

A Gender-based Analysis of Indirectness in Mosul Arab Parenting Interaction.

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى البحث في الفروق بين الجنسين في استخدام الكلام غير المباشر في التفاعل باللغة العربية الموصلية في سياق تربية الأطفال. تفترض الدراسة أن الرجال والنساء يستخدمون الكلام غير المباشر مع أطفالهم، لكن تختلف طريقة استخدامهم لهذه الطريقة حسب الغرض المرجو منها. كما تفترض الدراسة أن الأطفال الذين يستخدم أبائهم وأمهم الكلام غير المباشر يميلون إلى فهمه وتفسيره بشكل أكثر صحة. تحلل الدراسة بيانات مسجلة جمعت من متحدثين باللغة العربية الموصلية من الجنسين، ينتمون إلى خلفيات اجتماعية متشابهة، باستخدام نظرية أفعال الكلام لـ هولتغريفز (٢٠٠٢) ومبدأ التعاون لـ جرابس (١٩٧٥)؛ ويشمل التحليل خمسة مقتطفات من بين ٣٥ تسجيلًا. تقدم نتائج الدراسة توضيح لدور التلميح في اللغة وتساهم في فهم الفروق الجنسية في استخدام اللغة في سياق التربية.

وتبين من خلال تحليل المحادثات بين الآباء وأطفالهم أن الآباء يميلون إلى استخدام السخرية والفكاهة لإثبات سيطرتهم على المحادثة، وقد يشملون أنفسهم في انتقاد سلوك أطفالهم لتعليمهم أهمية تحسين سلوكهم. في حين تأخذ الأمهات عملية التربية بشكل أكثر جدية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الرغبة في توجيه الأوامر للأطفال تكون أكثر فعالية باستخدام طريقة الكلام غير المباشرة.

Abstract

This study aims to investigate gender differences occurred during indirect speech acts in Mosuli Arabic interaction within the context of parenting. The study hypothesizes that men and women use indirect speech acts with their children, but they use them for different purposes. The study also hypothesizes that children with parents who use indirect speech acts are more likely to understand and interpret them correctly. The study analyses recorded data that have been collected from Mosuli Arabic speakers of both genders, with similar social backgrounds. The analysis is based on Holtgraves' speech act theory (2002) and Grice's cooperative principle (1975). The analysis includes 5 extracts that have been selected out of 35 recordings. The results of the study provide an elucidation to the role of indirectness in communication and contribute to the understanding of gender differences in language use within the context of parenting.

Through the analysis of conversations between parents and their children, it has been found that fathers tend to use sarcasm and humour to prove their control over the conversation and may include themselves in criticizing their children's behaviour to teach them the importance of reforming their attitudes. Meanwhile, mothers take the act of regulation more seriously. The findings suggest that although parents have the power to set orders, indirect speech acts may be a more effective way of conveying messages and regulating their children's behaviour.

1. Introduction

Language serves as the most crucial tool for communication, allowing individuals to interact through both verbal and nonverbal means. While verbal communication involves the use of words, nonverbal communication encompasses the use of body language, gestures, and silence. Successful communication relies on adhering to linguistic conventions and rules to construct meaningful interactions (Grice, 1989, p. 26). To ensure smooth and effective conversations, individuals often flout these conventions by using indirectness.

Indirectness refers to the use of language where the interpretation of the utterance differs from its literal meaning. This type of communication often relies on shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener. People use indirectness for various reasons, such as to be polite and considerate of others' feelings, to convey veiled threats, or even to have self-protection (Zhang and You, 2009, p. 100). Several studies have suggested that women tend to use indirectness more frequently than men do; women often use polite forms and questions to convey their intentions (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 158). However, men are more likely to use indirectness when it comes to humour, especially when interacting with their children, as a way of affirming their dominance and societal position (Jenkins 1985, p. 137).

2. Problem

Indirectness is one of the factors that seems to most often cause communication breakdown between members of the same or other linguistic or cultural groups (Grainger & Mills, 2016, p. 1). Indirectness can sometimes be misinterpreted or interpreted differently by the listener (especially when she\he is a child), and this may cause

difficulty in comprehending the message. In other words, using indirectness may lead to miscommunication between adults and children as sometimes parents employ indirectness to interact with their children for different reasons.

3. Hypothesis

The present study hypothesizes that:

- 1- Men and women differ in the way they use indirectness with their children indirectly.
- 2- Children with parents who often use indirectness are likely to easily understand the indirectness and interpret it correctly.

4. The aim of the study

The present study investigates the concept of indirectness and its relationship with gender differences from a pragmatic point of view. It attempts to illustrate the distinctions between men and women, as parents, insofar on their use of indirectness with their children is concerned.

5. Source of data:

The data analysed in the present research have been collected from Mosuli Arabic participants of both genders from various educational backgrounds. However, they have similar social backgrounds and are 30-40 years old. The study focusses only on differences in gender rather than other factors like educational and societal background.

6. The models of the study:

Holtgraves' view of the speech act theory (2002) and Grice's cooperative principle (1975) are the models, on which the present study is based, to analyse and interpret the collected data. This model is employed to examine the understanding and interpretation of indirect communication. Holtgraves (2002, p. 23) proposes a two-stage process for detecting indirectness. The initial stage involves recognizing the literal illocutionary act, which represents the intended action, based on Grice's (1975) concept of conversational implicature. Drawing upon background knowledge, linguistic knowledge, and conventional knowledge, inferences are made to infer the speaker's intended indirect meaning. For instance, expressions such as "can you open the window?" and "would you pass the pepper?" imply the hearer's ability and willingness to perform specific actions, leading to directive interpretations. The second stage involves identifying the intended illocutionary act once the presence of an underlying meaning is acknowledged. The model assumes that listeners, upon noticing a violation of the relevance maxim by the speaker, will generate inferences based on their beliefs about the reasons behind the violation (Holtgraves, 1998, p. 1).

7. Indirectness

Indirectness in speech acts is a concept that refers to the use of language that does not explicitly state what the speaker intends to communicate, but rather requires the listener to infer the intended meaning. This can be achieved through the use of various linguistic devices, such as metaphors, implicatures, and indirect speech acts. Understanding indirectness is important in developing pragmatic competence, which involves the ability to interpret and use language in

appropriate social contexts (Goatly, 1995, p. 45; Sew, 1997, p. 363; and Thomas, 1995, p. 119).

Distinguishing between direct and indirect speech has been always a contentious issue. Dascal (1987), Grice (1968) and Clark (1985) attempted to make sense of the distinction by arguing that an utterance can have two different meanings: sentence meaning, which refers to the literal and direct meaning of the words according to syntactic rules, and indirect or speaker-intended meaning, which can be totally different from the sentence meaning. Such distinctions in speech acts underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of language use, with important implications for both communication and comprehension.

Holtgraves (1997, p. 627) classifies indirect meaning into two distinct types. The first type is conventional indirectness, where the speaker's intended meaning is easily identifiable by the hearer, such as in the case of a request to pass the pepper. Conversely, the second type of indirect meaning, known as conversational indirectness, requires the listener to engage in a cognitive inference process to decipher the speaker's intended meaning. This type of indirectness is more complex and often requires greater effort on the part of the listener to correctly identify the speaker's intended message (Holtgraves, 1994, p. 423-424).

Individuals often use indirectness despite possessing the ability to be direct in their communication. This preference for indirectness can be attributed to the pleasure and enjoyment derived from communicating with minimal effort and few words. Indirectness is considered by many to be the ultimate prize in communication and serves as a reward for establishing a rapport with the interlocutor. Self-defence is another potential benefit of indirectness. In situations where one's expressions or ideas do not align with the assumptions of others or receive an unfavourable response, employing indirectness by

retracting or utilizing humour can effectively diffuse the situation (Tannen, 1992, p. 59-60).

8. Gender and Indirectness

Studies show that gender and indirectness in communication are correlated. Indirectness refers to vague, ambiguous, or implicit language (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Women tend to use more indirect language than men. This may be attributed to societal norms and expectations that encourage women to be more polite and deferential (Holmes, 2000, p. 159).

Studies have found a correlation between gender and the use of indirect language, in that women have been found that they tend to use more indirect language than the case with men (Holmes, 1995, p. 454). This may be a result of various factors. One is socialisation processes that encourage women to be more sensitive to the feelings of others and to maintain positive relationships (Tannen, 1990, p. 69).

However, the relationship between gender and indirectness is complex and depend on various contextual factors such as the context of the communication, the relationship between the speakers, and the topic being discussed. In a study conducted by Kádár and Haugh (2013), it was observed that women exhibited a higher tendency to utilize indirect language compared to men when making requests to strangers. However, this gender difference disappeared when making requests to acquaintances.

9. Data Collection

The present study was a qualitative data-collected method through smartphone recording app during family, friends, and relative gatherings. The study includes the analysis of 5 extracts that have been chosen out of 35 recordings. The five extracts were chosen as being the most comprehensible conversations as well as being the most appropriate for the academic research.

10. Data Analysis

Extract 1

A conversation between a father and his son; the son is annoying his father and nagging to let him play Xbox and the father is trying to make his son (seven-years old) stop his unacceptable behaviour.

Father: أبني، يكفي تلح، كوي غاح ينلغي الإكس بوكس

(son, stop nagging, or I will cancel your playtime)

Son: ما قدلح

(I am not nagging)

Father: مبلي قتلح، تغيد أسميك سارة ؟

(Yes, you are. Do you want me to call you Sara?!)

Son: لا

(No!)

The extract above starts with the father's utterance threatening his son to cancel his playtime. In his second utterance, the father makes a request realized by an interrogative form. However, this direct request is not the intended illocutionary force, as it makes no sense to call someone by another person's name. According to the model adopted, the process of identifying the indirect meaning and the motive behind using it requires, at first, recognizing that the literal illocutionary force is not intended; thus, this literal meaning (request) is not intended; but it will be used to arrive at the intended non-literal meaning. The second stage involves figuring out the intended illocutionary force; the hearer creates an inference to move away from the literal meaning towards the intended illocutionary force. The father's second utterance seems to flout the relevance maxim. Thus, the utterance is to be interpreted as a "threat" to stop "nagging," as the first utterance (stop nagging) did not

work as the son kept behaving in an unacceptable way. The son would definitely hate to be called after his sister for acting like her. As a father, he is responsible for regulating his child's behaviour; his second utterance (indirect illocutionary force) seems to be more effective than the direct one; by using this intended utterance, the father managed to stop the son's nagging and he also managed to regulate his behaviour.

Extract 2

Family playing card game, the parents with two kids, a boy (eight-years old) and a girl (four-years old).

A son: أغيد مرة اللخ نلعب أنا و أنت فريق

(Next time, I want you to team up with me.)

A Father: والله اذا تصيغ عاقل هكذ دائما نلعب و نصيغ أنا وأنت فريق الرجال، ولو مرات

قنصيغ فريق الأطفال

(If you keep behaving well, we can be the men's team, although sometimes we make the kid's team)

When the card game with the family is over, the son, who is eight-years old, asks his father to form a team with him the next time they play. The father replies with a promise that if his son keeps behaving well, they will form the men's team, although sometimes they form the kid's team. However, the literal illocutionary force differs from what the speaker wants to convey. According to background knowledge, it is impossible for a man to be a kid and vice versa; thus, there is a hidden message behind the father's words. The hearer (the eight-year old son) realizes the hidden meaning of his father's utterance, because he is familiar with this kind of expressions which are normally used by his father. The father in this utterance, firstly, compliments his son's attitude by comparing him to a man saying "we will form the men's team" and, then, he criticizes his negative attitude when he says "we form a team of kids" comparing his childish behaviours with his kids'. The father's motive behind violating the quantity maxim in this utterance is to regulate his son's behaviour by praising his son's attitude and encouraging him to behave as a man by acting maturely; it is also a reminder for the speaker himself of his immature actions as he

sometimes acts like a child; by admiring the kid's manners and confessing that even adults (fathers) make childish mistakes, the child will grow up with more self-confidence and trust in himself and in his father; he will learn to admit his own faults.

This father, as a male, tries to create a stronger bond with his son even if he has to criticize himself in front of his child, simply to teach his son how to behave and confess his mistakes.

Extract 3

A family is in their car having a conversation when the father addresses his five-years old daughter.

A father: بنتي ليش ويقفي ؟ ما عدغشع كلشي، كوي أكو شي بالسيارة أسمو مقعد

(My daughter, why are you standing? I cannot see anything; you know there is a thing in the car called a seat)

In this situation, the father repeatedly asks his children to sit in their seats. There are two illocutionary forces in this extract. The first one is when the father asks the little girl, "Why are you standing?" and the second (which is assertive) is when he states that there is a seat in the car. These literal forces are not intended. The hearer (daughter) can easily recognize that the speaker in the first sentence is not asking her about the reason for standing in the car, and in the second statement that there are seats in the car. Since standing in the car will distract the driver, the hearer will realize that the speaker is asking her to sit down and that is the ulterior meaning. So, the indirectly intended non-literal force is a directive act performed by the speaker (father) to the hearer (daughter) in order to sit down. Also, by performing indirectness, the speaker is flouting the quantity maxim here because he should be more informative. The father here uses a simple sarcasm in order to regulate his daughter's behaviour. This kind of motivating behaviour (regulation) would affect the child's attitude better than a direct order as the child will feel less controlled and think it is more of a request than a command.

Extract 4

A conversation between a mother and her elder daughter (six-years old).

A mother: عفية بنتي، بعد بعد تعالي يم أختكي حتى تعديها، عفية

(Good job, daughter! Come closer to your sister, so you pass her the infection, good job)

A daughter: بس دحضنها

(I am just giving her a hug.)

The extract above involves an utterance of a mother addressing her six-year-old daughter. In this utterance, the mother is attempting to urge her daughter to come near her baby sister, so the baby gets infected with the flu, and she uses an encouraging expression, "Good job," to do so. The situation seems entirely wrong and unbelievable. Therefore, according to background knowledge, the hearer (the six-year-old daughter) knows that infecting her four-month-old sister with the flu is not a good idea. Thus, the literal meaning of the speaker's (the mother) utterance is obviously not intended. The speaker seems to be flouting the quality maxim as she employs irony in order to regulate her daughter's behaviour. By using irony, she is scolding her elder daughter as she is being undisciplined and not listening to her mother's order to move away from her baby sister, because the baby girl would get sick. Using indirectness here can be more effective than a direct order; this strong utterance leaves a strict message to the daughter that she will surely make her baby sister ill even if this behaviour is only an act of love for her sister.

Extract 5

A mother and her two children (nine-years old and five-years old) are sitting in the living room and watching television.

A mother addressing her son: عبود حبيبي، صوت التلفزيون ما عيلي؟

(Abood my love, the television is too loud, isn't it?!)

A son: هسة أنصينو

(I will turn it down.)

This excerpt involves a simple conversation between a mother and her son sitting in the living room. The mother starts by performing a directive speech act realized by a simple question, asking her son, "the television is too loud, isn't it?" However, this interrogative form does not represent the speaker's (the mother) actual intention; the speaker's intended meaning is not to inquire about the volume of the television, whether it is high or low, as she can hear the television's volume. Based on the hearer's response, "I will turn it down," it is clear that the hearer (nine-years-old) immediately recognizes his mother's non-literal illocutionary force, which is an indirect request for him to turn the volume down. The speaker flouts the quantity maxim (being less informative than she should be); by this indirect motivating behaviour (regulation), the mother attempts to regulate her child's behaviour as it is her responsibility, as a mother, to do so.

Turning a command (turn the volume down) into an indirect request would stimulate the politeness sense in the child's personality, so he learns to request things politely other than making direct orders to others.

Parents are responsible for raising their children properly and managing how they speak, act and behave. They use different linguistic styles in order to regulate their children's behaviours. The extracts

above represent conversations between parents with their children. They use indirect speech acts to convey certain messages to their children in order to regulate their behaviours.

The analysis shows that, as parents, males and females differ in how they interact with their children. According to the conversations above, men are inclined to use sarcasm with a sense of humour to prove that they are in control of the conversation; they may also include themselves when criticizing their children's behaviours to have an impact in the children that people do make mistakes, but what matters is that they reform their attitudes.

Females, on the other hand, seem to take the act (regulation) more seriously than males, as males add their sense of humour to it. Mothers, as females, would stimulate certain aspects in their children's personalities by taking things more seriously and without criticizing themselves. However, although parents can use their power to set orders to their children, both genders, with their roles as parents, use indirect speech acts because it seems to be more effective than direct forms; they believe that it would leave an expression in the child that giving direct orders does not always work. It has been found, by looking at the children's responses, that they find no difficulty in interpreting indirectness due to the hypothesis that children who are used to deal with indirectness can easily comprehend it.

11. Conclusion

The present study sheds light on gender differences in the use of indirectness in Mosuli Arabic interaction within the context of parenting. The study highlights that fathers and mothers use indirectness differently with their children, and that indirect speech acts may be more effective in regulating children's behaviour than direct speech acts. The analysis of conversations between parents and children have revealed that fathers tend to use sarcasm and humour to prove their control over the conversation, while mothers take the act of regulation more seriously. The findings provide some insights into the role of indirectness in communication and contribute, to some degree, to our understanding of gender differences in language use within the context of parenting.

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