

CULTURAL VALUES UNDERLYING SPEECH ACT OF INVITING: THE CASE OF IRAQI EFL SPEAKERS

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to describe and analyze the realization patterns of the speech act of inviting. The study also attempts to detect causes for potential differences of the speech act realization strategies during conversations such as Linguistic or pragmatic aspects, cultural values or social parameters. Furthermore, the study aims to highlight some cultural values underlying invitations. In the study, one-to-one correspondence is unattainable between the speech acts of inviting, across English and Arabic. In this context, the same speech acts can be loaded with dissimilar illocutionary force and cultural values across languages. Finally, divergence in politeness features and social parameters leads to divergent speech act strategies across the relevant cultures and languages.

Keyword: Inviting, speech act, English, language, Foreigner learners.

Introduction

Speech act theory (SAT), has been known as one of the core issues of modern pragmatics, since it was clearly initiated, particularly by the Oxford philosopher, Austin (1962) and expanded by his student Searle (1970) and other scholars. The speech acts of any language provide its speakers with a readymade "catalogue" of culture-specific categories of verbal interaction, a catalogue that makes sense within, and is attuned to, a particular portfolio of cultural values, assumptions, and attitudes. Speech acts can shed a great deal of light on broader cultural themes, but equally the significance of any particular speech act category can only be fully understood in broader cultural context.

Speech Acts of Invitation

The major contribution of the speech act theory is in drawing attention to the different illocutionary forces

between direct and indirect speech acts. Speech acts (Searle, 1975) can be performed either directly where "the speaker utters a sentence and means exactly and literally what he says" (Searle 1979: 30) or in various indirect ways. It is argued that the appropriateness of this choice is affected by the process of face management and the relative status of the speaker, and the choice of how to perform speech acts will encode social information. Searle (1975: 60-61) says that in indirect speech acts "the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic, together with the rational powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer". In indirect speech acts, what speaker means is different from what s/he actually says. They do not contain performative verbs and sentence type is used in an atypical way (e.g. declarative sentence used to ask a question). The felicity conditions might be violated for literal meaning of sentence, but will not be violated for intended meaning (e.g. Can you take out the garbage? -S knows H is capable?). His normal response is either literal meaning or non-literal meaning. If latter, it's an indirect speech act.

The link between indirectness and politeness is further supported by Searle's observation that "politeness is the most prominent motivation for indirectness (1975: 76). Leech (1983) contends that indirect illocutions are more polite than the direct, because the former can offer more options for the addressee. A polite utterance is likely to be seen as minimizing the addressee's costs and maximizing his/her benefits, and the opposite is true for the addresser. The addresser is thus often confronted with negative face and has to address it by applying Leech's (1983) principles, in which indirectness is the dominant strategy to gain politeness. Leech suggested that it is possible to increase the degree of politeness by using more indirect illocutions: "(a) because they increase the degree of optionality, and (b) because the more indirect an illocution is, the more

diminished and tentative its force tends to be" (1983: 131-132). As Leech (*ibid*) and Thomas (1995) note, indirectness increases the degree of optionality and negotiability on the part of hearer and thereby reduces the imposition on the hearer. As a number of cross-cultural pragmatic studies on politeness point out, the application of this principle differs systematically across cultures and languages.

According to Blum-Kulka (1989: 42), indirectness is either conventional centred on conventions of language including propositional content (literal meaning) and pragmalinguistic form used to signal an illocutionary force, or nonconventional which relies heavily on the context and tends to be "open ended, both in terms of propositional content and linguistic form as well as pragmatic force".

Consider an indirect invitation made by way of asking, "Can you come?" The hearer can accept (or refuse) that indirect invitation by answering "Yes" (or "No") to the literal question. The literal speech act is only a means to performing the indirect speech act. The first is generating and the second is generated. Thus, whenever the hearer accepts the previous indirect invitation he gives a positive implicit answer to the literal question. The indirect speech act is usually more important than the literal one. It is indeed the primary speech act of utterance. When a speaker indirectly invites the hearer by asking a question, he wants much more an answer to his invitation than to his literal question (cf. Vanderveken, 1997). Thus, in order to minimize the threat and to avoid the risk of losing face, there is a preference for indirectness on the part of the speaker to smooth the conversational interaction (cf. Felix-Brasdefer, 2005). For example, English makes use of a number of indirect structures to express the act of invitation, including the following: "Will you come to the picnic?" (Hearer's willingness ... "Can you come to the picnic?" (Hearer's ability); would you (like to) come to the picnic?" (Hypothetical, slightly politer) "Could you come to the picnic?" (Hypothetical slightly politer). Arabic, however, makes frequent use of imperative and declarative structures to realize politeness in such situations. The expressions are used to achieve a greater degree of politeness. Questions about the hearer's willingness and ability relatively make weaker invitations in Arabic than English and French. Accordingly, the translator should take into consideration the degree of indirectness exploited by the source and target languages in similar situations in

order to perform an equivalent sense of politeness (cf. Aziz and Lataiwish, 2000) (for more details on the use of direct and indirect speech acts in conversation, see Grice (1975), Cohen and Perrault (1979), and Allen and Perrault (1980).

Cultural Values and Speech Act of Inviting

Inviting as a speech act usually reflects positive politeness. Although, this speech act may be used as a threat to the participants' public self-image or their face wants. The multifunctional use of the invitation has an effect on the communicative strategies used in the interaction, Some of these strategies are concerned with the one's positive face, as in the case of imperatives and others to the one's negative face, showing deference, as basically in interrogative utterances, Most of these strategies attempt to respect the face wants of those taking part in social interaction (Ruiz de Zarobe, 2000).

The act of inviting can be defined as an attempt to get the addressee to attend or participate in a given event or carry out an action, which is supposed beneficial to him/her. The speaker is bound to a potential future action, which involves allowing or facilitating the state of affairs in which the addressee will carry out the action expressed in the invitation (if one invites someone to a party, one will then have to allow that person to take part in it). The speaker is both suggesting the hearer consider the merits of some action and, at the same time, promising that the speaker will approve of the action should the hearer perform it, "Would you be free in coming to our party this weekend?" ; "Come in, please, come in and share our meal", they invited. Moreover, societal norms as well as the grammatical structure of the language form the invitation speech act.

Characteristics of the Speech Act of Inviting

In general, invitations are basically assigned either to the directive or the commissive category of the illocutionary taxonomy (Austin 1962; Searle 1979). Searle (1979: 11-12) assigns the same direction of fit (world-to-words) to both commissives and directives, noting that classifying speech acts would be simpler if they were really members of the same category (e.g. promises could be requests to oneself). Searle (1979: 17) establishes such rigid types of illocutionary categories that they are unable to accommodate hybrid illocutions (e.g. threatening!', inviting, offering', warning, or advising without problems. Hancher (1979: 6) is aware of the drawback in Searle's

illocutionary taxonomy. He observes that certain speech act types, like threats, invitations or offers, have been forced into the mould of certain illocutionary categories-directive or commissive to which they do not fully belong. In order to overcome this weakness of Searle's classification, Hancher (1979) posits the existence of a new sui generis hybrid category of commissive-directives. Bach and Harnish (1979) as does Hancher (1979) claim that they have a hybrid nature and suggest that they should be thought of as belonging to a new commissive-directive category. Moreover, they argue that they include features of both illocutions equally; neither force dominates (Hancher, 1979: 6, see also Leech's suggestion that directives and commissives be merged into a "superclass, 1983: 206).

Although Searle (1979: 11) and Leech (1983: 217) view invitations as directives, they may also be analysed as both offer and request (cf. Hussein, 1984). If someone is invited to a party at a host's house, simultaneously the latter is offering him/her access to all event of which the inviter is the sponsor and requesting access to the invitee's company at a future time (cf. Schiffrin, 1981: 239-40; 1994: 73). In invitations, as in offers, the speaker is the central doer of the action. He/she has no power or authority to ensure compliance. Nevertheless, it is still polite for the speaker to be insistent where the addressee is the beneficiary of the action. This would imply that the addressee seems to be reluctant to accept the performance of the action, yet the speaker is ready to do an action for his good effect. Tsui (1994) regards invitations and offers as a type of requestive act. The illocutionary verb "invite" can be semantically analysed as shown in the following table:

Table (1): Semantic analysis of the illocutionary verb "Invite" modified after Leech (1983).

Category	Directive /Commissive
[X* is the event described in the propositional content]	Invite
Does X follow the speech act?	Yes
Is S* or H* involved in X*?	S/H*
If X* follows the speech act, is it conditional or unconditional?	conditional
Is X* Cost/Benefit to S* or H*?	Benefit to H and Cost/Benefit S*
What attitude is implicated?	Willingness (for H*) to do X*

* Whereas X; subject, H; hearer, S; speaker,

The illocutionary act of inviting can be further semantically described and characterized in the form of the following propositional idealized cognitive models:

- (1) Agent Type: the person who performs the action expressed in the predication can be the speaker, the addressee, and/or a third party.
- (2) Time of Action: the action presented in the predication can take place in the past, present, or future time.
- (3) Degree of Speaker's Will: degree to which the speaker wishes the state of affairs expressed in the predication to take place.
- (4) Degree of Addressee's Will: degree to which the addressee wishes the state of affairs expressed in the predication to take place.
- (5) Degree of Cost-benefit: degree to which the realization of the state of affairs expressed in the predication represents something positive (i.e. benefit) or something negative (i.e. cost) for the speaker, the addressee, and/or a third person.
- (6) Degree of Optionality: degree to which the person who is to materialise the state of affairs expressed in the predication is free to decide upon his subsequent course of action.
- (7) Degree of Mitigation: degree to which the force of the speech act is softened.
- (8) Degree of Power: the relative position of the speaker and the addressee in a hierarchy of authority.
- (9) Degree of Social Distance: the relative position of the participants in a continuum of intimacy.

In short, the fact that the act of inviting (1) presents the addressee as the agent of a future action, (2) involves a future benefit for the addressee, and (3) involves the speaker's cooperation in performing the future action, explains its mixed commissive-directive nature. (For further details on these cognitive models and how they are related to the speech act of inviting and other illocutionary acts, see, Verschueren, (1985) Lakoff: 1987, Wierzbicka, 1987; Risselada, 1993; Hernandez, 2001).

Felicity Conditions for the Speech Act of Inviting

To invite is to request someone to become party to something, perhaps a group or a process, and this is a propositional content condition. Generally speaking, there is a preparatory condition to the effect that it is something the hearer will be happy about and that is perceived to be good for him. There is an option of refusal in this mode of achievement. Broadly, the felicity conditions of the speech act of inviting can be set as follows:

1. Propositional Content Condition:

- a. S expresses the proposition of suggesting in his/her utterance.
- b. S predicates a future act A of Sand/or H on condition that H accepts A.

2. Preparatory Conditions:

- a. H may accept or turn down A.
- b. S assumes H is willing that A be done.

3. Sincerity Condition:

- a. S thinks he/she has the H's permission to do A.
- b. S desires A to be done.

4. Essential Condition: S intends to make H recognise that his/her utterance counts as a desire that A be done.

Accordingly, a set of semantic rules (SRs) can be devised for the speech act of inviting as follows:

1. Propositional Content Rule: The proposition of inviting is to be uttered in the context of a sentence, the utterance of which predicates some future A by S and /H.

2. Preparatory Rules: The proposition of inviting is to be uttered iff S assumes that H is willing that A be done.

3. Sincerity Rule: The proposition of inviting is to be uttered iff S desires A be done.

4. Essential Rule: The proposition of inviting is considered a desire that A be done.

However, the set felicity conditions and semantic rules above cannot be strictly prescribed for all languages, if considering cross-cultural differences of speech acts (cf

Searle (1979), Bach and Harnish (1979), Allan (1986, 1998) and Al-Sha'baan (1999).

Text Analysis

Invitations are performed by using various linguistic constructions; imperative is one of these constructions.

E.g. *let's have tea*. The grammatical criteria of this speech act are as the following;

1. Mood ; Imperative
2. Agent; 2nd person singular (implicit)
3. Subject; 2nd person singular (explicit)
4. Tense ; present
5. Voice ; Active
6. The type of speech ; Direct

- Example 1;

Take this pen (Active)

Iron my shirt. Let +O +be +PP

Suggestion

Let my shirt be ironed (passive)

Mood; Imperative

Agent: 2nd person singular (Implicit)

Subject; Third person singular (explicit)

Tense; present

Voice; passive direct

- Example 2;

Would you be free to.....

Would you like to

a picnic?

Could you

} Join us for

Mood; Interrogative

Agent; 2nd

Subject; 2nd

Tense; Past

Voice; Active

Type of speech act; Direct

Example 3;

I invite you to have dinner with me

Mood; Indicative/ declarative.

Agent; 2nd person singular (implicit)

Subject; 2nd person singular (explicit)

Tense; Present

Voice; Active

Type of speech act; Direct

-Example 4; be +p.p

You are invited to have dinner

Mood; Indicative / declarative

Agent; 2nd person singular (implicit)
Subject; 2nd person singular (implicit)
Tense; Present
Voice; passive
Type of speech act; Direct

FINDINGS

The data analysis of this study reveals the following findings:

- a. Despite outward similarity, the speech acts imply the cultural values, politeness features, social context, and degree of strength and illocutionary point.
- b. The speech acts of inviting, can be used interchangeably, an invitation can be expressed via a suggestion formula - e.g. Thank you (or thanks) for the meal.
- c. In some cases incorrect illocutionary force was assigned to the Arabic speech acts of inviting, suggesting and thanking.
- d. Regarding politeness, significant differences were found between English and Arabic in the level and in the degree of directness, tentativeness, and formality of the language through choice of address forms, utterance lengths, use of supportive moves, appearance of down-graders, and other features.
- e. In English culture, directness may not imply affiliation, sincerity, straightforwardness and cordiality rather than imposition on people's freedom of action, these values with lesser degree relatively, making it hold a position between English and Arabic.

Concluding Remarks

1. No special power relationship between the speakers is needed in order to perform an invitation. We can invite people to do something whether they are above or below us in a hierarchy of power.
2. The speech acts of inviting have common social relevance.
3. Common strategies used in expressing invitations can be sorted out through context and other indicators.

4. Invitation can be recognized in the formal realization of imperatives, interrogative and indicative frequently uses an imperative construction while intending-to conveys a polite invitation using some forms of invocation or good wish for the addressee.
5. Some semantic formulae are conventionally used for performing both acts of inviting.
6. The appropriate use of speech acts, like inviting, or even just extending thanks, can have an impact on obtaining the desired results in social situations across cultures.
7. English and Arabic are more different in the formulae used to perform the acts of inviting. Likewise, the content of these formulae and the rules of their use frequently reflect the beliefs of their users and the particular values of their culture.
8. Directness in Arabic culture can be linked with positive cultural values, like closeness, affiliation, sincerity, straightforwardness and cordiality rather than imposition on people's freedom of action.
9. The available universals of various cultures require to be recognized. This will achieve smooth communication, well accounting for the increasing interest in speech acts and politeness studies, especially in this age that needs cultural understanding and rapprochement.

Conclusion

The study attempted to provide a detailed analysis of the speech act of invitation grounded on the Theory of Speech Acts which was introduced by Austin (1962) and was later developed by his successor Searle (1969) to understand the way utterances are and should be understood in pragmatic context. It was concluded from the paper speakers of the two languages of Arabic and English differ in the way they make invitations. This difference is due to the cultural differences between the two language groups. Furthermore, other cultural aspects come into play while making invitations among Iraqi EFL speakers; such as politeness and also the Arabic and Islamic traditions and teachings. For example, Iraqi speakers use imperatives to express inviting strategies and this is regarded as a politeness strategy to invite others. The study recommended that further research should be conducted on other speech acts in which cultural differences are recognized and explored.

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