RELEVANCE AND SPEECH ACTS IN THE ANALYSIS OF CONVERSATIONS BY 2nd YEAR IRAQI EFL LEARNERS AT AL- NISOUR UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating the type of difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL learners at Al-Nisour University College in their quest for the most appropriate utterance to express their ideas. One of the problems that face learners of language is that they do not use the language in real-life situations outside the classroom. The teachers must have the ability to convey the language as close to the native speaker's as possible by being aware of the necessity of being relevant when they communicate with their students who are not in direct contact with native speakers. Actually, to convey the idea effectively and with least mental effort, the learners of the language have to understand how to use direct and indirect way to get the right meaning when learning English as a second language.

Keywords: relevance theory; relevant utterance; direct speech; indirect speech.

1. Introduction

The major concern of this study is to examine the type of difficulties faced by learners in deciding the most appropriate utterance to convey their ideas. In order express the idea with more contextual effects and with less mental effort, the learners of the language need to understand the concept of relevance which is introduced by Sperber and Wilson (1986) who state that "human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance". Direct and indirect speech acts are used in this study as the principles that have to be used by the learners in order to solve the decision problem when they choose the relevant utterance. The test revealed that most learners used the direct way to determine the appropriate choice. Still, most learners face difficulties in saying what exactly is inside their minds as relevant as possible when they give the reason behind choosing the right alternative. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, no previous research has ever tackled the topic of relevance and speech acts in the analysis of conversations by EFL learners from the perspective of a relevance-based approach to speech acts. Hence, this study is intended to close a gap between second language knowledge and communicative needs.

2. Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory (henceforth RT) is propounded by Sperber and Wilson (1986) which is regarded as one of the significant theories. Sperber and Wilson reduced Grice's four maxims into one principle, namely the principle of relevance.

“Grice's maxims can be replaced by a single principle of relevance - that the speaker tries to be as relevant as possible…” (1986: 381).
For them, the principle of relevance is the only main principle needed for communication to function effectively (Leonardi, 2010: 99; Gast, 2008: 2; and T. L. Dadbe, Forthcoming: 1). Sperber & Wilson's principle of relevance differs from Grice's conversational maxim in being a quantitative not a qualitative. Grice argues that there are a number of norms which the speaker has to follow in order to guide the hearer to his intentional meaning. In contrast, Sperber & Wilson argue that human central cognitive systems are the only way to guide the hearer to observe the speaker's communicative meaning (Wang, 2014: 247). In fact, the principle of relevance is not like Grice's theory because it is neither maxim nor a convention nor a theorem but a: "generalisation about ostensive communication" (Hirst, 2007: 3).

Sperber & Wilson's approach is based on the assumptions that human cognition is geared to the hearer's search for relevance (the maximization of relevance). According to this framework, the utterance must be conveyed with more contextual effects, at the same time, it has to be understood with less processing effort to ensure successful communication. In addition, the speaker's utterance has to be relevant enough to be worth the addressee's attention (Osunbade 2013: 145). RT is based on two principles. The first is the Cognitive Principle, and the second is the Communicative Principle. The first part is related to the cognition while the second one is concentrated on the communication, or more precisely on the utterance interpretation (Allot 2013, 59).

2.1 Cognitive Principle of Relevance

Sperber and Wilson's (1995: 261) cognitive principle of relevance:

"Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance."

The major part in this theory is the human cognition which has advanced a variety of deductive (innate or acquired) mental mechanisms or biases that tend to give attention to inputs with greatest expected relevance and to process them in the most relevance-enhancing way (Wilson, 2009: 394). Relevance is defined here as the property of inputs to cognitive systems: the input is more relevant when we have more cognitive (or contextual) effects, and it is less relevant when it needs more mental (or processing) effort. The conclusion is that that relevance is an arrangement between effort (i.e. cost) and effects (i.e. reward) (Allott, 2013: 59-60). The degree of relevance of an input to an individual between cognitive effects and processing effort will be explained as follows:

i) **Reward: Cognitive effects**

"Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time" (Wilson & Sperber, 2004: 604; the original formulation, at Sperber & Wilson, 1986: 153).

In agreement with the above quotation, the communicator tries to affect the individual's *cognitive environment* (5) by any act of communication where the cognitive environment of the audience is defined as a set of assumptions that is manifest to the hearer and the communicator herself. The hearer connects the new information with the old information (the information that already exists in the cognitive environment of the individual) to get the contextual implications (Forceville, 1996: 86). There are different kinds of cognitive effects plainly discussed in RT, and they are as follows:

a) from the old and new information, the hearer derives further assumptions, but not from either the old information or new information alone, which is known as "contextual implications";
b) he adds certain new assumptions to the store of information that already exists in his cognitive environment;

c) he discards certain assumptions about the world and replaces by some new information;

d) he may strengthen or weaken certain degree of assumptions which are regarded as part of his cognitive environment (Forceville, 1996: 86).

Even if the new information is true, it is not regarded as a cognitive effect if it does not have any relation with any previously held assumption. This is what known as a positive cognitive effect which is a worthwhile difference to the individual's representation of the world (Wilson & Sperber, 1986: 48).

In the processing effort and contextual effects of optimal relevance, the addressee has to get a positive cognitive effect which means a truth content conclusion (referring to as contextual effects). On the other hand, false conclusions are not worthwhile because they give cognitive effects but not a positive one. More accurately, a contextual effect is neither the new information in the utterance alone, nor the context alone (the old information), but a combination of the context and new information. For example, the teacher may give his/her students a lecture, and the students find it relevant, as it causes a lot of changes in their cognitive environment (i.e. in their awareness). This lecture may help the students to strengthen some of their existing assumptions (a positive one), and to weaken or neglect some irrelevant assumptions (negative one) (Zhonggang, 2006: 44-45).

ii) Cost: Processing Effort

Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

(Wilson & Sperber 2004, 604; the original formulation, at Sperber & Wilson 1986, 153).

According to this definition of relevance, the claim is that the human cognitive systems work with the input to save the mental effort of an individual at least as possible (Allot, 2013: 61). Simms (2009: 194) states that processing effort is the process that the hearers take to understand the speaker's meaning, and this process depends on the speaker's utterance and the hearer's inference of that utterance, as well as the effort that must be expended by the hearer to compute the cognitive effects of the utterance. In other words, 'processing effort' is the effort that requires processing input to the point that its cognitive effects are derived. In addition, Wilson argues that effort is "to represent the input, access contextual information and derive any contextual effects." In fact, RT does not aim to define sources of processing effort, but it tries to study perception, memory and inference, and these are the results of the fields of psychology (Wilson, 2009: 394). According to processing effort, understating an utterance depends on two factors:

a- The form of the utterance (how the information is presented, e.g., complex, familiar, etc.).
b- The effort needed to understand the utterance and to construct a suitable context (Noh, 2000: 63).

Generally, different stimuli (utterances) will require different amounts of processing effort. For instance, longer sentences require more processing effort than shorter ones. Also, uncommon words or ambiguous words require more effort to process than common ones (Allott, 2013: 66). Another brilliant point is that the same stimulus in different contexts will, in general, require different amounts of processing effort. The stimuli in different contexts may be more or less salient (easy to perceive); the contextual assumptions may be more or less accessible to process (easy to restore from memory or infer). In fact, the implication will depend on the context that supports inferences (Wilson & Sperber, 2004: 609). Furthermore, the one must
not only understand the physical objects, but also the source of information like utterances created by other human beings, books, the internet, advertisements etc. (Todd & Gigerenzer, 2000: 729-730).

From the two facts of cognitive effects and processing effort, the utterance has to have a large number of contextual effects, and these effects have to be understood with less effort in order to be relevant enough to the audience, i.e., the producing utterance has to be understood with more effect and least effort (Cruz 2001, 201).

2.2 Communicative Principle of Relevance

Before going into the details of the second principle, Sperber and Wilson differentiate between two separate models of communication: a conventional and non-inferential one, known as the code model (Pre-Grian), and a non-conventional one, which is called by Grice and his followers as the inferential model (Marquez, 2006: 42).

i) The Code Model

The theory of code model has developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949). The main idea of Shannon and Weaver is the transmission of a message where the sender conveys his message as a signal (whether spoken words, electric signals, gestures, or written words) through various channels which can be affected by noise whilst the addressee receives them and tries to decode the sender's message to understand it (Gordon, 2009: 6). According to the code model, misinterpretation of the provided evidence will result from some failures in communication, whereas understanding the intended meaning of the utterance by the audience will lead to effective communication (Wilson and Sperber, 1995: 88-89). Certainly, Sperber & Wilson do not deny the importance of this process, but they state that it is not enough to understand the utterance; therefore they develop the Grice's notion of inferential comprehension (Yus, 2011: 4).

ii) The Inferential Model

The central claim in Grice's Theory is the expression and recognition of intentions which is regarded as the fundamental feature of most human cognition whether verbal or non-verbal, and this claim may be regarded as the main concern in RT (Loukusa, 2007: 43). For Grice, the speaker may say something and at the same time he means another thing and this depends on the speaker's intention, i.e. what the speaker intends to say (Allott, 2013: 71). So, Grice emphasizes on the importance of the recognition of the sender's intention by the receptor. This process of recognition is achieved by inference, not by deciphering. He asserts that "Communication is successful not when hearers recognize the linguistic meaning of the utterance, but when they infer the speaker's 'meaning' of it." Sperber states that the hearer can infer the speaker's meaning without using code (rules or conventions) (Gordon, 2009: 10). Inferential model is called by Sperber & Wilson as the 'Ostensive Model' (or Ostensive-Inferential Communication), which has two steps: ostension and inference (Marquez, 2006: 43). This new term, 'ostensive-inferential communication', is explained by Sperber and Wilson as follows:

(a) the informative intention: the intention to inform an audience of something;

(b) the communicative intention: the intention to inform the audience of one’s informative intention. (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 611).

According to the former, a set of assumptions have to be manifest or more manifest to the audience, whilst the second one aims to make the set of assumptions mutually manifest to audience and communicator.
when the communicator has an informative intention (Yi-bo, 2015: 602-603). Perry (2015: 25) states that “communication will be successful when the addressee recognizes those intentions.”

These two models, coding and ostension, are carried out by the speaker because they are involved in a productive process, whilst decoding and inference are carried out by the addressee because they are involved in an interpretation process (Márquez, 2006: 43). After explaining the two models, Sperber and Wilson (1995: 260) have presented the communicative principle as:

"Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance".

For Sperber & Wilson, the most important role in this theory is to specify the interpretation of the ostensive stimulus where it should be communicated by the presumption of optimal relevance. Sperber & Wilson (1987: 704) claim that the speakers and the addressee only need to know the communicative principle of relevance to communicate with each other rather than knowing the principles of genetics to reproduce.

3. Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory is usually attributed to the Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin. The basic ideas, which were formed by him in the late 1930s were presented in his lectures given at Oxford in 1952–1954, and later in his William James Lectures delivered at Harvard in 1955. These lectures were finally published posthumously as How to do things with words in 1962. After his death in 1960, Austin’s ideas were refined, systematized, and advanced, especially by his Oxford pupil, the American Philosopher John R. Searle (Austin, 1962: 3).

According to Searle (1979), when the assertive sentence form is used to make a statement or the interrogative form to ask for information, it is called a direct speech act. When a polite request is made in the form of an interrogative statement, it is called indirect speech acts.

3.1 Direct Speech Acts

Nozar Niazi (2002: 28) says:

“A direct speech act has only one function, whereas an indirect speech act performs more than one function simultaneously”.

According to this, an interrogative structure such as Did you...?, Are they...? or Can we...? is used with the function of a question, it is described as a direct speech act. For example, when we don’t know something and we ask someone to provide the information, we usually produce a direct speech act such as Can you ride a bicycle? (Yule, 2010: 134).

3.2 Indirect Speech Acts

Searle (1969) first proposed the notion of indirect speech acts, a work that he substantially revised in Searle (1979). According to Searle, a speaker may utter the sentence:

(1) Can you pass the salt?
and mean it not merely as a question but as a request to pass the salt. (Searle, 1979: 30). Searle states that in order to understand an indirect speech act:

"The speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer." (Searle, 1979: 32)

Therefore rather than making the request directly, the indirect act involves finding out if there is an obstacle to the hearer servicing the request. For example, the hearer may not be able to service the request, the hearer may not have the object being requested or even not want to service the request (Wilfred, 1991:185). As it is clear in this table:

Table (1): Direct and Indirect Speech Acts (Yule, 2010:134)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utterance</th>
<th>Structures</th>
<th>Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you eat pizza?</td>
<td>Interrogative</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat the pizza (please)!</td>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>Command (Request)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You ate pizza.</td>
<td>Declarative</td>
<td>Statement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 A Relevance-Based Approach to Speech Acts

Wilson and Sperber (1988: 99) make it very clear that

"a directed semantic link between linguistic form and representations of propositional attitude".

Mood gives a clue for the interpretation that the speaker wants to convey:

"Our claim is that the characteristic linguistic features of declarative, imperative, or interrogative form merely encode a rather abstract property of the intended interpretation: the direction in which the relevance of the utterance is to be sought." (ibid: 101)

Sperber and Wilson state that saying that interrogatives represent desirable thoughts is equal to the claim that they represent possible answers as relevant. Sperber and Wilson seem to suggest that the hearer recognizes an utterance as a request when s/he recognizes the speaker’s intention to describe a state of affairs as potential and desirable for the speaker her/himself and that the hearer is in a position to bring about the described state of affairs. As a result, the recognition of speech acts is considered as a pragmatic inferential process which contains a preliminary decoding phase of the semantic import of the sentence mood (Lenci, 1994: 119).

4. Research Design and Methodology

In this section, there are the objectives of the study, hypothesis, significance of the study, the sample of the study, data collection, and data analysis and results. They will be explained one after one.
4.1 Objectives of the Study

This study aims at:

1. examining students' responses to some extent.
2. determining the types of response from the learners
3. investigating the impact of the learners' knowledge on giving the correct answer in the second language.

4.2 Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that:

1. the speech act is essential in the understanding of the utterance, and it is considered as communicated act.
2. the search for relevance is the essential feature of human communication, people seek to use relevant utterances only.
3. the learner's knowledge is determinant in utterance selection at a particular time.

4.3 Significance of the Study

1. It is expected that the present study is to be of value to linguists, students of linguistics and many others who are actually concerned with the teaching/learning process especially teachers and learners of English.

2. It concentrates on using relevance and speech act theories in teaching the second language. Besides, it can help the learners to focus on learning the second language with more contextual effect and with less processing effort.

4.4 Sample of the Study

The participants were 20 Iraqi EFL learners at Al- Nisour University College. They had been taught EFL for approximately ten years. The reason for selecting this particular group of students stems from the fact that they studied *Situational Dialogues* in the previous year and they had a piece of good information about the dialogues in the book. The participants were similar in age, ranging from 19 to 20 years old, but factors such as sex and age were not controlled in this study.

4.5 Instruments and Data Collection

The test items used in this study are (8), each item has three alternatives. The alternatives are collected from Michael Ockenden (1986), *Situational Dialogues*, and the additional information is taken from the internet. These eight items were used as the instrument of the study to obtain good results. Subjects were allotted 30 minutes to complete. Although there were no minimum time constraints, they were instructed to choose one of the three utterances in each item by using a tick mark beside the most appropriate answer. The students were not allowed to use any kind of dictionaries or other supplementary materials while reading and answering the eight items. See Appendix 1.

4.6 Data analysis and Results

The first section (4.6.1) presents the analysis of each item and the tables of correct and wrong answer committed by 2ND Iraqi EFL learners at Al-Nisour University College. In the second section (4.6.2), there
is the discussion of the results by achieving the objectives of the research and investigating its hypotheses, additionally, the test of the results will be investigated one after one.

4.6.1.1 Test Item No.1

It is hypothesized that the search for relevance is the essential feature of human communication, people seek to use relevant utterances only. Does this occur with second language learners or not? Before going into details we have to know that the learners' knowledge will make him/her able to evaluate exactly what is the relevant utterance at a particular time. In item 1, the speaker has some works to do and wants to end the conversation. In fact, all utterances (1a, 1b, and 1c) are relevant to the learners, but one of them would be more relevant to the addressee. For the first utterance (1a), Adam does not specify whether he will go or not. To be more specific he does not give a direct answer but he implies that "he will not go with her". According to (1b), Adam firstly gives a reason and then he refuses directly and politely. The last utterance (1c) is considered irrelevant to the question, but it is relevant if his utterance interprets in this way, "I can't come because my brother will come tonight and I am going to celebrate with him".

1. <<question; direct and clear>>- 1a <<answer; indirect>>, 1b <<answer; direct and relevant>>, 1c <<answer; indirect and irrelevant>>.

In reality, (1a) is better than (1c), but (1b) is better than (1a) and (1c) in giving a direct and polite refusal.

Table (2) The Correct and the Wrong Answers of Item No. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Relevant</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect and Irrelevant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (2) shows that the most popular type is direct and relevant (60.0), and the remaining majors are roughly equally (the percentages are between 15.0 and 25.0). And this reflects that the question is direct and clear for most learners.

4.6.1.2 Item No.2

For RT, if the speech act is essential in the understanding of the utterance then it is considered as communicated act. According to item no.2, Mary wants to start a conversation with the waiter and orders salad and pizza. In (2a), Mary starts a conversation by using the expression "Excuse me" to pay the waiter's attention and then asks directly with using polite request. For (2b), Mary asks directly and this supposes that the waiter is beside her and in accordance with the question, Mary has to start the conversation and then ordering her request. The last utterance (2c) has no contextual effect or relevant information.

2. <<question; direct and clear>>- 2a <<answer; direct and relevant>>, 2b <answer; direct>, 2c <answer; direct and irrelevant>>.
Table (3) The Correct and the Wrong Answers of Item No. 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Relevant</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Irrelevant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this table (3), the learners choose the *direct and relevant* utterance as the most appropriate one, where its percentage equals (75.0), and the remaining types are roughly equal (their percentages are 10.0 and 15.0). As a result, this question is clear and direct for most Iraqi EFL learners at Al-Nisour University College.

4.6.1.3 Item No.3

The question asks the learners to refuse the offer and end the conversation as well as apologize politely. In the first utterance (3a), Margret refuses politely, and her answer is direct, besides she promises to go with Paul on Monday. But it does not consider the most relevant one because she gives another reason which is not related to the question. In (3b), Margret refuses and gives a reason behind her refusal. Additionally, she gives the reason directly and apologizes to him. The last one (3c) is indirect, and it implies that she cannot go with him. As a result, (3b) is better than (3a) and (3c).

3. <<question; direct and clear>>- 3a <answer; direct>, 3b <<answer; direct and relevant>>, 3c <answer; indirect>.

Table (4) The Correct and the Wrong Answers of Item No. 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Relevant</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is obvious in the table (4), the *direct and relevant* utterance is the most suitable one to choose by the learners, and most learners choose it. In this table, the percentage of the second utterance (3b) equals (60.0), whereas the rest alternatives are lower than (3b) where their percentages equal (30.0) for the first utterance (3a), and (10.0) for the last utterance (3c).

4.6.1.4 Item No.4

In this item, the learners need to start a conversation with the receptionist to book a single room for two days. According to the first utterance (4a), the speaker uses informal greetings "hi" to start the conversation with the receptionist, as well as, he asks about any vacancies, and here he does not determine whether a single room or double. Besides, he asks to stay for one night only and in the question, they are two days. In the second utterance (4b), the speaker attracts the addressee's attention through using the expression "excuse me" and books a single room for two days. Somehow, the last utterance (4c) is relevant.
to the question. But he does not start a conversation, he only asks. Additionally, the speaker in (4c) does not say how many days that he wants to spend in the hotel. As a result, (4b) is better than (4a) and (4c).

4. <<question; direct and clear>>- 4a <answer; indirect and irrelevant>, 4b <<answer; direct and relevant>>, 4c <answer; direct>.

Table (5) The Correct and the Wrong Answers of Item No. 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect and Irrelevant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Relevant</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear in table (5) that direct and relevant utterance is determined as the most relevant one by most learners where the percentage of (4b) equals (90.0), and the direct answer has not chosen where it equals (00.0), and the indirect and irrelevant utterance have chosen by two students only where it also equals (10.0). Thus, this question is very clear and understandable by learners.

4.6.1.5 Item No.5

In this item, the learners need to close a conversation with the quest at night. For the first utterance (5a), the speaker suggests to watch another series, and this implies that he does not want to close the conversation. In the second utterance (5b), the speaker says "good night" only. This suggests that he will go to the bed directly and it is better to say something else when you have a quest because he is not a member of your family and this may consider as roughly rude. In (5c), the speaker thanks the quest and asks them to get rest, as well as, he ends the conversation by saying "good night". In fact, this alternative is considered as the most relevant one. Therefore, (5c) is better than (5a) and (5b).

5. <<question; direct and clear>>- 5a <answer; indirect and irrelevant>, 5b <answer; direct>, 5c <<answer; direct and relevant>>

Table (6) The Correct and the Wrong Answers of Item No. 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect and Irrelevant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Relevant</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6) shows that the question is direct and clear because most students choose direct and relevant answer to be the right answer.

4.6.1.6 Item No.6

In this item, the learners need to start a conversation with a cashier to change dollars into sterling. According to the first utterance (6a), the speaker starts the conversation with the expression "hello", then
he says what he wants directly and politely. In the second utterance (6b), the speaker does not determine the type of currency, he wants only to cash the cheque, and this is not relevant to our question directly. For the last utterance (6c), Joseph wants to have a new cheque book, and this part is not relevant to the requirements of the question. And then, he asks about changing *dollars into sterling* politely. As a result, (6a) is better than (6b) and (6c).

6. <<question; direct and clear>>- 6a <<answer; direct and relevant>>, 6b <answer; indirect>, 6c <answer; direct and irrelevant>.

**Table (7) The Correct and the Wrong Answers of Item No. 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Relevant</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Irrelevant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that most learners in item 6 have determined the *direct and relevant* utterance as the most suitable one. In other words, the percentage of the first utterance is higher than the second and third one. Consequently, (6a) > (6b and 6c).

**4.6.1.6 Item No.7**

In this item, the learners need to ask about Susan's health and know if she is okay or not. They will know from Paul that she is okay and then they must close the conversation because they need to get home early. According to the first utterance (7a), there is something missing because the speaker asks Paul to "*tell her to take things easy*". This supposes that s/he knows something about her case and wants only to know if she overcomes her difficulties or not. Besides s/he closes the conversation simply. In item (7b), the first part "*I am glad to hear that*" is connected with the first requirement that Susan is okay and the speaker is happy with this news. In contrast with the second part "*let me know if there's anything I can do*", s/he does not close the conversation but starts a new one, and this is not relevant to the given question. For the last alternative (7c), the speaker does not express his attitude towards the news. S/he only explains that s/he wants to get home early and closes the conversation. Consequently, (7b) and (7c) has no contextual effects with the given information. Thus, (7a) considers as the most relevant one. However, in (7a), the speaker's speech is direct, but it implies that he knows about her health previously.

7. <<question; direct>>- 7a <<answer; indirect and relevant>>, 7b <answer; direct and irrelevant>, 8c <answer; direct>.

**Table (8) The Correct and the Wrong Answers of Item No. 7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect and Relevant</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Irrelevant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is clear that the *indirect and relevant* answer is roughly equal to the *direct and irrelevant* utterance, but the correct utterance is nearly higher than the second one. Consequently, (7a) > (7b) > (7c).

### 4.6.1.8 Item No. 8

In item (8), the learners need to start a conversation with a stranger by talking about *the sunny weather*. In (8a), the utterance is relevant to the sunny weather. However, most learners consider it as an irrelevant answer because the sun has a negative meaning in Arabia, but in Europe, it has a positive meaning. Therefore, this may affect on choosing this utterance as the right answer. According to the second utterance (8b), the utterance implies that season is winter and the sun appears after a rainy weather or maybe the clouds hide the sun and it appears again. For the last utterance (8c), the expression is considered a general way to start a conversation. So, the three expressions are equally the same, but one of them is the most appropriate one in accordance with the interpretations of each one. As a consequence, (8b) is better than (8a) and (8c).

8. <<question; indirect>>- 8a <answer; indirect>, 8b <answer; direct and relevant>, 8c <answer; direct>.

### The table (9) The Correct and the Wrong Answers of Item No. 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Relevant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table (9) shows that most learners choose (8c) as the relevant answer. Actually, it is not appropriate but they think so because it is a general way to start the conversation by most EFL learners. The percentage of this utterance (8c) equals (45.0) where it is higher than the most appropriate one (8b). As well as, the first utterance is higher than the *direct and relevant utterance*.

### 4.6.2 Discussion of the Results

The results show that most learners know where to use direct and indirect way to convey what they want to say when they use English as a second language, despite that, most of them tend to use direct way to convey the idea, and this may due to their understanding of the meaning in the second language. Additionally, the conducted study improves that if the learners want to convey the meaning correctly, it is better to them using *direct and relevant* way to communicate especially in learning the second language. Furthermore, the mentioned hypothesis cannot be applied to the learners that they do not have a piece of complete knowledge and cannot use the indirect way to say what in their mind is. As well as, the indirect way need a presupposition about the topic. Actually, it also improves that understanding of the utterance is crucial in the communicated acts. As well as, the search for relevance is the essential feature of human communication, and this occurs when the students choose the appropriate utterance as the relevant one, whether it is direct or not. See the table (10).
Table (10) Types of Using Alternatives in the Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Alternatives</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Relevant</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Irrelevant</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect and Relevant</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect and Irrelevant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (25) shows that the relevant answer of direct utterances is higher than other kinds where its percentage equals (55.0), and the direct utterance is higher than the rest types where it equals (20.0), and the remaining types are roughly equal in the percentages and they order from high to low, as following: indirect (6.3) > indirect and relevant (5.6) > indirect and irrelevant. As it appears, all kinds of indirect use less than direct kinds. This improves that most of them understand the surface meaning, not the implied one. As it is obvious in figure (1).

![Figure (1) Types of Using Alternatives in the Test](image)

**Conclusion**

In accordance with the assumption proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986), human cognition is geared to the hearer’s search for relevance (the maximization of relevance), this study had been conducted to investigate the impact of the learners' knowledge on giving the correct answer in the second language. As a result, relevance defined here as the essential feature of human communication where the learners sought to use relevant utterances to get the most relevant one by determining the type of responses. The results showed that the learners’ knowledge in the second language has an impact on giving the correct answer. Notably, when the relevant answer of direct and relevant utterances was higher than other kinds where its percentage equaled (55.0). The results also showed that most learners knew how to use direct and indirect
way to convey what they want to say when they use English as a second language, despite the fact that most of them tended to use direct way to convey the idea, and this might due to their understanding of the meaning in the second language. Additionally, it improved that if the learners want to convey the meaning correctly, it is better to them using direct and relevant way to communicate especially in learning the second language. Furthermore, the mentioned hypothesis could be applied to the learners that they did not have a piece of complete knowledge and could not use the indirect way to say what in their mind is. As well as, the indirect way needed a presupposition about the topic. Actually, it also improved that understanding of the utterance is crucial in the communicated acts. As well as, the search for relevance was the essential feature of communication, and this occurred when the students chose the appropriate utterance as the most relevant one, whether it is direct or not. As regards to the role of the learners in determining the most relevant utterances, they cannot convey their intended meaning as comprehensible as possible, but rather they give evidence of their thoughts that the selected utterances were indeed relevant in the communication process. The advice is that the learners should develop the interactive abilities in second language learning, and this can be obtained from the understanding of direct and indirect speech acts from the perspective of relevance theory, and it is advisable to show that communication is not only in getting learners to focus on the accuracy of the target language forms but rather to the meaning of these forms. As well as, teachers of foreign language are advised to develop the learners' ability in distinguishing the differences between different utterances, and exposing their input when they give the reason behind their answers, and use the second language inside and outside the class because this will make learners get competence like native speakers, as well as, they will realize the gap between their non-native-like forms and the target forms when the teachers correct the learners' incorrect forms.

References


Wilson, D. & D. Sperber (1988), ÔMood and the Analysis of Non-Declarative SentencesÓ, in Dancy, J., J.


**Appendix 1**

In each item, you have three utterances to select from. Choose the one that you think is the MOST appropriate and why you think it is the most appropriate one. Put (✓) next to the one you choose:

1. Suzan invites Adam to spend the night of Christmas with her. How would he refuse and end a conversation because he has some works to finish at home.
   a. I’ll probably just stay at home. Thank you.
   b. I expect I’ll stay with my family. Anyway, I can’t I have to work on this presentation.
   c. My brother will come to spend the night with us.

2. Mary is in a restaurant, she wants to start a conversation with the waiter by ordering salad and pizza.
   a. Excuse me. I want to have a small salad and pizza, please.
   b. Please, salad and pizza.
   c. Excuse me, I want a salad because it is good for people who want to have a slim body, and I want pizza also.

3. Paul asks Margaret to go to the cinema. Actually, she cannot because she must go to the bus station and buy a ticket now. How would she close the conversation and apologize to him?
   a. I'm sorry. I can’t. I promise to go with you on Monday.
b. I can’t go with you because I have to buy a bus ticket now. I am very sorry.

c. I’ve promised myself to get early home today.

4. Peter wants to start a conversation with a receptionist to book a single room for two days.

a. Hi. I wonder whether you have any vacancies for tonight.

b. Excuse me. Have you a single room for two nights?

c. Have you got a single room?

5. The time is 12:00 a.m. and you want to go to bed. How would you close a conversation when you have a quest.

a. Don't you want to see part two of the serial?

b. Good night.

c. Thank you so much for such a fun night. Let's get a rest. Good night.

6. Joseph wants to start a conversation with the cashier to change dollars into sterling he says.

a. Hello. I'd like to change dollars into sterling, please?

b. Could you cash this cheque, please?

c. A new cheque book and these dollars into sterling, please?

7. Asking your friend, Paul, about Susan's health. Paul tells you that she is okay. You want to finish the conversation and get home early.

a. Give her my regards and tell her to take things easy. See you soon.

b. I am glad to hear that. Let me know if there's anything I can do.

c. I want to go home early today. See you soon.

8. Samir wants to start a conversation with a stranger by talking about the sunny weather.

   a. Nice and bright this morning.

   b. It's good to see the sun again.

   c. Such a wonderful day today, isn't it?