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The Use of Thanking Speech Act Strategies in English Realized by Kurdish EFL Learners at Soran University

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the most frequently-used thanking strategies by Kurdish EFL learners. This study attempted to examine the most frequently- used thanking strategies in Kurdish language. DCT represents various scenarios where the participants are asked to write down the terms they use to thank others. The participants involve people from different stages of language proficiency. The analysis of data based on Cheng's (2005) taxonomy of 8 strategies to express gratitude. The study involved fourteen Kurdish EFL learners of English language at Soran University. All of them were randomly selected with regard to their age and gender. The results showed that 'thanking, state of favor, appreciation' were the most common used strategies among males and females Kurdish EFL participants.

Keywords: Thanking, Thanking Strategies, Speech Act, Kurdish EFL Learners

Introduction

Expressions of gratitude are closely linked to the notion of verbal politeness. A speech act in linguistics and the philosophy of language is an utterance that has performative function in language and communication. Because the current study examines the speech act of thanking, it would appear to be vitally important first to familiarize the theory of speech act. One of the most important studies that have contributed to evolving the speech act theory was conducted by Austin in a number of lectures that were published in a book entitled "How to Do Things with Words" (1962). Through this book, Austin classifies speech acts on three levels: "locutionary", "illocutionary", and "perlocutionary acts" (1962, p. 94, 98, 99).

According to Austin, a speaker using an illocutionary act impacts the hearer. He states that "saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons..." (1962, p. 101). And so, he states that speech acts could be expressed directly or indirectly (1962, p.32).

Many studies have been done on the speech act of thanking. Some studies investigate the strategies used by interlocutors in different languages, while other research has put more focus on analyzing speech acts of

thanking with reference to their functions and forms. Other studies investigate the influence of “pragmatic transfer” on EFL/ESL learners’ performance of speech acts of thanking. According to several scholars, the speech act of thanking is a universal illocution across languages and cultures. (Coulmas, 1981; Aijmer, 1996; & Schneider, 2005). Additionally, gratitude expressions are utilized “when a speaker wants the addressee to know that s/he is grateful for what the addressee has said or done” Jautz (2008, p 142). Holmes (1986: 346) makes a remarkable distinction between negatively affective speech which can be diminished, and positively affective speech which can be enhanced. An enhanced thanking, *thank you very much*, is possible, whereas a diminished thanking, **thank you a little*, seems odd. The expression *thank you* is, therefore, a positively affective speech act.

According to Eisenstein and Bodman (1995), expressing gratitude can “engender feelings of warmth and solidarity among interlocutors” (1995, p.64). Jung (1994, p.20) goes further in his research paper associated with speech acts of thanking that gratitude expression has the “effect of enhancing rapport between the interlocutors.”

Literature Review

It is of particular interest to consider ways where the meaning of an utterance in terms of objective of speaker is delivered. In this sense, the term of speech act can be utilized as a reference to ‘actions such as “requesting”, “questioning” or “informing.”’ we can define a speech act as an action performed by a speaker with an utterance’ (Yule 2014: 131). Such a speech can be delivered directly or indirectly. In the majority of cultures, asking people to perform an action directly seem to be labeled as face-threatening act. This is likely due to the fact that it indicates having the social power of such dominant people over others (ibid). Consequently, utilizing the indirect speech act eliminates the hypothesis of social power.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) labeled face as the ‘public self-image’ that each participant willing to argue for himself. Additionally, the two kinds of face – negative and positive faces can act differently. Negative face is the necessity to be autonomous and free from annoyance, whereas, the positive face is essential to be linked, appropriate, and to be a member of the team. Yule (2014) further explains the face as below:

A face-saving act that emphasizes a person's negative face will show concern about imposition (I'm sorry to bother you...I know you are busy, but...). A face-saving act that emphasizes a person's positive face will show solidarity and draw attention to common goal (Let's do this together...; you and I have the same problem. (Yule, 2014: 133).

Likewise, speech act has been utilized and expressed by different scholars in various ways. Yusefi et al. (2015: 211) claimed that showing appreciation and thanking seems to be one of the most frequently used speech act and key tools which reinforces the connections between the members of a general public. Correspondingly, thanking can be regarded as a speech act whose interpretation has been on the basis of the manner where it is conducted, and its correlation with other speech acts within identical language (Aijmer, 1996; Kumatoridani, 1999). Similarly, on the basis of the context, they are used the way of expressing speech act forms, including thanking, varies from one culture to another one. Okamoto and Robinson (1997) claim that British thank you is commonly employed while communication with high-status speakers. Likewise, according to Mey (1998), several linguistic behaviors, including expressing thanks, demanding, and making an apology are likely to be concerned with identical circumstances in similar manners across cultures. Likewise, Grant and Gino (2010) claim that expressing gratitude can be omnipresent within human public life; A great number of cultures show thankfulness appropriately which has significant societal value, which can be present in the ‘positive face’ of the supporter. Nevertheless, the manner that thankfulness is communicated can mostly be decided by ‘socio-cultural values’ and bonds leading every culture (as cited in Yusefi et al., 2015). Nonetheless, while some forms of speech act between bilingualism such as English and Kurdish are discussed, certain issues may emerge. This is because, every culture has its own expressions, for instance, in Kurdish culture one of the offer responses for any kind of drinking such as drinking a cup of tea might be ‘dest khosh’ literally means ‘good hand.’ However, it could be meant ‘well done’ in English as a target language, which may display a kind of thankfulness to the person who offers the drinking. As a result, Kurdish EFL learners are likely to challenge these difficulties as soon as they employ the speech acts that vary from their own source language in terms of social dissimilarities and

terminologies. In this sense, it is significant that communicators of a society to be familiar with the pragmatic competence of any culture. As Kamel (1993:27) has the following analysis for thanking speech act in Muslim societies:

It is the belief in Arabic societies that God is the source of all things, good and bad from a human point of view, so God or Allaah is the first to be thanked. ? Allaah. According to the Muslim belief has to be thanked for whatever happens, good as well as bad events. Thanking from this perspective can be interpreted as an expression of gratitude for past acts of the addressee, thanking also may be intended as a compliment or flattery, perhaps in the hope of receiving future favors and avoiding more of God's wrath (Ibid). Likewise, many religious terminologies are being used in the thanking speech act of Kurdish pragmatic competence stemming from Arabic, for instance, alhamdulillah (thanks are due to God). This may indicate that Arabic culture has a great impact on thanking speech act in the Kurdish language as well. On the other hand, Cheng (2005: 1) argues that saying appreciation is a speech act which can be communicated at a primary age and can be frequently implemented by native speakers of many languages. Consequently, it is widely argued that learners are highly likely effectively express thank you in the target language. Nevertheless, researches shed light on the point that even forward-thinking students may face the problem of sufficiently stating thanks. On the other hand, Searle (1969) regarded thanking as an expressive illocutionary performance. While expressing thanks, the utterer states appreciation for the listener's contribution to a past deed that was advantageous to the talker.

Wong (2010) argues that thank you, and thanks could be regarded as the most shared conducts to show appreciation in today's contemporary domain.

The practice of gratitude has several advantages. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) maintained that, showing thankfulness can assist the general public to handle worrying circumstances healthier, and to reinforce social contacts (as cited in Yusefi et al., 2015).

Once such a speech act of thanking is communicated properly, it could give rise to emotional state of warmth and cohesion among communications, sustaining and increasing social interconnection and collective relationship within the social order (Eisenstein and Bodman, 1993). On the other hand, there might be some drawbacks if the members of society are unsuccessful in expressing gratitude appropriately. As Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) believed that such disadvantages might include having bad contacts within speakers' connections, resulting in frustration, antipathy, and anger among them (as cited in Yusefi et al., 2015, p. 212).

This study will investigate thanking strategy in both Sorani and Kurmanji- Badini dialects of the Kurdish language in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRG). Despite the fact that a considerable number of researches have been conducted in many languages with regard to the speech act of thanking, no or very seldom studies have concentrated on the Badini and Sorani Speech acts of thanking. Each community has its own way of thanking, which may vary from other societies culturally and socially. As a result, it is required to be familiar with the ways of speech of thanking in both dialects in Kurdish language, so that the process of communication can be successful with less having miscomprehension.

Research questions

1. What are the most usable thanking strategies utilized by Kurdish EFL learners?
2. Does learning the English language affect Kurdish EFL learners on their use of thanking and gratitude strategies?

Methodology

Research method

This research belongs to descriptive-qualitative research because it is aimed to investigate and explain the most utilized gratitude expressions by Kurdish EFL learners.

Participants

The current study involved 14 Kurdish EFL learners of English language at Soran University. All of them were randomly selected regardless of their age and gender difference.

Instrument

The research instrument used for this study was a modified version of the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) developed by Cheng (2005). The DCT used in this study consisted of 7 different scenarios. The scenarios contained the most common situations that learners may encounter in their college life and was written in both Kurdish and English languages. The participants were asked to express their response to each described situation in the provided blank space after each of the situations.

Procedure

The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) had been conducted to elicit thanking strategy. To elicit the information, The 7 situations in the DCTs (see appendix) were adopted from the questionnaire items (14 items) summarized by Eisenstein and Bodman (1993, p. 75-76). The participants were asked to complete the DCT based on several different situations presented. They were asked to fill out the instrument and display different thanking expressions they use in Kurdish. In this study, for collecting the data, questionnaire in the form of paper was spread up to different subjects.

Data analysis

After collecting the data via DCTs, responses were categorized based on the thanking strategies scheme proposed by Cheng (2005). Thanking strategies Taxonomy by Cheng are:

1. Thanking
2. Appreciation
3. Positive feelings
4. Apology
5. Recognition of imposition
6. Repayment
7. Other expressions
8. Alerters

After collecting all the data through Discourse completion test, responses were categorized based on the thanking strategies proposed by Cheng (2005).

1. Thanking

Participants say "thank you" in the following different ways:

- a. Thanking by using "thank you" (Thanks a lot! Thank you very much!)
- b. Thanking by using "thank you" and mentioning the favor (Thank you for your help!)

2. Appreciation

- a. Thanking and using the word appreciate. (Thank you! I appreciate)
- b. Thanking and promising. (Thank you! I will do my best)

3. Positive feelings

- a. Thanking and stating the reason. (Thank you for your help!)
- b. Thanking and farewell. (Thank you! bye-bye)

4. Apology

- a. Using apologizing words. (I am sorry!)
- b. Apologizing and mentioning the favor. (I am sorry! I am sorry for being late)

- c. Thanking and compensating. (Thank you! I will do your part next time)
- d. Thanking and offering promise. (Thank you! I will do my turn next time)

5. Recognition of imposition

- a. Acknowledging the imposition. (I know that you were not allowed to give me extra time!)
- b. Stating the need for the favor (e.g., I try not to ask for extra time, but this time I need it!)

6. Repayment

- c. Offering and promising. (Next time I will treat you)
- d. Feeling indebted. (I owe you next time)

7. Other Expressions

- a. Small talk.
- b. Leave-taking. (goodbye)
- c. Joking. (next time is your turn, don't forget)

8. Alerters

- a. Titles and names(Mr, Dr, Azad, Sir)
- b. Attention getter. (really, well, Hey)

Results

In the following tables, the description of ten scenarios, participants' responses, and strategies of thanking expression of speech act sets and the discussion of the research findings are presented below.

Situation One: You board the bus, pay your money and take a seat near the front of the bus. Just before your stop, you guess that the driver is not going to stop. You move to the front, and ask the driver to stop, and he stops.

| No | Responses | Freq | Strategies |
|----|--------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Thank you, Mr. | 7 | Thanking |
| 2 | Thank you, sorry to bother you | 2 | Thanking + Apologizing |
| 3 | Would you stop on this stop, please? | 1 | Requesting + asking permission |
| 4 | Thank you, it is great. | 4 | Thanking + complimenting |

In situation one, different responses were given by the participants, mostly used is Thanking and also complimenting.

Situation Two: You work for a large company, which is usually very busy. You send your manager a request for some days off. The vice-president of personnel calls you into his office. He tells you to sit down. You feel a little nervous, because you have only been working there for six months. The vice-president says, 'You're doing a good job. In fact, we are so pleased with you that I am going to give you a raise'.

| No | Responses | Freq | Strategies |
|----|---|------|---|
| 1 | Thank you so much | 7 | Thanking with intensifiers |
| 2 | Thank you for your appreciation, it is makes me happy | 3 | Thanking +giving appreciation+ expressing delight |
| 3 | Oh, really? Thank you very much. | 1 | Expressing surprise+ thanking with intensifier |
| 4 | Thank you very much, I will do my best. | 2 | Thanking with intensifier + promising |
| 5 | Thank you very much for your attention. | 1 | Thanking with intensifier by stating the reason |

In the second situation, all the participants showed thanking strategy speech act which combined with appreciation, expressing delight, and promising.

Situation Three: In the supermarket, you ask the cashier to bag your groceries. He does this and then turns to begin serving the next customer. You pay and pick up your bags to leave.

| No | Responses | Freq | Strategies |
|----|-------------------------|------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Thank you very much | 8 | Thanking with intensifier |
| 2 | Thank you and bye | 2 | Thanking+ leave-taking |
| 3 | Thank you for your help | 4 | Thanking+ stating the reason |

In the third situation, all the participants used simple thanking expression and thanking, followed by stating the reason and leave-taking.

Situation Four: At the table in a restaurant a friend says, you have something on your face.' You ask where. Your friend tells you. You rub your face and ask, 'Is it off?' your friend says that it is.

| No | Responses | Freq | Strategies |
|----|------------------------------|------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Thank you | 9 | Thanking |
| 2 | Thank you for your attention | 2 | Thanking+ stating the reason |
| 3 | Thank you doe telling me | 2 | Thanking+ stating the reason |
| 4 | Thank you, golden man | 1 | Thanking + complimenting |

In the fourth situation, the participants expressed their thanking gratitude with stating the reason and mentioning complimenting.

Situation Five: You find yourself in sudden need of money--\$500. You mention this to a friend. Your friend immediately offers to lend it you. At first, you say, 'Oh no, I didn't mean it as a request. I couldn't take it.' Your friend says, 'Really, it's all right. What are friends for?' Your friend insists again, and you take the check.

| No | Responses | Freq | Strategies |
|----|---|------|---|
| 1 | Thank you very much. | 4 | Thanking with intensifier |
| 2 | Thank you very much. I will give it back to you soon. | 3 | Thanking with intensifier + stating repayment |
| 3 | Thank you. I will not forget you kindness. | 3 | Thanking+offering promise |
| 4 | I am really grateful for your help | 2 | Expressing deep feeling of thanking |
| 5 | Indeed, thank you, and you're my best friend | 2 | Expressing surprise+ thanking+compliment |

The fifth situation brings length thanking speech acts through generosity, kindness, and also friendship as well as offering promise and repayment. This is very common in Kurdish culture and society. Kurdish people try their best socially to return the money as soon as possible.

Situation Six: You are studying in another city. Both you and your roommate work. You come home late from work and find that your roommate has done some work around the house that you had promised to do, but had not had a chance to do.

| No | Responses | Freq | Strategies |
|----|--|------|--|
| 1 | I am very sorry. Next time I will do it for you. | 3 | Apologizing for promise breaking+ stating compensation |
| 2 | I am sorry, I made you tired | 4 | Apologizing+ expressing the state of reason |
| 3 | Thank you. You are my best friend. | 2 | Thanking+ praising |
| 4 | I am sorry, I was late, and you have done all the work that I have to do | 1 | Apologizing+ stating reason+ compliment |
| 5 | I am sorry | 1 | Apologizing |
| 6 | I am really sorry that I was late. Thank you | 1 | apologizing+ stating reason+ thanking |
| 7 | Thank you very much for doing my work | 2 | Thanking with intensifier+ stating the reason |

In situation number six, participants used apologizing speech act mostly. Expressing their terrifying sorry, followed by compensation and praising. And also, some of them used simple thanking with the state of repayment and complimenting.

Situation Seven: Your friend suggests going out to lunch. You say that you'd like to go, but you only have \$2. Your friend says. 'Ah, don't worry. I'll treat you today.' Your friend takes you to a very nice restaurant –a much more expensive one than you usually go to. You have a wonderful meal. Your friend pays, and you get up to leave.

| No | Responses | Freq | Strategies |
|----|---|------|--|
| 1 | Thank you for the lunch | 5 | thanking |
| 2 | Thank you very much for the meal | 3 | Thanking with intensifier |
| 3 | Thank you very much. Next time I will treat you. | 3 | Thanking with intensifier+ return offering |
| 4 | It is a nice day today for having this meal | 2 | Expressing delight |
| 5 | Thanking and being sorry for not having enough money to treat you | 1 | Thanking+ expressing indebtedness |

All the participants stated thanking expressions which combined with other speech acts like suffering return, expressing delight, and expressing indebtedness.

Discussion & Conclusion

The present study aimed at investigating the use of thanking strategies among Kurdish EFL learners learning English as a foreign language at Soran University. Considering the first objective of the study, the results showed that Kurdish EFL learners used thanking speech act strategies from simple thanking to length one alongside of stating the reason and the favor. These results to some extent are similar to Yasami and Rastegar (2014) which showed that Iranian EFL learners experienced the use of thanking strategies and its subcategories (thanking, thanking with intensifiers and mentioning the favor).

Due to the scenarios and situations presented to the participants, all the participants used thanking speech acts ranged from simple thanking speech acts length and more complex speech acts. Friendship, age, gender, and familiarity would be contributing factors for speakers of the English language to behave and speak in a polite language. The results of this study showed that thanking, compensation, appreciation, state of the reason, and repayment were regarded as the most frequently used strategies by Kurdish EFL learners.

There might be some limitations to the current study. As the first limitation of the results, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all Kurdish EFL learners because of the small participants of Kurdish EFL learners in this study. Secondly, the researchers used one data collection instrument with some number of

Kurdish participants. For more data and reliability, further studies are recommended through using more methods of data collection instrument.

The use of these strategies can be attributed to the Kurdish learners' cultural values and politeness. And also, learners can be aware of the gaps existing between the first mother tongue language and English either as a second language or foreign language. On this account, English language teachers can enhance their learners to be aware of socio-pragmatic differences and similarities between the source language and target language.

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Appendix: English and Kurdish translated scenarios

Instrument (DCT)

Situation One: You board the bus, pay your money and take a seat near the front of the bus. Just before your stop, you guess that the driver is not going to stop. You move to the front, and ask the driver to stop and he stops.

You would say:

حاله تی یه کهم: له پاسیک سوار دهییت، پاره کهت دهدهی و کورسیه که له پێشهوه دهگری. ساتیکی کهم پێش ئوهی دابهزیت، وا ههست دهکهیت که شوفیره که ناوهستیت، دهچته پێشهوه و داوا ی لیده کهیت بوهستیت و ئویش دهوهستیت.

تۆ دهلییت

Situation Two: You work for a large company, which is usually very busy. You send your manager a request for some days off. The vice-president of personnel calls you into his office. He tells you to sit down. You feel a little nervous, because you have only been working there for six months. The vice-president says, 'You're doing a good job. In fact, we are so pleased with you that I am going to give you a raise'.

You would say:.....

حاله تی دووهم: کار بۆ کۆمپانیایه کی گهوره دهکهیت، که هه میشه قهبالغه. تۆ نامهیه که بۆ بهرپوهره کهت دهنیری که مۆلهت بدات بۆ ماوهی چهند رۆژیک. وه دواتر جیگری بهرپوهره په یوه ندیته پێوه دهکات و داوات لیده کات بۆ ژووهره کهی، پیت دهلیت که دابنیشیت و تۆش هه ندیک قه لهقی، چونکه تۆ ماوهی شهش مانگه دهست به کار بووی لهوئ. جیگری بهرپوهره پیت دهلیت "تۆ کاریکی باش دهکهیت، ئیمه زۆر دلخۆشین که پله کهت بهرزبکهینهوه."

تۆ دهلییت

Situation Three: In the supermarket, you ask the cashier to bag your groceries. He does this and then turns to begin serving the next customer. You pay and pick up your bags to leave.

You would say:.....

حاله تی سییه م: له سوپهر مارکیتیک داوا له کاشیه ره کهی شته کانت بۆ بخاته کیسیکهوه، ئو کاره که دهکات و بۆ کریاری دووهم رووی دهگۆرئ، تۆ پاره دهدهیت و شته کانت هه لدهگری بۆ ئوهی برویت.

تۆ دهلییت

Situation Four: At the table in a restaurant a friend says, you have something on your face.' You ask where. Your friend tells you. You rub your face and ask, 'Is it off?' your friend says that it is.

You would say:.....

حاله تی چواره م: له سه ره میزیک له چیشتهخانه یه کیک له هاوری کانت دهلیت، تۆ شتی که به دم و چاوتیهوه، تۆ دهلی کوئ؟ تۆ دهمو چاوت دهسپری و دهلی لیبوویهوه ئویش دهلی بهلی.

تۆ دهلییت

Situation Five: You find yourself in sudden need of money--\$500. You mention this to a friend. Your friend immediately offers to lend it you. At first you say, 'Oh no, I didn't mean it as a request. I couldn't take it.' Your friend says, 'Really, it's all right. What are friends for?' Your friend insists again, and you take the check.

You would say:.....

حاله تی پینجه م: له نا کاو پنیوستت به ۵۰۰ دۆلار دهبیته، ئمه له لای هاوری کهت باس دهکهیت، ئویش راسته وخۆ پیت دهکات، تۆش له سه ره تا رته دهکهیتهوه، دهلی "نه خیر، ناتوانم وهریگرم." هاوری کهت دهلیت "به راستی زۆر ئاسایه ئی هاوری بۆ هاورییه" هه ره سوور دهی له سه ره تۆش وهری دهگری.

تۆ دهلییت

Situation Six: You are studying in another city. Both you and your roommate work. You come home late from work and find that your roommate has done some work around the house that you had promised to do, but had not had a chance to do.

You would say:.....

حاله تی شه شه م: تۆ له شاریکی تر ده خوینی. تۆ و هاوری کهت که له گهلت له ژووره وهیه کار ده کن. تۆ درهنگ ده گه ریته وه له کار، ده بیینی که هاوری کهت به شیکی زۆری کاره کانی کردووه که تۆ به لیت دابوو بیانکهیت.

تۆ ده لییت....

Situation Seven: Your friend suggests going out to lunch. You say that you'd like to go, but you only have \$2. Your friend says, 'Ah, don't worry. I'll treat you today.' Your friend takes you to a very nice restaurant – a much more expensive one than you usually go to. You have a wonderful meal. Your friend pays, and you get up to leave.

You would say:.....

حاله تی هه وته م: هاوری کهت پیشنیار ده کات که بچن بۆ نانی نیوه پۆ. تۆ ده لییت که تۆش هه ز ده کهیت به لام ته نهها دوو دۆلارت لایه. "نهها. نیگه ران مه به" هاوری کهت ده تباته چیشته خانه یه کی زۆر باش. به کیکی زۆر گرانتتر له وهی که تۆ زۆر به ی جار سهردانی ده کهیت. تۆ ژه میکی زۆر باش ده خویت. هاوری کهت پاره که ده دات و تۆش هه لدهستی که ئه وی جییلی. تۆ ده لییت....