as Iraq. It underscores the importance of incorporating pragmatic instruction, particularly in speech acts, to enhance English communication among Arab learners. Additionally, the paper discusses the lack of utilization of speech acts of request among English as foreign language students in Arab countries, emphasizing the need for effective teaching methods to improve learners' pragmatic abilities in requesting within specific contexts.

III. METHODS

The study used descriptive quantitative design. A questionnaire was employed in the study to gather data. The study took place at Sudan, Al-Manaqil Locality. The researcher built closed ended questionnaire. The questionnaire included 12 statements; they were broken down into three sections. The study examines various factors impacting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' speech act performance within and outside the classroom. It evaluates the effects of the absence of conversational norms on speech acts for EFL learners through items 1 to 4. Additionally, it explores the influence of disabilities on situational speech act performance during English classroom interactions, covered by items 5 to 8. Furthermore, the research investigates challenges associated with presenting abstract material directly to students, particularly those with limited English proficiency, as indicated by items 9 to 12. The Teacher's questionnaire is summarized in the Table 1.

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Variable measure	Items
Effect of the lack of conversational norms of Speech act inside or outside the classroom of EFL students	1-4
The influence of disability of EFL learners in performing situational speech acts during their English classroom.	5- 8
The difficulties involved in directly presenting such abstract material to students, some of whom may have limited proficiency in English.	9-12

Participants

The participants of the study were recruited from secondary school teachers in Al-Manaqil Locality. Sixty-teachers were chosen randomly from different schools at Al-Manaqil Locality. All the teachers spent between 5 to 20 years teaching the English language at secondary schools. Table 2 illustrates the distribution of gender among a sample of 60 individuals. Among these, 18 participants identified as male, constituting 30% of the total sample, while 42 participants identified as female, making up 70% of the sample. This indicates a notable gender imbalance within the sample, with a higher representation of females compared to males. Such a gender distribution could potentially influence various aspects of the study or research being conducted, as gender may play a role in shaping perspectives, experiences, and responses to certain questions or topics. Therefore, it is essential for researchers to consider and account for such demographic differences when analyzing and interpreting the data obtained from their studies.

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE ACCORDING TO THE GENDER

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	18	30%
Female	42	70%
Total	60	100%

Validity and reliability

The researcher ensured that the questions and responses within the questionnaire were meticulously crafted with deliberate intentionality, flexibility, and a clear alignment with the research objectives. Additionally, there was a conscious openness to diverse methodologies to elicit varied responses effectively. Validation of the questionnaire was conducted by a panel comprising three assistant professors proficient in the English language. Their evaluation criteria encompassed assessing the clarity of statements, items, and instructions, as well as the ease of use and relevance of the objects to the research topic. They also scrutinized the wording employed throughout the questionnaire. Furthermore, particular attention was paid to tailoring options to suit the sample, fostering an environment conducive to attentive listening to policymakers' advice and facilitating the elicitation of insightful responses.

The study utilized the split-half method to evaluate the reliability of the test, a common approach in statistics to assess the consistency of measurements. In this method, the test is divided into two parts, and the results of each part are compared. Ten teachers responded to the questionnaire, and the correlation was computed using the coefficient correlation formula. This method helps gauge the extent to which the test produces consistent results over different administrations, providing insights into its reliability and effectiveness in measuring the intended constructs.

$$r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

According to the analysis, there was a significant positive correlation between the responses provided to the following questions:

PsQ = 067%. The questionnaire was distributed to the sample of the study, and then it was given enough time to respond and fill out the questionnaire.

IV. RESULTS

The teacher's questionnaire, which consists of 12 items split into three sections, covers a variety of topics that aid in examining the impact of not fully grasping the conversational norms required in the production of speech acts.

RQ1: To what extent does the lack of conversational norms regarding speech acts impact Sudanese EFL students, both within and outside the classroom?

TABLE 3
THE LACK OF CONVERSATIONAL NORMS CAUSES THE WEAKNESS OF THE SPEECH ACT FOR EFL LEARNERS

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The lack of conversational norms causes the weakness of the speech act for EFL learners.	83.3	13.3	3.3	0	0
The awareness of conversational norms helps EFL learners to be more active in speech acts.	57.	36.4	5	1.6	0
It is very necessary for EFL learners to be familiar with the principles of conversational norms.	78.4	18.4.	1.6	1.6	0
Teachers must encourage EFL learners to acquire the norms of conversation to be more active in the classroom.	75	23.4	1.6	0	0
Average	73.42	24.36	2.87	0.8	0

As seen in Table 3, with an average of 73.42% the participants strongly agree about the impact of lack of conversation norms on students inside and outside the classroom. Table 3 indicates that (50) (83.3 %) of the sample strongly that the lack of conversational norms causes the weakness of the speech act for EFL learners, while 8(13.3%) agree that the lack of conversational norms causes the weakness of the speech act for EFL learners, and 2(3.3%) with the lack of conversational norms causes the weakness of the speech act for EFL learners.

Based on the information in Table 3, 34 (57. %) strongly agree that the awareness of conversational norms helps EFL learners to be more active in speech acts. While 22(36.4. %) agree with the awareness of conversational norms helps EFL learners to be more active in speech acts, and 3(5. %) not sure that the awareness of conversational norms helps EFL learners to be more active in speech acts. And 1(1.6%) disagree with the awareness of conversational norms helps EFL learners to be more active in speech acts.

Table 3 showed that, 47 (78.4. %) of the sample strongly agree with that It is very necessary for EFL learners to be familiar with the principles of conversational norms, while 11(18.4. %) agree that it is very necessary for EFL learners to be familiar with the principles of conversational norms, however one of the samples not sure about that and one is disagreed with It is very necessary for EFL learners to be familiar with the principles of conversational norms.

Based on the information in Table 3, 45 (75 %) from the sample of the study were strongly agree that Teachers must encourage EFL learners to acquire the norms of conversation to be more active in the classroom, 14(23.4.) of the teachers were agree with above statement, while one the sample is not sure that Teachers must encourage EFL learners to acquire the norms of conversation to be more active in the classroom.

TABLE 4
THE INFLUENCE OF DISABILITY OF EFL LEARNERS IN PERFORMING SITUATIONAL SPEECH ACTS

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Conversational disability of EFL learners leads to a boring classroom	88.5	6.7.	3.2	1.6	0
EFL Learners conversational disability may affect in their collection levels	93.4	5.0	1.6	0	0
Participating EFL learners in situational speech encourage the teachers to renew the discussion's issues during the classes	91.8	5	3.2	0	0
It is very necessary for EFL learners to be very active in performing situational speech acts.	93.4	5	1.6	0	0
Average	91.77	5	2.4	0.4	0

With a total average of 91.77% of the participants strongly agreed on the role of disability of EFL learners in performing situational speech acts. Based on the information in the Table 4, 53 (88.5 %) of the sample of the study strongly agree with that) conversational Disability of EFL learners leads to a boring classroom, whereas 4 (6.7.%) agreed with the above statement, 2 (3.2%) of the sample of the study were not sure that conversational Disability of EFL learners leads to a boring classroom, while 1 (1.6%) disagreed with that conversational Disability of EFL learners leads to a boring classroom. Table 4 shows that, 56 (93.4 %) of the study sample strongly agree that EFL Learners' conversational disability may affect in their collection levels, and 3 (5.0%) of teachers agreed that EFL Learners' conversational disability may affect in their collection levels, while one member of the targeted sample was not sure about that the unable conversational of the EFL learners may have an effect on their outcome.

Based on Table 4, 55 (91.8 %) of the study sample strongly agree that Participating of EFL learners in situational speech encourages the teachers to renew the discussion's issues during the classes, whereas 3 (5.0%) agree, and 2 (3.2%) were not sure that participating of EFL learners in situational speech encourages the teachers to renew the discussion's issues during the classes.

According to the information in Table 4, 56 (93.4 %) of the study sample emphasized that EFL learners must be very active in performing situational speech acts, while 3 (5.0%) agreed with the same questionnaire statement, and 1(1.6%). I was not sure about that.

TABLE 5
THE WEAKNESS IN PRONUNCIATION LEADS TO NON-PRODUCTIVE EFL LEARNERS IN THE CLASSROOM

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The weakness in pronunciation leads to non-productive EFL learners in the classroom.	85.2	10.0	1.6	3.2	0
Acquiring the basic rules of English grammar represents the core of performing speech acts for EFL learners.	68.2	10	1.6	3.2	17
Avoiding using oral tasks, activities, and dialogues inside the classroom contributes to non-active EFL learners.	95	3.3	1.7	0	0
The shyness of EFL learners leads to non-performing Speech acts for EFL learners inside the classroom.	90	5	5	0	0
Average	84.6	7.07	2.47	1.6	4.25

With a total of 84.6% of the participants strongly agreed that the weakness in pronunciation leads to non-productive EFL learners in the classroom. Based on the results in the Table 5, 51 (85.2 %) of the targeted sample strongly agree that the weakness in pronunciation leads to non-productive EFL learners in the classroom, and 6(10.0%) of the sample agree with this statement, while 1(1.6%) was not sure about that and 2(3.2%) were disagree that the weakness in pronunciation leads to non-productive EFL learners in the classroom.

Table 5 also indicated that 41 (68.2 %) of the sample of the study strongly agree that, Acquiring the basic rules of English grammar represents the core of performing speech acts for EFL learners, and 6(10.0%) agreed while 2(3.2%) of the sample were disagree that, the necessity of knowing the basic of grammar represents the core of performing speech acts for EFL learners, and about 10(17%) of the sample strongly disagree that, acquiring the basic rules of English grammar represents the core of performing speech acts for EFL learners.

According to the results in Table 5, 57 (95 %) of the study sample of the study were strongly agree that avoiding using oral tasks, activities and dialogues inside the classroom contributes to non-active EFL learners, while, 2(3.3%) agreed with this statement, and 1(1.7%) marked as not sure that, avoiding using oral tasks, activities and dialogues inside the classroom contribute to non- active EFL learners.

Table 5 showed that 54 (90 %) of the targeted sample strongly agreed with the statement that the shyness of EFL learners leads to non-performing Speech acts for EFL learners inside the classroom, and 3(5%) agreed and not sure consequently.

V. DISCUSSION

Results showed that the lacking conversational norms of speech act inside or outside the classroom of EFL students. The sample of the study assured that the lack of conversational norms causes the weakness of the speech act for EFL learners. As well as the awareness of conversational norms helps EFL learners to be more active in speech acts, so the levels of fluency may rise up due to these activities, furthermore, EFL learners must be familiar with the principles of conversational norms to interact with native speakers of the target language easily and professionally, besides to Teachers must encourage EFL learners to acquire the norms of conversation to be more active in the classroom, which enables EFL learner to acquire the basis of conversational norms that assist them to communicate with others. These results agreed with Meznah (2018) who highlights the occurrence of negative pragmatic transfer among L2 learners when they mistakenly apply their pragmatic knowledge from L1 to L2 contexts. Furthermore, Taguchi (2013) affirmed that speech acts entail syntactic forms and strategies taught alongside contextual factors determining their indirectness and politeness. Even just carrying on a conversation in English, as Gallo (2014) notes, calls for a certain level of

understanding to underpin replies that encourage a speaker to go on, demonstrate comprehension, offer support, express agreement, elicit a strong emotional response, supplement, or correct the speaker's information, or request more details. Hussein and Albakri (2019) also affirmed that Iraqi students lack the utilization of speech acts of request among English as foreign language students in Arab countries, emphasizing the need for effective teaching methods to improve learners' pragmatic abilities.

The study reported that the disability of EFL learners has an impact in performing situational speech acts during their English classroom. The majority of the study sample emphasized that: the conversational disability of EFL learners leads to a boring classroom, as well as EFL learners conversational disability may affect in their collection levels more over EFL learners conversational disability may affect in their collection levels, furthermore Participating of EFL learners in situational speech encourages the teachers to renew the discussion's issues during the classes also EFL learners must be very active in performing situational speech acts. Results are confirmed by Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006), Taleghani-Nikazm (2006), Koike and Pearson (2005), and Takimoto (2008). For example, Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) mentioned that pragmatic competence involves recognizing the specific speech acts performed through language use. Furthermore, it is agreed upon that effective language use entails identifying the actions conveyed through utterances. Thus, in FL/L2 classrooms, teaching appropriate pragmatic realization patterns of speech acts is crucial (Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Takimoto, 2008). This ensures that during the teaching speech act, the teacher will discuss the students' expectations, perceptions, and awareness of the parallels and discrepancies between speech act behavior in English and their native tongue. It will also be the teacher's responsibility to explain things to the students as needed and assist them in identifying areas of negative transfer where communication breakdowns could happen. At a higher level, asking students to continue talking will be a helpful exercise. The teacher will need to get some slips of paper ready with a scenario that calls for the students to respond with a speech act. You can use this activity to go over every speech act that the teacher gave you in a special list when you first started teaching.

Finally, the study reported that among the difficulties involved in directly presenting such abstract material to pupils, some of whom may not speak English well, most of the targeted teachers agreed that, the weakness in pronunciation leads to non-productive EFL learners in the classroom as well as acquiring the basic rules of English grammar represents the core of performing speech acts for EFL learners, more over avoiding using oral tasks, activities and dialogues inside the classroom contribute to non- active EFL learners, in addition to the shyness of EFL learners leads to non- performing speech acts for EFL learners inside the classroom, have great influence in the activities which performed by EFL Learners inside and outside English language classroom. These findings agreed with Koike and Pearson (2005) who emphasize the efficacy of explicit or implicit instruction in helping ELLs understand pragmatic norms and improve speech act performance in contextual dialogue. Notably, speech acts remain the most extensively researched aspect of pragmatics, drawing significant attention in studies focusing on FL/L2 learners' development.

VI. CONCLUSION

For non-native speakers, speech acts and conversational norms present a practical challenge. Teachers' job in the process of helping their students learn speech acts is to gather data on the way native speakers carry out specific speech acts. You can find this information in certain textbooks. If there is a deficiency of this kind of information, one legitimate way to fill it in is to watch speech acts in their natural setting. EFL instructors should make it clear to their students how important it is to have good speaking abilities in EFL in general and speech act production in particular. They should also highlight how crucial it is to learn conversational conventions so that you can use the English language in a variety of contexts.

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