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Pragmatic Performance in Focus:

The Case of Saudi Graduates Giving Advice in English

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Abstract: This mixed-method study was conducted to investigate the pragmatic performance of different groups of Saudi individuals when speaking English. More specifically, the study compared the types of strategies employed by graduates in the humanities, science, and English when giving advice in English. The study also examined the extent to which the participants varied their choices of advice-giving linguistic realizations according to their interlocutor's social status. The possible influence of gender on strategy use was also explored. A total of 212 participants took part in this research, and the data were triangulated from a variety of sources: a discourse completion task (DCT), role plays, and retrospective interviews. The data analysis revealed that the participants' linguistic competence seemed to have a significant influence on their pragmatic performance in terms of the variety of advice-giving structures available to them and their abilities to adapt their use according to the social situation. There was, however, evidence of pragmatic transfer across all groups' responses, which could be attributed to their lack of awareness of the target community's speech conventions. The study concluded with a discussion of the pedagogical implications of the findings and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: interlanguage pragmatics, pragmatic transfer, pragmatic performance, speech acts, giving advice

الأداء البراغماتي:

تقديم المشورة باللغة الإنجليزية من قبل الخريجين السعوديين

نوف الجاسر

معهد اللغة الإنجليزية || جامعة الملك عبد العزيز || جدة || المملكة العربية السعودية

الملخص: أجريت هذه الدراسة ذات المنهجية المختلطة للتحقق من الأداء البراغماتي لمجموعات مختلفة من السعوديين المتحدثين للغة الإنجليزية. وتحديدًا، قارنت الدراسة أنواع الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمها خريجو العلوم الإنسانية والعلوم واللغة الإنجليزية عند تقديم المشورة باللغة الإنجليزية. تناولت الدراسة أيضًا مدى التنوع في اختيارات المشاركين للتراكيب اللغوية وفقًا للوضع الاجتماعي لمحاورهم. كما بحثت الدراسة التأثير المحتمل لجنس المشارك على استخدام هذه الاستراتيجيات. شارك ما مجموعه 212 مشاركًا في هذا البحث، وتم جمع البيانات عبر مجموعة متنوعة من المصادر: مهمة إكمال الخطاب، ولعب الأدوار، والمقابلات الشخصية. أظهر تحليل البيانات أن الكفاءة اللغوية للمشاركين لها تأثير كبير على أدائهم البراغماتي من حيث تنوع التراكيب اللغوية عند تقديمهم للمشورة وقدرتهم على تكييف استخدامهم لها وفقًا للموقف الاجتماعي. ومع ذلك، كان هناك دليل على تأثير الأداء البراغماتي باللغة الأم في إجابات جميع المجموعات، والذي يمكن أن يُعزى إلى افتقارهم إلى الوعي بمعايير الخطاب عند المجتمع المستهدف. اختتمت الدراسة بمناقشة الآثار التربوية للنتائج وتقديم اقتراحات للأبحاث المستقبلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البراغماتية بين اللغات، النقل البراغماتي، الأداء البراغماتي، الأفعال اللفظية، تقديم المشورة.

1- Introduction

The past few years have witnessed considerable advances in the study of interlanguage pragmatic competence, and several scholars (e.g., Bardovi- Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Barron & Warga, 2007; Chang, 2011) have emphasized that more attention needs to be given to language learners' ability to produce and comprehend utterances appropriate to the target language sociocultural context. Pragmatic competence is defined as "an aspect of communicative competence [which] refers to the ability to communicate appropriately in particular contexts of use" (Jaworski, 1998, p. 249). It is regarded as a key component of communicative competence, as it facilitates the appropriate use of the speech acts needed to achieve specific communicative purposes (Esther & Martínez-Flor, 2006). Speech acts are viewed as "the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" (Searle, 1969, p. 17). Although they are universal (e.g., advice, requests, compliments, apologies, and refusals), they are also constrained by the sociocultural norms of the speech community in which they are used (Cohen, 1996). A commonly observed challenge in interlanguage pragmatics is pragmatic transfer, which refers to "the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production, and learning of L2 pragmatic information" (Kasper, 1992, p. 207). Therefore, to avoid communication breakdown, second language (L2) learners, regardless of their linguistic proficiency level, need to develop awareness of the differences between the pragmatic systems of their native language and the target language. As Roever and Al-Gahtani (2015, p. 396) caution, "greater overall proficiency gives learners a wider range of linguistic tools to use, and greater automatization in accessing vocabulary and producing grammatical utterances .... However, pragmatic performance does not improve in lockstep with linguistic proficiency."

2- Statement of the Problem

A number of speech acts, such as requests, compliments, apologies, refusals, and complaints, have been widely researched in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (e.g., Al-Shorman, 2016; Alsuhaibani, 2020; Alsulayyi, 2017; Beltran-Planques & Querol-Julian, 2018; Chang, 2010; Grossi, 2009; Han & Burgucu-Tazegül, 2016; Kreishan, 2018; Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015; Su & Ren, 2017). However, there is a paucity of research examining the speech acts of L2 speakers giving advice. Searle (1969, p. 7) classifies giving advice as a directive that is used by the speaker to suggest a possible course of action to the receiver. The complex nature of this act makes it particularly significant to investigate. As Brown and Levinson (1987) emphasize, giving advice in an L2 is a face-threatening act and thus should be adapted to the conventions of the speech community, which include aspects of the social situation, distance, and power. For instance, L2 speakers need to modify their expressions according to their interlocutor's social status, considering whether it is higher than, equal to, or lower than their own (Rose, 2000). Otherwise,

cross-cultural differences can lead to the failure to advise appropriately (e.g., by sounding like one is giving orders rather than advice), which might result in offending the interlocutor.

Due to the substantial increase in the number of Saudi individuals studying abroad since the 2005 initiation of the Saudi Scholarship Program, addressing such intercultural communication issues has become more pressing, especially since English is a foreign language in Saudi Arabia (i.e., it is not officially or widely spoken in the country). English learning programs, therefore, need to pay considerable attention to developing not only the learners' linguistic proficiency but also their pragmatic performance. The present study aimed to address these issues by conducting an in-depth investigation of the pragmatic performance of different groups of Saudi speakers of English. More specifically, the study compared the strategies employed by graduates in the humanities, science, and English when giving advice in English. The reason for selecting these three groups was to explore the influence of their previous English language study at college on the development of their pragmatic competence (see Section 5.1). The study also examined whether the participants managed to vary their strategy use according to their interlocutor's social status. Moreover, both male and female participants were invited to take part in this research in order to explore the possible influence of gender on strategy selection.

3- Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What were the most frequent strategy types employed by the different groups of participants to give advice?

2. To what extent did the participants vary their use of the strategy types according to their interlocutor's social status?

3. Did male and female participants differ in the strategy types they employed to give advice?

4- Previous Studies on the Speech Act of Giving Advice

A common tendency among earlier empirical studies on the production of speech acts by non-native speakers of English has been to either examine the differences in the performance of non-native speakers with different proficiency levels or to compare their production with that of native speakers. To the best of my knowledge, research on advice-giving by non-native speakers of English has not been undertaken in Saudi Arabia yet. However, I review here a few empirical studies on this speech act in other Arab and foreign contexts.

Al-Shboul et al. (2012) conducted a cross-cultural study to examine the possible differences in the perceptions and production of advice-giving in English between two groups consisting of 20 Americans and 38 Jordanians studying in Malaysia. A modified version of Hinkel's (1997) Multiple Choice Questionnaire was used to collect the data. It comprised eight situations that involved offering advice to interlocutors of different social statuses. The findings showed that the two groups did not differ in their

perceptions of the interlocutor's social status. Differences were, however, observed in their strategy choices. The Jordanians preferred to use direct and hedged advice with interlocutors of equal and higher status, while the Americans viewed those strategies as less appropriate. More recently, Darweesh and Al-Aadili (2017) carried out a study to investigate the strategies employed by 50 university students in Iraq to offer suggestions and advice in English. The data were collected using a discourse completion task (DCT, see Section 5.2 for definition). The results revealed that the students often used direct strategies in situations requiring the use of indirect ones, which was an obvious indication of their lack of pragmatic competence. The male participants especially seemed not to consider the social status of their interlocutors when performing the speech acts. In light of these findings, the researchers explained, "Here lies the cultural difference between Arabic and English wherein the former language prefers direct strategies, while the latter prefers indirect ones. Directness may be labelled 'rude' by English native speakers. Transforming the rules and the cultural norms of the first language to the target language results in pragmalinguistic failure" (Darweesh & Al-Aadili, 2017, p. 185).

Useful insights can also be obtained by examining the studies undertaken in different parts of the world. For example, Matsumura's (2001) study focused on changes over time in the pragmatic performance of 97 Japanese students in Canada when giving advice in English. The data were collected using a multiple-choice questionnaire consisting of 12 scenarios. The findings showed, among other things, that when offering advice to interlocutors of an equal or lower status, the students' strategies matched those of native speakers regarding the appropriate choice of direct, hedged, and indirect speech acts. In the European context, Flor (2003) investigated how 232 Spanish students of two different proficiency levels of English preferred to offer advice. The analysis of the DCT data revealed that the more advanced group produced more speech acts and used more modifying devices than the other group. The researcher also found evidence for pragmatic transfer in the speech acts produced by both groups, which led her to call for more pragmatic awareness in L2 classroom activities. A similar approach was adopted by Min (2019) to examine the possible differences between 49 Korean university students and 20 native English speakers in the ways they offered suggestions and advice in English. The data were collected using a DCT consisting of eight situations. Interestingly, the findings revealed that the most frequently used strategies of both groups to offer advice were interrogatives, followed by imperatives and declaratives.

5- Method

5.1 Participants

Snowball sampling was used to select the participants, based on the researcher's personal contacts and the participants' willingness to take part in the study. Summarizing the advantage of this method, Johnson and Christensen (2004, p. 216) point out that, "Only a few individuals might be

identified at the beginning of a research study as being appropriate, willing and able participants. Over time, however, as each new participant suggests someone else who might participate, the sample becomes larger and larger." Thus, the final sample in this study consisted of 212 Saudi college graduates (114 females and 98 males). The participants' first language was Arabic, and their ages ranged from 22 to 25, with the average 24.1. They belonged to three groups: humanities graduates (71 participants, 39 females and 32 males), science graduates (78 participants, 42 females and 36 males), and English graduates (63 participants, 33 females and 30 males). They were selected according to their discipline in order to explore the influence of their previous English language study at college on the development of their pragmatic competence. Since the humanities graduates studied all their courses (except for a few electives) in Arabic, they were expected to have basic knowledge of English. The science graduates were expected to have good knowledge of English, as it was the medium of instruction of the majority of their courses. Lastly, the English graduates were expected to possess excellent knowledge of the language. All participants signed an informed consent form and were assured that taking part would be completely anonymous and that all data would be treated confidentially and used for research purposes only.

5.2 Instruments and Data Collection

Three types of instruments were used to collect the data needed for the present study. The first was a DCT, in the form of an open-ended questionnaire consisting of 12 scenarios that required the participant to give advice to individuals of various social statuses: higher than the participant (e.g., a boss or a professor), equal to the participant (e.g., a colleague or a friend), or lower than the participant (e.g., an employee or a student). All the scenarios were designed by the researcher based on Hinkel's (1997) eight-scenario DCT; however, none of Hinkel's actual scenarios were included in this study. For one thing, the researcher preferred to provide the participants with scenarios that were more culturally relevant and situationally appropriate. In addition, the interlocutor's social status in Hinkel's (1997) DCT was either higher than or equal to that of the respondent. To provide a more complete picture of the participants' pragmatic performance when offering advice, there was a need to include interlocutors with a lower social status as well (see, for example, Matsumura, 2001). Each of the three status relationships (lower-higher, equal, and higher-lower) was randomly present in four scenarios in the DCT. Face and content validity were checked and approved by two applied linguistics specialists.

The advantage of using the DCT as a data collection method is that it can elicit responses from a large number of individuals in a relatively short period. It is also indispensable when naturally occurring data are difficult to obtain, such as the context of this study, in which English is a foreign language and thus not widely spoken in the country. Although one may argue that the data collected through a DCT may not represent those occurring in authentic communication, several researchers (e.g., Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Billmyer & Varghese, 2000; Kasper, 2000) have advocated the validity of this method.

Kasper (2000, p. 329), for instance, points out that "production questionnaires are useful to inform about speakers' pragmalinguistic knowledge of the strategies and linguistic forms by which communicative acts can be implemented, and about their sociopragmatic knowledge of the context factors under which particular strategic and linguistic choices are appropriate." DCTs have also been widely and successfully utilized in a large number of empirical studies investigating the production of speech acts by L2 speakers (e.g., Alsuhaibani, 2020; Chang, 2010; Darweesh & Al-Aadili, 2017; Flor, 2003; Kreishan, 2018; Min, 2019). The participants were instructed to read each situation in the DCT and write down what they thought was the most appropriate wording to use in a real-world conversation. The whole DCT took approximately 15—20 minutes to complete.

In order to enrich our understanding of the participants' use of advice-giving strategies, role plays were utilized as a second data collection method in this study. Approximately a month after the participants completed the DCT, 45 individuals were randomly selected (15 from each group) to participate in the role plays. They performed the role plays in audio-recorded individual sessions and were presented with the same scenarios as in the DCT (one at a time), with the researcher as their interlocutor. Role plays have been employed as a valid elicitation method in numerous studies in the fields of cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics (e.g., Han & Burgucu-Tazegül, 2016; Kreishan, 2018; Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015; Su & Ren, 2017).

Since the total number of scenarios performed in the role plays represented only 21.23% of those included in the DCT, the findings of these two instruments were not expected to yield the same percentages regarding the use of each strategy type. This is especially true since several strategy types were found to be employed by a relatively small percentage of the DCT participants. Nonetheless, role plays were utilized in this research to provide a general picture of the participants' main preferences, with the added advantage of examining their strategy use in oral discourse (as compared to the written discourse of the DCT).

Immediately after the 45 participants completed the role plays, they were invited for one-on-one retrospective interviews to answer a number of general questions about their role play responses. The interviews were unstructured and included six to ten questions intended to gain clarification about the participant's preferences for a particular type of advice in each situation. The researcher collected the data from the female participants, while a male colleague with the same qualifications (PhD in Applied Linguistics and more than ten years' experience in English language teaching) collected the data from the male participants.

5.3 Data Analysis

The analysis focused on the types and linguistic realizations of the advice-giving strategies the different groups of participants used with the different interlocutors. It was based on Hinkel's (1997)

taxonomy of advice-giving strategies into direct, hedged, and indirect. Direct advice comprised imperatives and should statements (without hedging). Only responses that included explicit hedges were considered hedged advice. Lastly, indirect advice encompassed utterances in which no explicit or hedged advice was given (Hinkel, 1997, pp. 11–12). However, since this classification encompasses only a limited number of linguistic structures, it was not sufficient to account for the large number of advice-giving structures used by the respondents in this research. This necessitated the development of a more comprehensive and elaborate classification to be utilized as a basis for categorizing and coding the responses obtained in the study. In this classification, the responses that included imperatives, performatives, and bare declaratives or declaratives with should, ought to, have to, or need to (without hedging) were coded as direct advice. The responses that contained mitigating devices such as maybe, perhaps, and I (don't) think were coded as hedged advice. Finally, the responses that included declaratives with can, could, may, and might, if conditionals, interrogatives, and implicit advice (without hedging) were coded as indirect advice (See Section 6, Results and Discussion, for more details).

Linguistic structures were used as the units of analysis of the DCT and role play responses. The total number of linguistic structures that belonged to a specific strategy type was calculated for each group of participants. After that, the differences in the occurrences of each strategy type according to the interlocutor's status and participant's gender were computed.

Subsequently, the interview data were transcribed and coded thematically using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. The themes obtained from each participant's responses were compared with those obtained from the other participants in order to identify similarities and differences among the groups. They were then used to interpret their preferences for particular types of advice-giving strategies.

6- Results and Discussion

Analysis of the DCT and role play data revealed a number of differences among the three groups of participants in the strategy types and linguistic structures they used in the different situations. The participants also differed in their ability to vary their advice strategies according to their interlocutor's social status. It should be pointed out that the participants' role play responses were not found to contain any advice linguistic formulas that had not already been identified in the DCT responses. Therefore, the role play data will be used here mainly to support the DCT findings. The following scenarios were included in the DCT and role plays of this research and thus will be used in this section to present examples of the participants' responses.

Scenario 1 (interlocutor with a lower status):

One of your students always looks exhausted in class. You have heard that s/he stays up late every night and hence does not get enough sleep.

What would you say to advise your student?

Scenario 2 (interlocutor with an equal status):

Your friend is considering changing jobs. However, you have heard that the company that s/he is thinking of moving to is facing financial issues and risks closing down at any time.

What would you say to advise your friend?

Scenario 3 (interlocutor with a higher status):

You see your boss in an electrical appliances shop. S/he is considering buying a television model that you have bought before and found to have several faults.

What would you say to advise your boss?

Humanities graduates (N = 71)

The most frequently employed advice strategies by this group were direct strategies, which comprised 88.14% of their overall strategy use. On the other hand, only small percentages of hedged and indirect strategies (7.07% and 4.69%, respectively) appeared in this group's responses. Table 1 demonstrates the linguistic realizations of the strategies the participants used in the different situations.

Table (1) Humanities Graduates' Use of Advice-Giving Strategies

Strategy	Linguistic Structure	Total Usage (N = 852)		Usage with Lower Status Interlocutors (N = 284)		Usage with Equal Status Interlocutors (N = 284)		Usage with Higher Status Interlocutors (N = 284)	
		f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Direct	Imperative	223	26.17	80	28.17	78	27.47	65	22.89
	Performative	65	7.63	19	6.69	33	11.62	13	4.58
	Bare Declarative	182	21.36	16	5.63	57	20.07	109	38.38
	Should Declarative/ Ought to Declarative	134	15.73	86	30.28	31	10.92	17	5.99
	Have to Declarative/ Need to Declarative	147	17.25	83	29.23	64	22.54	0	0
Hedged	Maybe	46	5.40	0	0	0	0	46	16.20
	Perhaps	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	I (don't) think	15	1.67	0	0	0	0	15	5.28
Indirect	Can Declarative/ Could Declarative	34	3.99	0	0	15	5.28	19	6.69
	May Declarative/ Might Declarative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	If Conditional	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Interrogative	6	0.70	0	0	6	2.11	0	0
	Implicit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The findings revealed that the participants were inclined to use imperatives and different types of declaratives when offering advice, as illustrated in the quotes below.

Scenario 1:

(1) You should go to bed early every night.

(2) You have to sleep properly at night.

Scenario 2:

(3) Don't move to that company.

(4) You need to choose another company.

Scenario 3:

(5) Try a different brand.

(6) I advise you to buy another TV.

These quotes seem to imply that due to their insufficient linguistic proficiency, the participants in this group preferred to use simple, straightforward structures that delivered their intended meaning directly. This observation supports Roever and Al-Gahtani's (2015, pp. 400–401) suggestion that low-proficiency L2 speakers "follow a 'message first' strategy … to make their intended meaning clear, although it runs the risk of sounding abrupt to interlocutors." Another possibility that could explain this group's preference for direct advice-giving strategies could be pragmatic transfer from their native language, Arabic. In contrast to English, directness in speech is regarded as a marker of helpfulness and friendliness in Arabic (Abed, 2011). Obviously, their overuse of this strategy indicates a deficiency in their English pragmatic performance. Their lack of awareness of the addressee's role in the conversation was reflected in their inability to adapt their use of the English structures in a contextually appropriate manner. As Rose (2000) urged, L2 speakers need to modify their expressions according to their interlocutor's social status, whether it is higher than, equal to, or lower than the speaker's.

Interestingly, the participants' interview responses appear to support both of the explanations above. For example, one participant commented, "I just wanted to say what was going on in my mind in the correct language." Another mentioned, "For me, the purpose of giving advice to someone is to help them do what's best for them. I didn't think much about how to say it. My goal was just to help and to show that I care." These findings are congruent with those of previous studies on Arab learners of English in second and foreign language environments (e.g., Al-Shboul et al., 2012; Darweesh & Al-Aadili, 2017). The participants' performance in the role plays also confirmed their general preference for direct advice-giving strategies, as the following quotes illustrate.

Scenario 1:

(7) You shouldn't stay up late at night.

Scenario 2:

(8) Wait until you are sure this company is good for you.

Scenario 3:

(9) My advice is to go to a different shop.

The participants' use of indirect strategies was limited to can and could declaratives and interrogatives and was observed in 7.39% of the situations that entailed offering advice to interlocutors of an equal status.

(10)   You can move to a better company.

(11)   Why don't you choose a different place?

The use of can and could declaratives emerged with a similar percentage (6.69%) when the advice was addressed to a higher-status interlocutor.

(12)   You could buy a better TV that is another brand.

It was noted, however, that the participants were more inclined to use hedged advice (mainly with maybe and I think) in more than one-fifth (21.48%) of those situations.

(13)   Maybe try a different brand.

(14)   I don't think this TV is good.

The use of these mitigating devices has an important pragmatic function of reducing the degree of assertiveness when giving advice and thereby softening the message for the recipient (Fraser, 1980). One participant, for instance, explained, "I just tried to be more polite since I was advising my boss." Another commented, "I didn't want to sound too bossy, so I felt the need to soften my tone."

Although male and female participants exhibited similar preferences regarding the use of direct and indirect advice-giving strategies, gender seemed to play a significant role in the use of hedged advice. It was found that more than two-thirds (67.21%) of the total use of this advice type was carried out by the female participants. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to examine the advice-giving linguistic realizations of the different genders; hence, this finding cannot be compared with previous literature. This gender difference was also observed in the interviewees' responses. For instance, a female participant commented, "If you want people to listen to you, you need to speak to them in a soft, unintimidating manner." In contrast, a male participant mentioned, "I respect all people, and I offer them advice based on their inherent worth. I think they are aware of that, so there's no need to embellish my talk when advising somebody."

Science graduates (N = 78)

This group's use of advice-giving structures was found to be more varied than that of the previous group, although direct strategies were still the most common type, occurring in almost half (48.93%) of the DCT responses. A summary of the linguistic realizations of the advice-giving strategies that these participants used is presented in Table 2.

Table (2) Science Graduates' Use of Advice-Giving Strategies

Strategy	Linguistic Structure	Total Usage (N = 936)		Usage with Lower Status Interlocutors (N = 312)		Usage with Equal Status Interlocutors (N = 312)		Usage with Higher Status Interlocutors (N = 312)	
		ƒ	%	ƒ	%	ƒ	%	ƒ	%
Direct	Imperative	35	3.74	22	7.05	9	2.89	4	1.28
	Performative	28	2.99	8	2.56	7	2.24	13	4.17
	Bare Declarative	25	2.67	11	3.53	5	1.60	9	2.89
	Should Declarative/ Ought to Declarative	189	20.19	94	30.13	86	27.56	9	2.89
	Have to Declarative/ Need to Declarative	181	19.34	98	31.41	77	24.68	6	1.92
Hedged	Maybe	18	1.92	0	0	0	0	18	5.77
	Perhaps	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	I (don't) think	79	8.44	0	0	0	0	79	25.32
Indirect	Can Declarative/ Could Declarative	139	14.85	36	11.54	45	14.42	58	18.59
	May Declarative/ Might Declarative	154	16.45	43	13.78	49	15.71	62	19.87
	If Conditional	37	3.95	0	0	21	6.73	16	5.13
	Interrogative	46	4.92	0	0	13	4.17	33	10.58
	Implicit	5	0.53	0	0	0	0	5	1.60

The overuse of direct strategies by a large number of the participants is considered pragmatically inappropriate and an indicator of an interlanguage behavior stemming from a lack of the needed pragmatic competence. This finding is not unexpected, as previous research on the production of advice strategies by non-native speakers (e.g., Al-Shboul et al., 2012; Darweesh & Al-Aadili, 2017; Flor, 2003; Matsumura, 2001; Min, 2019) revealed that the appropriate use of the target language in accordance with the social conventions of its speech community was challenging to the majority of the participants.

Nonetheless, the findings also revealed the presence of a variety of indirect linguistic structures in the participants' responses, as illustrated in the following quotes.

Scenario 1:

(15)   You can sleep at the same time every night.

(16)   You might set the alarm to remember when to go to bed.

Scenario 2:

(17)   If I were you, I wouldn't go to that company.

(18)   Why don't you look for another job?

Scenario 3:

(19)   Did you check the other models?

(20)   I've tried this brand before but wasn't pleased with it.

The popularity of the indirect strategies was also evident in the role plays, as the participants' performance contained a variety of linguistic structures.

Scenario 1:

(21)   You could organize your time to get enough sleep.

Scenario 2:

(22)   If I were you, I would wait till things get better.

Scenario 3:

(23)   Why don't you try another shop?

It should be pointed out that the use of if-conditionals and interrogatives for giving advice is relatively common in Arabic. Hence, compared to the humanities group, this group's increased knowledge of English could have facilitated the use of these structures when offering advice in English as well. For example, one participant commented, "I wanted to give a genuine piece of advice, so I subconsciously used the conditional sentence. This is what I always do." Another mentioned, "I know how to make good questions in both Arabic and English, and I really believe that using questions is a smart way to get my listener to accept my advice."

Similar to the humanities group, the participants in this group restricted their use of hedged advice to interlocutors of a higher status.

(24)   Maybe it isn't a good idea to buy this TV.

(25)   I don't think this is a good brand.

Those participants thus appeared to exhibit some awareness of their interlocutor's status. Another significant finding was that while almost three quarters (74.68%) of their advice-giving strategies to lower-status interlocutors were direct, more than half (55.77%) of the strategies they employed with higher-status interlocutors were indirect. This could also be attributed to the advancement of those participants' pragmatic competence, which enabled them to utilize their linguistic knowledge in a native-like manner to achieve effective communication. One interviewee, for example, explained, "When addressing a superior, it's really important to sound modest by avoiding the use of overt expressions." Another commented, "To avoid being misunderstood as an arrogant person, I prefer to use modals like could and might, especially when advising more powerful people."

Similar to the previous group, the only difference observed between the male and female participants in this group was in their use of hedged advice. Almost three-quarters (74.23%) of the total use of this strategy occurred in the females' responses. The interviewees' explanations for this difference can be summarized into the male participants' low awareness of the native speakers' norms and the female participants' constant attempts to sound as native-like as possible.

English graduates (N = 63)

In contrast to the previous two groups, the most frequently employed strategies by this advanced group were indirect ones, which accounted for 46.96% of all the strategies they used in the DCT. This was followed by hedged strategies (31.75%) and direct strategies (21.3%). Table 3 illustrates the linguistic structures the participants used to offer advice in the different social situations.

Table (3) English Graduates' Use of Advice-Giving Strategies

Strategy	Linguistic Structure	Total Usage (N = 756)		Usage with Lower Status Interlocutors (N = 252)		Usage with Equal Status Interlocutors (N = 252)		Usage with Higher Status Interlocutors (N = 252)	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Direct	Imperative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Performative	5	0.66	5	1.98	0	0	0	0
	Bare Declarative	4	0.53	4	1.59	0	0	0	0
	Should Declarative/ Ought to Declarative	88	11.64	62	24.60	26	10.32	0	0
	Have to Declarative/ Need to Declarative	64	8.47	34	13.49	30	11.90	0	0
Hedged	Maybe	87	11.51	0	0	23	9.13	64	25.40
	Perhaps	30	3.97	0	0	0	0	30	11.90
	I (don't) think	123	16.27	0	0	17	6.75	106	42.06
Indirect	Can Declarative/ Could Declarative	84	11.11	59	23.41	25	9.92	0	0
	May Declarative/ Might Declarative	86	11.38	57	22.62	29	11.51	0	0
	If Conditional	48	6.35	0	0	48	19.05	0	0
	Interrogative	66	8.73	31	12.30	35	13.89	0	0
	Implicit	71	9.39	0	0	19	7.54	52	20.64

Several interesting findings emerged when examining the strategies employed by this group. In contrast to the other groups, there was not one occurrence of the imperative in this group's responses. In fact, none of the linguistic realizations of the direct strategies were used when addressing a higher-status interlocutor. Overall, the most common strategy type when offering advice to lower- and equal-status individuals was indirect (58.33% and 61.91% of the total strategies used in those situations, respectively), whereas hedged advice was the most common type (79.36%) when advising those of a higher social status.

Scenario 1:

(26)   If I were you, I would sleep at least seven hours a night.

(27)   Why don't you get enough sleep at night?

Scenario 2:

(28)   You could ask a lawyer about this.

(29)   You might apply to more than one company, not only this one.

Scenario 3:

(30)   Maybe you can look at different brands before making up your mind.

(31)   I don't think this brand is durable enough.

The popularity of the indirect and hedged strategies among this group was also observed in the role plays, as the following quotes demonstrate.

Scenario 1:

(32)   Why don't you pay more attention to your sleep?

Scenario 2:

(33)   If I were you, I would wait until you are sure of their financial situation.

Scenario 3:

(34)   I don't think you will like this TV.

The use of hedged and implicit advice with equal-status interlocutors also distinguished this group's responses from those of the other two groups.

Scenario 2:

(35)   I don't think this is a wise choice.

(36)   Job security is the most important consideration for me.

In support of this finding, one interviewee stated, "I don't like my advice to sound too assertive, like it's an order, even if it's addressed to my friend. Rather, I use something like 'I think' to make it sound more like an opinion." Another mentioned, "For me, giving implicit advice to my friends and colleagues is the best option. I just tell them what I think is good, and they are free to take it or leave it."

A further distinguishing feature of this group's performance was the use of the mitigating device perhaps when the advice was offered to a higher-status individual.

(37)   Perhaps looking around first would give you more options.

These findings confirm those of previous research (e.g., Al-Shboul et al., 2012; Flor, 2003), which reported that their proficient respondents used more modifying devices in their production of advice strategies. Furthermore, since different situations led to different linguistic realizations of advice giving, we can infer that this group was, to a great extent, aware of the concept of social role. Thus, their advanced linguistic proficiency was accompanied by an improved pragmatic performance (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). Another explanation of the prevalence of mitigating devices in the speech of higher, compared to lower, proficiency speakers could be the relatively advanced knowledge required to combine these devices with the advice structures. This might have led the latter group to resort to the use of simple, direct strategies instead.

Although only a small difference was found between the males and females in their use of hedged advice (45.83% vs. 54.17%, respectively), the latter group significantly outperformed the former in their use of implicit strategies (64.79% vs. 35.21%, respectively). Interestingly, the interview data also suggested that the female participants in this group were more conservative when offering advice, preferring to hint at rather than to explicitly state the advice.

It is worth noting that in all three groups, there was no evidence of refraining from offering advice, even to higher-status interlocutors. This could possibly be explained in light of Al-Shboul et al.'s (2012, p. 115) suggestion that as Muslims, "they perceived giving advice as an Islamic obligation. Regardless of what people may think of someone, every Muslim ought to be concerned about giving advice in their daily life and should not think about people's reaction, whether they will condemn or praise them later." To sum up the findings of the present study, the differences in the participants' use of advice-giving strategies are presented in Figure 1.
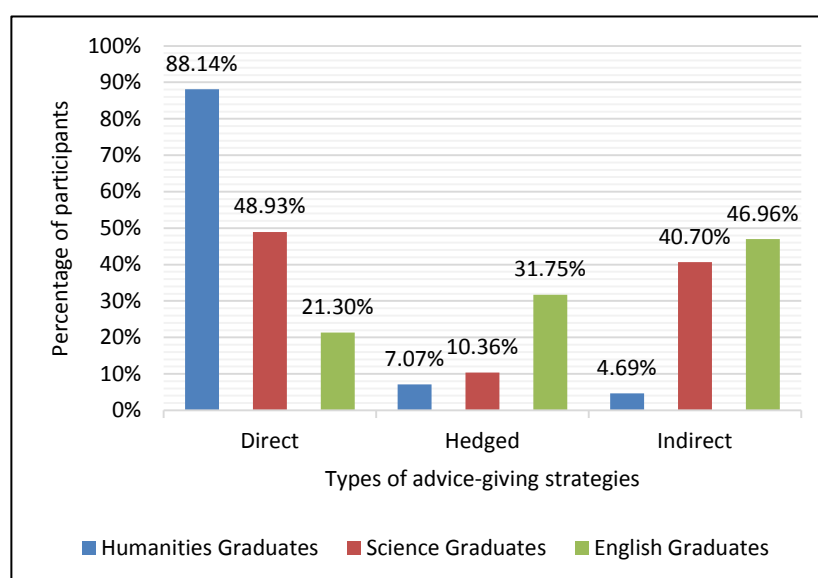

Figure (1) Differences in the Participants' Use of Advice-Giving Strategies

7- Conclusion

The findings of this study provided new insights into the pragmatic performance of different groups of Saudi individuals when offering advice in English. Linguistic competence seemed to have a significant influence on pragmatic performance in terms of the variety of advice-giving structures available to the speakers and their ability to adapt their use according to the social situation. Nonetheless, there was evidence of pragmatic transfer across all groups' responses, which could be attributed to their lack of awareness of the target community speech conventions. This is especially true since English is a foreign language in Saudi Arabia; hence, the participants did not have much exposure to the language in authentic communication in order to model its appropriate use according to the context. In this case, the influence

of their native language was stronger than it would have been in second language environments (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987).

8- Pedagogical Implications and Research Suggestions

Promoting L2 learners' pragmatic performance necessitates revising the traditional classroom practices to shift the focus from learning about the language to the actual use of the language in meaningful communication. Task-based language teaching, which is a type of communicative language teaching, would be indispensable to achieve this goal, since learners are required to use their linguistic knowledge to carry out tasks that resemble authentic, real-world situations (see Skehan, 2003). For example, beginners could practice using modal verbs (such as can, could, may, might, and should) to give advice in situations that involve interlocutors of different social statuses. In this learning episode, their attention should be drawn to the different degrees of assertiveness and to the social functions of these modals. More advanced learners need to be made aware of the importance of using mitigating devices (such as I think, maybe, and perhaps) to modify the effect of their speech according to context. Enhancing L2 learners' pragmatic competence would result in less pragmatic transfer from their native language, and, consequently, fewer communication misunderstandings when using the L2 in real-life interactions.

Since little is known about the pragmatic challenges that Saudi individuals encounter when producing speech acts, especially offering advice in English, more research is needed in this area. Future research might consider replicating this study with respondents of similar characteristics to examine the congruency of the findings. There is also a need for cross-cultural studies with native English speakers to evaluate the appropriateness of the advice-giving strategies employed by the Saudi speakers. Furthermore, longitudinal studies would enrich our knowledge of the manner in which the respondents' pragmatic performance develops over an extended period of time and the extent to which this progress is similar to or different from that of their linguistic proficiency.

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