

Gender Differences in Advice-giving among Jordanian Undergraduate Students at BAU

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the differences in the understanding of how to give advice among Jordanian male and female students at Al- Balqa' Applied University (henceforth, BAU). In addition, it aims to provide explanations of these prominent differences between the two participating groups. Hinkel's (1997) Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) is used as a data collection instrument. The questionnaire is translated into Arabic to ensure that participants truly comprehend the situations. Results demonstrate that there are differences between the two participating groups. For example, Jordanian male students favour to give advice indirectly more than using hedge advice, direct advice and opting out in both peer acquaintance and instructor situations. On the other hand, Jordanian female students prefer to use hedge advice in responding to both peer acquaintance and instructor situations more frequently than using direct advice, indirect advice and opting out. The present study concludes with a discussion of essential directions for future research.

Keywords: advice-giving, gender, Jordanians, MCQ, speech act

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Introduction

In many cultures, advice or singular a piece of advice undoubtedly refers to the good intention of the speaker trying to express what the addressee should do in a particular situation or what is good for him/her. It can be formal as a recommendation or informal as an opinion. Moreover, the advice is a very polite form of language communication. The advice also is a human trait that makes the social relations and communications move smoothly and become stronger. Giving advice is related to people who are superior, not in social or economic status, rather in their behaviour, experience and knowledge. Those are the ones who understand that helping others is just as good as helping themselves.

Although gender interacts with other social factors such as occupation, place of residence, education, income, racial or ethnic origin, cultural background, caste, religion, status, class, role of the speaker in an interaction, and formality of the contexts, there are cases in which gender is the main issue accounting for speech variation. There have been several pragmatic studies examining different speech acts including apology, request, and refusal. However, very little research has been conducted on the speech act of advice (Nydell, 1987; El-Sayed, 1990; Kuo, 1996; Hinkel, 1997; Al-Shboul, Maros, & Subakir, 2012; Al-Shboul & Zarei, 2013). As a result, a limited number of definitions were provided of what advice giving is. For instance, Searle (1969) indicates that the speaker believes that he/she will do a good deed to the hearer because both the speaker and the hearer are not sure that the act will be done by the hearer without advice being given. In addition, Brown and Levinson (1987) notice that the differences among cultures and the social factors like social status and distance between both speaker and hearer, gender, and politeness as being suitable in a certain culture result in different degrees to which advice is a face-threatening act.

To the researchers' best knowledge, there has been no study demonstrating gender differences in advice giving among Jordanian undergraduate students. Previous research on Jordanian advice giving (Al-Shboul et al., 2012) is investigated from a cross-cultural perspective where all of the learners are males since gender is not examined in this research as a variable. Thus, it seems to be valuable to investigate how Jordanian undergraduate students recognise the speech act of advice giving that would have a useful contribution to cross cultural and gender contrastive studies. To put it another way, the study presents gender as a basic variable to investigate the dissimilarities of the understanding of the advice speech act by Jordanian male and female students at BAU. The researchers aim to show how the speakers' perception of advice giving can be influenced by gender.

Literature Review

The speech act of advice giving has not been explored thoroughly but in a limited number of studies (Nydell, 1987; El-Sayed, 1990; Kuo, 1996; Hinkel, 1997; Al-Shboul, Maros, & Subakir, 2012; Al-Shboul & Zarei, 2013). The following paragraphs highlight a brief overview of studies carried out on the speech act of advice in different linguistic and cultural speech communities.

Kuo (1996) examines gender and differences in advice giving and how gender can be an influential variable in terms of the happening of advice giving and its form and style. Results show differences between male and female speakers. For example, female speakers tend to offer advice

to listeners of the same sex by means of different linguistic forms such as sentences with modal auxiliaries or hedge, and justifications with advice form to express advice. By contrast, only four imperative forms of advice either seriously or jokingly are expressed by male speakers in their conversations.

In another cross-cultural study, Hinkel (1997) investigates the differences in the production and perception of advice giving. A discourse completion test (DCT) designed by the researcher is used to collect the production data. In addition, a Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) is used to collect perception data from the participants. Forty Taiwanese Chinese and forty American native speakers of English participate in the study. The results of the study reveal that native speakers favour direct and hedged advice notably more than do non-native speakers when responding to DCT situations. However, the researcher argues that the DCTs may not necessarily be an appropriate instrument for first language (L1) and second language (L2) data. In response to MCQ, however, NSs select significantly less option of direct or hedge advice than do NNSs, which is in accordance with the theoretical assumptions. Hence, the significance of this study appears of being the first of its kind to compare two data collection instruments (DCT and MCQ) in the framework of advice giving research.

In Iranian context, Al-Shboul and Zarei (2013) investigate the differences in capturing the suitability of giving advice in English among Iranian Persian English as a foreign language (EFL) male and female students. The researchers use Hinkel's (1997) Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) to collect data from the participants. The questionnaire includes number of questions where participants are required to give advice or to opt out to situations with a peer acquaintance (equal status) and an instructor (higher status). The findings of the study show that the two participating groups' perceptions of social distance in the situations with peer acquaintance and instructor are different. In addition, the learners differ in the types of advice they use as the proper option. For example, male group tends to use indirect advice in both situations more than the other three options. On the other hand, female group prefers hedge advice more frequently than the other three options in both peer acquaintance and instructor situations.

In Arabic context, El-Sayed (1990) indicates that in Arabic culture the speech act of advice giving is seen as a matter of friendliness and also to a great extent carries kindness and care. Moreover, Nydell (1987) notes that what is accepted in one culture may not be in another, and subjects about one's family members, job, academic qualification, salary, health, and other personal matters are freely discussed. Hence, Arabs would be confused of refusing advice because it is regarded as private matters in American culture. These two studies are significant because the lack of discussion about advice giving in Arabic context. Yet, the researchers do not provide information about the data collection method or how the data are transcribed.

In Jordanian context, Al-Shboul et al. (2012) compare how native speakers of American English and Jordanian EFL students perceive the speech act of advice giving in English. The participants of the study involve twenty native speakers of American English and twenty Jordanian EFL learners. An adopted version of Hinkel's (1997) Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) is used to collect participants' data. The questionnaire consists of eight situations where participants are required to provide advice or to opt out to situations with a peer acquaintance (equal status) and

an instructor (higher status). The results of the study reveal that both groups capture in the same way the social distance of a peer acquaintance and an instructor situations. By contrast, they are not the same regarding the types of advice they provide as the suitable option. This study is important because it is one of a rarely Arabic speech act of advice as perceived by Jordanian EFL students. However, the study has focused on advice giving from a cross-cultural viewpoint only where all of the learners are males since gender is not studied in this research as a variable.

As the previous paragraphs have shown, the speech act of advice giving may differ according to several social factors including the gender and the cultural background of the participants. Moreover, it can be seen that the major number of studies that have been conducted on the speech act of advice giving do not emphasize gender as a main variable. Therefore, it seems to be helpful to examine the differences in the perception of the speech act of advice giving among Jordanian male and female students at BAU. This will be the gap where the present study will handle.

The Study

This study aims to examine the different perceptions of advice giving among Jordanian male and female students at BAU. Moreover, it aims to provide explanations of these prominent differences between the two participating groups. The study basically focuses on the gender variable and its effect on how the speaker captures advice giving. The concept of gender is employed to make clear categories with social construction with regard to sex. It has been a controversial issue whether gender has an influence on the communication style of the speaker. For example, Brend (1975) finds that men tend to use some patterns related to surprise and politeness less frequently than women do. Besides, Sukyadi and Ayu (2011) state that gender and language emphasise on the features utilized by men and women. In other words, how the stereotype towards gender works in their preference of language styles. The findings of these studies reveal that men and women usually resort to dissimilar linguistic styles in which men's speech differ from that of women. The main concern of the present study is to shed light on how Jordanian male and female students at BAU recognise the speech act of advice giving. Consequently, the related research question appeared from the literature is whether there are dissimilarities between the two groups taking part in the study.

Methodology

Participants

The participants to the present study include 100 undergraduate students at BAU. The participants involve 50 females and 50 males whose age ranged from 18-22 years old. All the participants are Jordanian Arabic. They also are from the central region of Jordan and pursuing different academic majors in the college of business (e.g. Accounting, finance).

Instrument and Procedure

The researchers of the current study use Hinkel's (1997) Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) as the data collection instrument. To guarantee that participants truly grasped the situations, the questionnaire is translated into Arabic by the researchers who are native speakers of Jordanian Arabic. Then, three professors of linguistics in the department of English language and literature at BAU check the accuracy of translation. The researchers also briefly describe the characters involved in the questionnaire situations as the following: a higher social status represented by an

instructor at college who is professionally well-known by the participants, and a peer acquaintance. The questionnaire contains eight situations that need giving advice or opting out. More specifically, four of these situations are intended to the higher social status and four to the peer acquaintance. Three randomly ordered MC options are followed by each situation: (1) direct advice including the model “should,” (2) indirect comments with no advice giving or providing suggestions, and (3) hedged advice with the expressions of “need to” or other softeners or hedging advices, lexical hedging (“may be, I think”), or questions. Opting out is the fourth obvious option that remains the same for all choices. Examples of direct advice, indirect comments, and hedge advice are illustrated in (A) to (C), respectively:

- A. You should buy the book at the other store. This store has high prices
- B. This store has high prices
- C. May be, it’s not a good idea to buy the book here. This store has high prices

The researchers run the questionnaire at BAU’s main campus located in Al-Salt, Jordan. Al-Balqa’ Electronic Academy building is the location where the researchers meet the participants. The following are the procedures of how the questionnaire is administrated: (1) the researchers clarify the tasks to the participants briefly; and (2) the participants are required to read each situation carefully and react to it by placing themselves in the given situations. Then, they are required to select the most appropriate option of these statements or questions. In conclusion, the researchers analyse the data in terms of percentage and frequency for each MC option in each situation. To put it another way, the choices of the participants of the MC responses are computed and then converted into percentages (see Table 1).

Results and Discussion

The question that emerged from the present study aims to discover whether there are different perceptions of advice giving between Jordanian male and female students at BAU. Consequently, the results reveal the presence of gender differences between both groups of participants. Generally speaking, the participants’ perception of the social distance is different in a peer acquaintance and an instructor situations. In addition, the two participating groups are not the same in the form of advice they select as the proper option. In both situations, indirect advice is the most frequently used option by male students as compared to the other three options (direct advice, hedge advice, and opting out). With respect to female students, the participants tend to select hedge advice more frequently than the other three options in both peer acquaintance and instructor situations.

The findings are in agreement with those reported in other advice studies such as Kuo (1996). For instance, Kuo (1996) finds that female speakers tend to offer advice to listeners of the same sex by means of different linguistic forms such as sentences with modal auxiliaries or hedge, and explanations with advice form to express advice. By contrast, only four imperative forms of advice either seriously or jokingly are expressed by male speakers in their conversations. In addition, Al-Shboul and Zarei (2013) conclude that Iranian Persian EFL male learners select indirect advice rather than the other three options in both peer acquaintance and instructor situations. On the other hand, hedge advice is the most frequently selected option in both peer acquaintance and instructor situations by female learners as compared to direct advice, indirect advice and opting out options.

Table 1. MCQ Data

Situation	Direct	Hedge	Indirect	Nothing
Peer acquaintance				
1. Unreliable car	M 29 (58) F 27 (54)	M 11 (22) F 16 (32)	M 8 (16) F 7 (14)	M 2 (4) F 0 (0)
2. Academic course	M 8 (16) F 4 (8)	M 12 (24) F 22 (44)	M 29 (58) F 21 (42)	M 1 (2) F 3 (6)
3. Repair shop	M 8 (16) F 11 (22)	M 14 (28) F 22 (44)	M 28 (56) F 17 (34)	M 0 (0) F 0 (0)
4. Library	M 8 (16) F 1 (2)	M 19 (38) F 41 (82)	M 20 (40) F 3 (6)	M 3 (6) F 5 (10)
Instructor				
1. Library	M 8 (16) F 2 (4)	M 7 (14) F 33 (66)	M 22 (44) F 8 (16)	M 13 (26) F 7 (14)
2. Illness	M 12 (24) F 19 (38)	M 23 (46) F 25 (50)	M 15 (30) F 6 (12)	M 0 (0) F 0 (0)
3. Bookstore	M 8 (16) F 10 (20)	M 22 (44) F 24 (48)	M 16 (32) F 12 (24)	M 4 (8) F 4 (8)
4. Restaurant	M 11 (22) F 27 (54)	M 8 (16) F 14 (28)	M 31 (62) F 9 (18)	M 0 (0) F 0 (0)

Note: percentages given in brackets, with frequency amount is recorded in each cell

Regarding peer acquaintance situations, table 1 shows that direct advice option is used more frequently by male students than their female counterparts in three out of four situations. More specifically, males tend to be more direct in *Unreliable Car*, *Academic Course*, and *Library* situations. Yet, they tend to choose direct advice option less frequently than female students do in the situation of *Repair Shop*. Even though both participating groups' perceptions of direct advice are different, these differences are not significant. For example, both participating groups' selection of direct advice in the *Unreliable Car* situation is almost the same: male students 58% and female students 54%. By contrast, the differences between the two participating groups appear to be prominent in the *Library* situation as 16% of males use the option of direct advice while only 2% of the females select that option.

On the other hand, female students tend to choose hedge advice in all situations with peer acquaintance more than their male counterparts. For instance, the differences between male and female students appear significantly in the *Library* situation as only 38% of males select hedge advice options while 82% of females choose the same option. However, the female students select the indirect advice options in all situations with peer acquaintance less frequently than their male counterparts. For example, only 6% of females tend to use indirect advice options in the *Library* situation compared to 40% of males who select the same option. The researchers would attribute the choices made by the participants to the concept of face. Hence, male students would understand the speech act of advice giving in their conversations as a face threatening act. So, they either try not to give advice or do it in a bad way. On the other hand, female students would understand the same speech act in their conversation positively and use it to reflect different stylistic and linguistic devices to keep equality and rapport.

According to Baca (2011), the people engaged in the conversation commented on his partiality for the advice of females, which he ascribes to the care and concern of the people taking part in the conversation. Thus, these comments would be made because both the speaker and the hearer expect different interpersonal communication style between males and females when giving advice.

Regarding the instructor's situations, the female students choose the direct advice option more than their male counterparts in three out of four situations. More specifically, the option of direct advice is used less frequently by female students (4%) than males (16%) in only one situation (Library situation). However, the situations of *Illness*, *Book Store*, and *Restaurant* are used more directly by female students than males. These results are in accordance with those reported by Al-Shboul and Zarei (2013) where Iranian male students' frequency selection of direct advice is only less than their female counterparts in the *Library* situation. Hence, female students tend to use more direct advice in the other three options (Illness, Book Store, and Restaurant). Fishman (1978) indicates that men's speech is characterised by traits like statement aiming to make less emphasis on any further talk. On the other hand, ensuring reaction is the main purpose in the formal style of women's speech such as asking question. It would be revealed from the present study that Jordanian females capture direct advice as a sign of kindness, care, sincere, and building a stronger relationship with their instructor.

As is the case with peer acquaintance situations, the option of hedge advice is used more frequently in the all instructor's situations by female students than their male counterparts do. Even though both groups of participants varied in their selections of hedge advice option, these differences appear to be negligible in 2 out of 4 situations (Illness and Book Store). In other words, both male and female students' perceptions have mainly the same percentages at 44% of males and 48% of females select hedge advice in the *Illness* situation and 22% of males and 24% of females select the same option in the *Book Store* situation. Though, both groups of participants show significant differences in the *Library* situation as only 14% of males select the option of hedge advice while 66% of females use that option. The findings are similar to those reported by Al-Shboul and Zarei (2013) who find that 12 out of 20 female students tend to use the hedge advice option compared to only 3 out of 20 male students who select the same option. The researchers attribute the reasons for similarities with the findings from the present study to religious similarity and collectivist cultural orientation. The cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism is one of the four cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1991). Jordan and Iran are typically classified as collectivistic cultures, and the U.S. and the Europe countries typically are classified as individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 1991).

Finally, the male students' selection of indirect advice is more than females do in the all instructor's situations. For instance, 62% of male students select the option of indirect advice as compared to only 18% of female students who select the same option in the *Restaurant* situation. The researchers believe that the differences in the selection of indirect advice options between the two participating groups would be explained in terms of their perception of the status. In other words, while status matters are recognised as significant by males, they appear to be comparatively less significant for females who tend to select more direct advice.

The researchers would like to emphasize on a number of pedagogical implications in lights of the results of the current study. For example, school curricula should take in consideration the different perception of speech act by male and female students. More specifically, it could be valuable to teach learners how speech act strategies are not perceived in the same way by Jordanian male and female students. For instance, giving examples of how advice giving differs among male and female learners. Finally, the researchers would like to highlight that school curricula should pay attention to the socio pragmatic aspects of the language rather than the structures and lexical knowledge.

Conclusion and Future Research

In the current study, the results shed light on the different perceptions of advice giving by Jordanian undergraduate students at BAU. In addition, the present study has shown that Jordanian male and female students differ in the forms of advice they select as the proper choice. Even though the present study has mostly answered the research question, more research on advice giving in Jordan context are required to be investigated (examining the pragmatic transfer and the production of advice giving). While the results of the present study can be generalised, they are constrained with a number of considerations including the following:

Only participants from the central region of Jordan are randomly chosen to participate in the present study. As a result, this does not guarantee that the participants have been representative of all Jordanian native speakers of Arabic. Moreover, the number of participants includes only 50 females and 50 males whose age ranged from 18-22 years old. The present study could reveal different findings with population with different age groups, economic, and educational backgrounds. Therefore, these results should not be deemed final and probably not generalizable to other social contexts or participants with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, the researchers believe that using only one instrument to collect the data is not sufficient to give deep understanding of every phase of the Jordanian advice strategies. Therefore, using real discourse data such as observing a long turn-taking conversation could contribute to a better understanding of the discourse patterns of giving advice. As we cannot predict the occurrence of some speech acts including the speech act of advice giving, relying on a long turn-taking conversation data would not result in adequate examples of a specific speech act. Also, MCQ are primarily used to elicit participants' perception data, which is the scope of the current study. In conclusion, researchers who are interested to conduct speech act studies in the future are highly recommended to begin where this study ended. Hence, those researchers could investigate the limitations of the present study by including situations representing a larger number of social settings (e.g., shopping malls, marketplaces, meetings and conference).

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