

A Comparative Study of the Speech Act of Ordering: A Case Study in English Language between English Native Speakers and Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study tried to take a step in analyzing the speech act of ordering as a distinct case in the researches done about speech acts. It aimed at investigation of students' performance of speech act of ordering and its similarities and differences between English native speakers and Iranian EFL learners. To this end, a DCT consisting of 20 different situations was distributed among 150 participants in Iran and the United State. Data were analyzed by employing percentage and chi-square. The results revealed both similarities and differences in using speech act of ordering in such a way that both native speakers and Iranian EFL learners used almost the same strategies for ordering but differed in the frequency of applying them.

Keywords: English native speakers, Iranian EFL learners, Pragmatic competence, Speech act of ordering.

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1. Introduction

The significant role of communication in English language learning and teaching has led to a large number of studies on elements involved in communication. This in turn has entailed the development of pragmatics and speech acts as one of its subcategories which has long been of interest of researchers (e.g. Allwood, 1978; Dietz & Widdershoven, 1991; Vanderveken & Kubo, 2001). Speech act theory has known to be introduced by John Austin (1962) by "How to do things with words". Since then the crucial role of speech acts in appropriate language use has been focused on (Schmidt and Richards, 1980). The term 'verbs of communication' was used by Allwood (1978) instead of speech act verbs since, she claimed, there were aspects of communication to which verbs referred that were not always connected with speech. In fact, as Schmidt and Richards (1980) claimed explanation of communicative competence is the main contribution of speech act theory.

Searle (1976) developed five major speech acts as examples of language use and communication. These components are as follow:

- I. Representatives: commit the speaker to the truth of something (including asserting, claiming, reporting).
- II. Directives: reflect attempts of the speaker to get the hearer to do something (including ordering, commending, requesting, suggesting).
- III. Commissives: commit the speaker to do some future action (including promising, offering, threatening).
- IV. Expressives: express a psychological state (including congratulating, apologizing, complimenting).
- V. Declaratives: cause correspondence between the propositional content and reality (including appointing a chairman, marrying a person, and christening).

Many scholars discussed that speech act strategies are to some extent universal (e.g. Brown & Levinson, 1978; Matsumoto, 1988; Yu, 2003). However, learners should learn particular applications of universal forms which are different across different cultures. Social distance,

degree of power, and ranking of imposition in a special culture need to be considered performing a speech act of any kind (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Schmit and Richards (1980) also mentioned that learners need to be aware of certain contexts associated with certain speech acts. All these highlight the importance of politeness in regard to speech act. Speech act of ordering is especially in touch with face threatening acts. According to Lavric (2007, p. 29),

An order threatens the positive and the negative face of the addressee by infringing on his/her social status and constraining his/her freedom of action; on the other hand it enhances, if obeyed, the negative face or territory of the speaker because the speaker gets something done by somebody else. The positive face of the speaker might also get enhanced in terms of the image of self-power, but it might equally get threatened should s/he be considered too authoritarian or imposing, or should the order simply be ignored.

Lavric (2007, p. 30) stated “language competence may simply be equaled with freedom of action in one particular language”. Therefore, it is necessary for learners of a foreign language to be aware of which speech acts are threatening in a special culture in order to save face and not to be called rude. The awareness of proper speech acts in proper contexts can be achieved through instruction and examples of how certain speech acts are performed and interpreted in a second language.

As one of the daily used speech acts, speech act of ordering needs certain attention especially because it is closely connected with face keeping. Despite this fact, no considerable number of studies has been done about speech act of ordering. It has been often mentioned only as examples in other speech acts studies (e.g. Allwood, 1978; Bach & Harnish, 1982; Lavric, 2007; Harrison, 2008; König & Siemund, n.d.; Jalilifar et al, 2011).

Speech act of ordering is often investigated under the term ‘imperatives’, including requests, suggestions, and commands. However, it is often the speech act of request and suggestion which grab researchers’ attention and speech act of commands is ignored as a distinct case and left untouched in pragmatic aspect. Therefore, considering the importance of politeness in using speech act of ordering, it is crucial to study this speech act in terms of its usage, its variation in different cultures, its place in educational settings, classrooms and teaching materials. To this end, this study is devoted to investigate the difference and variations of speech act of ordering between Persian and English by analyzing its production in English native speakers and English language learners.

The question this study tries to answer is if there is any significant difference between Iranian students who learn English and English native speakers who participated in this study, in frequency of strategies used for giving orders. Also, it tries to find out how they differ qualitatively in using speech act of ordering.

2. Review of literature

Speech act theory emerged in 1960s by Austin's (1962) introduction of speech acts and the notion of locutionary (literal meaning), illocutionary (intended meaning), and perlocutionary (actual effect) acts and accordingly felicity conditions were proposed by Austin (1962) and formulated by Searle (1976, as cited in Renkema, 2004). It was then Searle's (1976) categorization of different speech acts and Grice's (1975) maxims which earmarked for discussions and studies of the time (e.g. Wunderlich, 1980; Young, 1989).

Direct and indirect speech acts were recognized and great number of researches were devoted to recognizing them within speech types (e.g. Clark, 1979; Brown, 1980; Cheng & Warren, 2003).

Politeness theory suggested by Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1978) and Leech (1983) proved to be a leading notion in communication and grabbed attention of many researchers and a lot of studies have been done since then (e.g. Navratilova, 2005; Chakorn, 2006; Rashidi & Sammahnejad, 2006; Ahangar & Amou Ali Akbari, 2007; Mishra, 2011; Behnam & Niroomand, 2011).

Great number of studies has been done about different types of speech acts examining variables such as proficiency, gender, cultural background, effect of instruction and so forth (e.g. Martinez-Flor, 2003; Farina, Buchheit and Salim, 2010; Han, 2012). Among them there are studies which compare Iranian EFL learners' performance with those of target language such as Janani (1996) who studied failure in expressing gratitude between Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers and found out variation among expressions used by the two.

In another study, Yaghoobi (2002) investigated the patterns of request in email writing among Persian native speakers, Persian EFL learners and English native speakers. The result of his study showed similarities at the main level between English natives and Iranian learners.

Politeness perception of request forms was explored between Persian EFL learners and American native speakers by Abdolrezapour and Eslami-Rasekh (2010). The result revealed difference in perceiving interlocutors' power but not in perceiving request realization.

In a similar study Ahmadian and Dastjerdi (2010) compared Iranian EFL learners and Americans in the realization of reprimand speech act to investigate social power and distance. The findings of this study made it clear that social power was significant in Iranian culture, while social distance was not significant in either culture.

Employment of speech act of gratitude between Persian EFL learners and English native speakers was examined by Ahar and Eslami-Rasekh (2011) and showed variation between two groups. Persian EFL learners demonstrated negative transfer from L1.

Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011) investigated speech act of suggestion to find differences and similarities between Persian and English suggestion strategies and found differences in three types of suggestion samples.

In a recent study, Samavarchi and Allami (2012) compared speech act of giving condolences in English and Persian and reported significant difference between English natives and EFL learners.

As reviewing the literature here reveals, speech act of ordering is ignored as a distinct case. To this end, this study is devoted to investigate the difference and variations of speech act of ordering between English native speakers and Iranian English language learners.

3. Method

To investigate speech act of ordering, a group of selected participants completed a special DCT and then the responses were analyzed as explained in following sections.

3.1 Participants

Overall 150 participants (adult male and female) consist of 30 English native speakers and 120 Persian EFL learners attended this study. The selection of number of participants was based on feasibility, especially in the case of English native speakers. They were intended to be American English native speakers. They were living in America, mostly in Colorado, Alabama and Arizona and took part in this study by answering the questionnaire they received by email. However, it

should be mentioned here that more than 600 requests were sent but only 32 were answered among which two did not meet the necessary criteria.

EFL learner participants were university students studying English translation or English teaching. They were studying in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and Emam Reza University, Iran. There were also advanced level students of Marefat and Allame English language institutes who took part in this study. The condition of not living in a foreign country was specified for this group of participants to remove the native English like knowledge of pragmatics.

Although age was not a variable in this study, participants all were selected among adults in order to make sure they were familiar with pragmatic features of communication in their own language. In the case of EFL learners, they were selected among advanced level students again to optimize the chance of familiarity with pragmatics during their years of studying English as a foreign language.

3.2 Materials

The DCT (Discourse Completion Test) was used for gathering data in this study. It was designed in two parts: the first part about personal information of participants which was used for screening the questionnaires and deciding if the participants met the conditions of the study.

The second part illustrated 20 different situations each of which including an individual ordering the other one(s) to perform an action. The situations varied in terms of settings and authorities to probe the actual behavior of respondents in different situations. Suitability of the situations and the questionnaire was examined and approved by two English language professors in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran.

An instruction on what a participant is supposed to do and how to complete the task was given accompanied by an example. In order to evoke the desired responses, they were explicitly asked to write an order for each situation.

3.3 Procedure

The DCT written in English was sent to American English speakers in America by email. They were either introduced by friends or friends' of friends or individuals contacted through their

email addresses available on university websites. Approximately 600 requests were sent during five months but only 32 among them cooperated.

The same version of DCT was distributed among students in universities and institutes in Iran. The instruction was orally explained and any arisen question was answered. Then they were asked to complete it which took about 10 to 20 minutes.

After collecting the data from both groups, responses were analyzed based on a 9-point rating scale by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) who claimed that “the categories on this scale are expected to be manifested in all languages studied” (p.201). This taxonomy has been widely used in speech act studies (e.g. Dalton-Puffer, 2003; Pishghadam & Rasouli, 2011; Shams & Afghari, 2011). Therefore, it was the best available taxonomy for this study considering that no one ever has developed a specific taxonomy for speech act of ordering and also because request is the most similar to the speech act of ordering. The categories of this taxonomy and an example mentioned by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, p.202) are illustrated in the table 1.

Table 1. Request strategy type

No	<i>Strategy type</i>	<i>Example</i>
1	Mood derivable	Clean up this mess, please.
2	Explicit performatives	I'm asking you not to park the car here.
3	Hedged performative	I would like you to give your lecture a week earlier.
4	Locution derivable	Madam, you'll have to move your car.
5	Scope stating	I really wish you'd stop bothering me.
6	Language specific suggestory formula	How about cleaning up.
7	Reference to preparatory condition	Could you clear up the kitchen, please?
8	Strong hints	You've left this kitchen in a right mess.
9	Mild hints	I'm a nun (in response to the persistent boy).

To analyze the responses, each sentence was decided to belong to which category by considering the lexicon and syntax of the sentence and comparing it with explanations and examples of the rating scale. The reliability of rating the data was examined by two English language professors in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran and modified again if necessary. The frequency and percentage of each category was calculated in both groups and presented in the form of tables and graphs.

To test the hypothesis of the study a test of chi-square was conducted to find out if there is any significant difference between strategies used for ordering among English native speakers and EFL learners. The findings were then analyzed syntactically, lexically and pragmatically and discussed accordingly. Some pedagogical suggestions were proposed.

4. Results

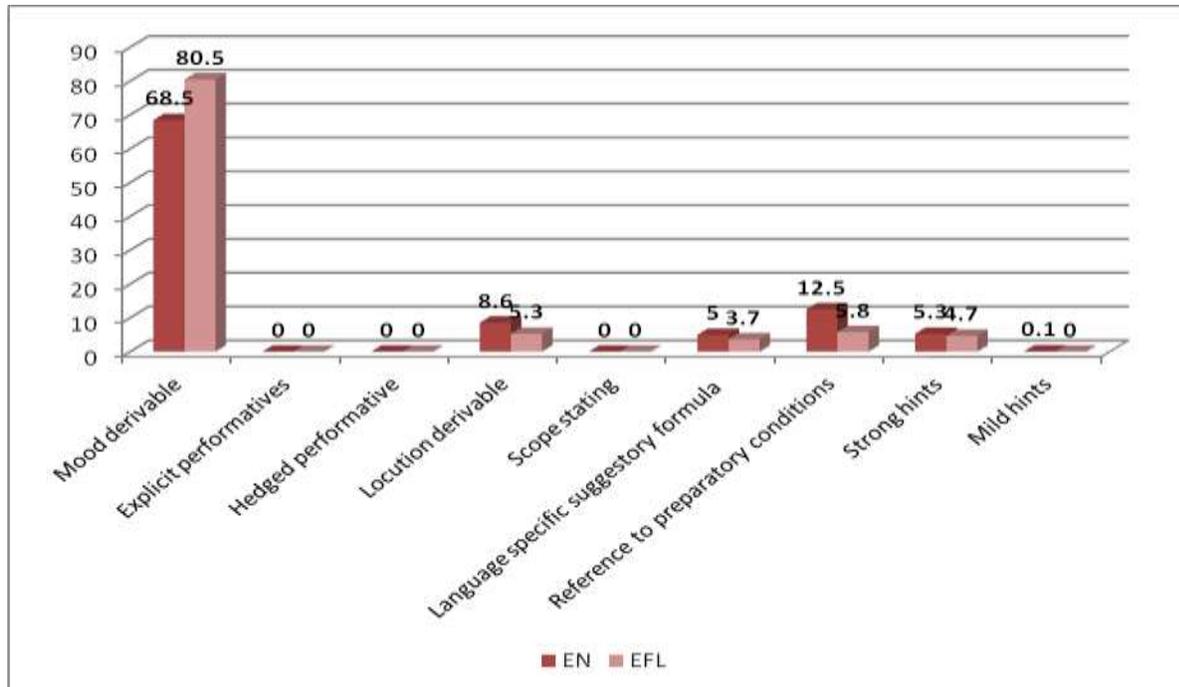
To answer the question of this study, English native speakers' and EFL learners' responses were categorized based on the 9-point rating scale Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and frequency and percentage of their responses were calculated as follow:

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of ordering by English natives and EFL Learners

Strategy type	English Natives		EFL Learners	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Mood derivable	411	68.5%	1932	80.5%
Explicit performatives	0	0	0	0
Hedged performative	0	0	1	0
Locution derivable	52	8.6%	126	5.3%
Scope stating	0	0	0	0
Language specific suggestory formula	30	5.0%	89	3.7%
Reference to preparatory conditions	74	12.5%	139	5.8%
Strong hints	32	5.3%	113	4.7%
Mild hints	1	0.1%	0	0
Total	600	100.0%	2400	100.0%

As table 2 reveals there are both similarities and differences in using strategies for ordering between English native speakers and EFL learners. The comparison of strategy use between English native speakers and EFL learners is illustrated in the following graph:

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Graph1. Percentage of strategies used by English natives and EFL learner

As it can be seen, both English native speakers and EFL learners had almost the same preferences in using strategies for giving orders. Both groups used ‘Mood derivable’ as the most commonly used strategy for giving order (68.5% and 80.5%). Some strategy types such as ‘Explicit performatives’, ‘Hedged performative’, and ‘Scope stating’ were not used by either groups.

Surprisingly, although English natives and EFL learners utilized a high percentage of ‘Mood derivable’ strategy, they both used ‘Reference to preparatory conditions’ (12.3% by ENs) and (5.8% by EFL learners) and then ‘Locution derivable’ (8.6% by ENs) and (5.3% by EFL learners) as the two frequently used strategies after ‘Mood drivable’. ‘Language specific suggestory formula’ was the third frequently used strategy type (5% by ENs) and (3.7% by EFL learners) after ‘Mood drivable’ by both groups of participants. ‘Mild hints’ was utilized only once by one EN speaker which means once in six hundred situations.

The difference in percentage of using the strategy types can be summarized as follow:

English natives: *Mood derivable (68.5%) > Reference to preparatory conditions (12.5%) > Locution derivable (8.6%) > Strong hints (5.3%) > Language specific suggestory formula (5%) > Mild hints (0.1%)*

EFL learners: *Mood derivable* (80.5%)> *Reference to preparatory conditions* (5.8%)> *Locution derivable* (5.3%)> *Strong hints* (4.7%)> *Language specific suggestory formula* (3.7%)> *Mild hints* (0%)

It is noticeable that EFL learners' strategy choice, except for 'Mood derivable', does not show much fluctuation among applied types with (5.8%) as the most and (3.7%) as the least frequently used strategy types after 'Mood derivable'. A test of chi-square conducted to find out if English natives and EFL learners' choice of strategies differs significantly.

Table 3. Chi-square results

	English Natives	EFL Learners
Chi-Square	1190.260	7071.280
df	5	5
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

As table 3 demonstrates, significant difference was revealed in choosing strategy types for issuing an order between English natives ($\chi^2 = 1190.26$, $p < .05$) and EFL learners ($\chi^2 = 7071.28$, $p < .05$).

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study intended to investigate how speech act of ordering is performed in English language by English native speakers and Iranian EFL learners and to probe the similarities and differences in their strategy use.

Result of this study revealed that there are both similarities and differences in the strategies English native speakers and Iranian EFL learners utilized to perform speech act of ordering. Both English native speakers and EFL learners used 'Mood derivable' category as the most commonly used strategy for giving orders, with a noticeably high priority compared to other categories.

Some strategy types such as 'Explicit performatives', 'Hedged performative', 'Scope stating' and 'Mild hints' were not used by either groups. The fact that either of groups used these strategy types might be indicating that speech act of ordering does not fall into some patterns. 'Explicit performatives' might add an extra threat by explicitly uttering the illocutionary force such as "I order you ...". 'Scope stating' and 'Mild hints' might be too indirect to be used for giving an order (see table below).

Table 4. Sample of answers by English natives and EFL Learners

No	Strategy type	English native speakers	Iranian EFL learners
1	Mood derivable	“Clean up your room, please.”	“Stop the car.”
2	Explicit performatives		
3	Hedged performative		“I’d like to have the batteries checked.”
4	Locution derivable	“I need you to finish the report before lunch time.”	“My batteries need to be checked, please.”
5	Scope stating		
6	Language specific suggestory formula	“Let’s move in a circle.”	“No more bricks should be here.”
7	Reference to preparatory condition	“Will you carry these bags to the car?”	“Would you please change the channel?”
8	Strong hints	“7’s ready to order.”	“Your time is up.”
9	Mild hints	“Table 7 has just been sat.”	

The most frequent used category of ordering, ‘Mood derivable’ includes imperative structures and downgraders in most cases. However, frequency of using downgraders was different between the groups. English native speakers hardly used an imperative structure without a downgrader, while EFL learners produced some sentences without a downgrader.

Regarding ‘language specific suggestory formula’ category, it was observed that no American native speaker used “*should*” for ordering, whereas EFL learners used the auxiliary “*should*” for ordering, probably as a result of semantic transfer of “*baayad*” (must) from L1. The following sentences are produced by Iranian EFL learners as two instances:

You should clean up as soon as possible.

Two minutes later, I should see you in the yard.

Only few number of EFL learners used “*let's*” to form a suggestory structure to order. Using “*should*” in large number of sentences and “*let's*” in few cases for ordering by EFL learners while both are categorized under ‘language specific suggestory formula’ indicates that EFLs are not really utilizing this term for suggesting. In fact, it is a negative transfer from L1 in which the function of the word has caused problem in production of correct speech ac of ordering. Insufficient instruction of a frequently used auxiliary, should, is a serious problem in English language teaching system, course books and classrooms and demands special attention of teachers and material developers.

Comparing the two groups of participants, it was noticeable that some EFL learners used only one type of strategy to order; the first category was used for all the 20 different situations. No variation or little variation was observed in EFL learners' responses while English native speakers used different strategies with more tendencies to use imperatives with downgrades. The fact that Persian EFL learners use one type of strategy for ordering in English language reveals insufficient L2 input and lack of instruction. This entails teachers' attention to explicit teaching of speech acts especially speech act of ordering and course book writers' attempt to provide more L2 input for their materials.

While collecting the data from American English native speakers, there were instances in which the participants expressed the cultural differences as comments either after or before they write a speech act of ordering for the situations in the questionnaire. Some American participants remarked that they do not usually order people; instead they prefer to request people to do things. This avoidance of using orders by English native speakers might be one of the reasons that speech act of ordering has not already been studied distinctly.

Moreover, in some cases they stated that their sentence would depend on who the person is and the quality of their relationship. For example, how long they had known each other or who was more experienced.

The cultural difference was more evident in one of the situations in the questionnaire in which participants were asked to order their driver to drive them home. Some American participants stated that they could not imagine having a driver or that it was not normal to have a driver there whereas there was no single case of trouble with having a driver for Iranian EFL learners.

Overall, it can be concluded that there are cultural differences between Iranian EFL learners and American English native speakers in giving orders and in their social values reflected in their pragmatic competence and that linguistic competence is not sufficient for achieving communicative competence which is in line with findings of other researchers, though in other speech acts (e.g. Abdolrezapour and Eslami-Rasekh, 2010; Ahmadian and Dastjerdi, 2010; Shams and Afghari, 2011). This enforces the need of considering sociocultural differences in teaching speech acts, especially speech act of ordering which is greatly different in the two languages.

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Appendix

Part one: Please answer these questions about yourself. The information you provide me is just to help me for a better analysis of the purpose of the study and won't be used for any other purposes.

Name (you may use any name, doesn't have to be factual):

Age: Education: Job:

Native language: Nationality:

Email (if you allow me to contact you for similar future studies):

Part two: Imagine yourself in each of these situations and order the other person to do what you say.

Example: Order a student to read along a text.

Answer: Sara, read page 10.

1. Order your students to answer the first question in their book.
2. Order your son to clean up his room.
3. Order the construction workers to remove the bricks from the site.
4. Order somebody to hurry up.
5. Order your driver to drive you home.
6. Order the babysitter not to let your child watch TV before doing his homework.
7. Order your employee to finish his report before lunch time.
8. Order your younger sibling to change the TV channel.
9. As a doctor in a hospital order a nurse to check the general condition of a patient.
10. Order the mechanic to check the batteries on your car.
11. As a police officer order a driver to stop the car.

12. Order your child not to play with his food.
13. As a judge order the defendant to finish his speech.
14. As an aerobics instructor order your trainees to move in a circle.
15. Order your soldiers to be in the yard in two minutes.
16. As a restaurant manager order a waiter to take the order of table number 7.
17. Order the janitor of school to clean the classrooms soon after the students leave.
18. Order your pet to go away.
19. Order a porter to carry your bags to your car.
20. Order your camera man to shoot a scene from a different angle.

Thank you for spending time on this questionnaire.