Using Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) To Analyse Polite Request Patterns: Developing Social Exchange Products

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Abstract: This paper focuses on identifying factors in classroom activity that reflect how English as a foreign language (EFL) is acquired in an educational setting in Iraq. It shows how the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) can be employed to improve ESL/EFL student's awareness of a complex process of socialization. First, the context of the teaching is briefly outlined. Second, analysis (systematic functional grammar) of one chosen sentence from the classroom activity will be presented. Next, a description of how the classroom activity is conductedwill be provided. Following, there will be a brief discussion of two affective factors underpinning the activity design. Finally, the anticipated errors that the learners would make during study and suggestion for their correction will be given.

Keywords: EFL/ESL students, Socialization-Polite request, Task-based activity, Affective factors

I.   Introduction

Foreign language teaching and learning is a complex process of socializationof the non-English speaking student. To accomplish better learning results, language teachers need to understand the nature of language and its acquisition. It is important then to recognise language learners as social beings. For example, for English as Foreign/Second Language students (ESL) to cope and function within an English-speaking educational context it is critical that they be familiar with the English used in education texts. In turn, this type of English must be able to relate to their daily lives in which they can see how to use English to navigate social roles and expectations. It is essential that the ESL/EFL student be aware of current language learning discourses so that they develop an understanding of how English is of use to them and their community, now and in the future. It is thus necessary for teachers of English to model systematic use of text and its real-world application.

II.   Teaching context

This theoretical study targets the third-year students of a public secondary school in Iraq for boys. They will be presented a task-based learning activity to use alongside their curriculum textbook, *English 5*. The fifth unit in the textbook provides instruction on grammar to change a command or imperative into a polite or indirect request. Traditionally, methods of teaching instruction have relied on memory techniques, such as structured role-play dialogue, pattern drills and text book exercises. This was an ideal method for the standardized exams; however, the technique lacked flexibility for real-world improvised conversations and functions. Students have reported their frustrations with these techniques which are often repetitious, boring and irrelevant to daily needs (Al_Seady 2006).

The potential earning activity for this task will utilize task-based teaching methods to involve students' interest and motivation. Research supports this approach to aiding language acquisition (Nunan 2007). Students are able to apply new knowledge to relevant circumstances in their own lives. The outcomes expected for the students in this study are to be able to;
1) Distinguish between polite and authoritative requests in English.
2) Understand the contexts in which to use a polite or authoritative request in English.

III.   Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) Revisited

Traditionally, the linguisticsdiscipline is being importantly involved in the relative small segments of a spoken language analysis and identification (Eggins 1994). Recently a number oflinguists started to consider thoughtfully the contexts and ways in which language is authentically being used, in trial to recognize other types of linguistic patterning than just those within sentence limitations. An important early study focused on

situational variationdiscussion of the context-of-situation (Malinowski, 1923, 296-336 cited in Eggins, 1994). The concept of "context-of-situation" thatwas further developed by Firth (cited in Eggins 1994), who analysed meaning in related to how language works in a provided context. He created a list of a series of variables that are continually present in the context of any social situation (meaningful interaction), for instance, the people who take part in a situation, the activity taking place or the result of that action.

Furthermore, Halliday has identified systematic correlations in the organization of language itself. Such as between the three types of meaning language organization can encode, these being field, tenor and mode, and specific contextual features, such as experiential, interpersonal, and textual (Eggins, 1994). Halliday (cited in Al Hamdany, 2012) stated that "The *field* is the social action in which the text is embedded, in other words, what is going on in a particular setting of space and time. It also includes what the interaction is about (the subject-matter) and what the participants know about it (shared knowledge)".

In his above study, Al Hamdany (2012) explained, depending on Martin's 1994 study, that "*Tenor"* is the mutual relationship between the participants who took part inalong a constancy of formality (starting from the most informal reaching to the most formal). The social circumstance massively impacts on the formalitystatus in a context, for instance the appropriateness andacceptabilityof words, actions and phrasesin accordance with the unlike situations. The "*mode"* isdealt with the act played by language in the situation; whichis particularly the language endeavouring to fulfil. The mode contains the avenue of communication utilised (spoken or written). A fewof likely situationsappear within a context by the way of mode hostility; texts that is written could be loudly or silently read, while texts that spoken could be preparedor spontaneous, and et cetera(Eggins 1994).

Halliday (cited in Martin et al 1997, p78) suggests thatlanguage choices are apparently influence by the variables ofregister since these variables reflect the three main aspects of the functions of language. These three aspects are; ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. First, ideational function is the represent of the utilises language to show knowledge and experience. It is recognised in "field" by grammar's "transitivity patterns". Second, the "interpersonal function" utiliseslanguage to create interpersonal relationships and reveal interaction. That is fulfilled within"tenor"by the mood pattern of grammar employed. Thirdand last, in order toarrange datatoward a comprehensible spoken and/or written text that is recognised in mode by theme model of grammar, the textual function uses language is utilised (Eggins 1994, p 78). Appropriately, if a word or grammar model and/or pattern choice is altered, the meaning of language will be frequently unlike as well.

Using SFG to analyse polite request sentence pattern
Systemic Functional Grammar was utilized to design the learning activity for this project. The aim of the activity is to instruct students as to the use of register variables in English. As a social function, this learning activity is concerned with how an imperative and polite request can be used by the students in an educational context. Even though the social function of both requests may be similar, in any circumstance the language choices are constrained by the three registers variables to reflect three different situational meanings.

The following textbook statement is the phrase which was analysed:
'*I would be grateful if you could answer me before 10th of July'*
The mark sentence is a complex projection sentence which contains two clauses by having one process projected through another by reporting (Martin et al. 1997, p. 172). The focus of the activity is represented by the field of the sentence that is the sentence involved in, say, and seeking information.

Furthermore, the sentence is providing a statement of the first person (first party). The experiential meaning of the sentence is recognised by, first, utilising the verbal transitivity and it demonstrates the implications of linguistic interacting with situational variation. For example, this sentence tentative meaning would be unlike if the speaker said, 'I would be grateful if you could report to me before 10th of July'. Thissentence's tentativemeaning alters since 'report' seems to be a "more technical" answer alluding to interaction alters in a context, that is, the talker has to be "more technical", needing not only the ordinary simple answer but also itemised data.

Second, asEggins, 1994, p. 68 stated, "ideationalmeaning" of the said sentence is realized by using the verbal processes transitivity, that is, '*answer'*, and then using the transitivity of relational process, such as 'would be', to illustrate '*what will happen'* and so assign a quality to the concept of '*grateful'*. However, changing in the situation will lead to change into acasual situation, like an interplay between spouses, friends and brothers and sisters, the talker mayemploy different register, for example polite (even though it is more likely that friends and spouses will be more casual than formal with each other). Moreover, if the original sentence said by the first party is a question rather than a statement, such as 'Could you answer me before 10th of July please?', with the a more polite request pattern, the sentence should be changed into 'I wonder if you could answer me before 10th of July'? As result, the altering of the field has a real instantaneous and vital effecton the text, especially on the content words utilised.

Dealing with the second variable of tenor, which makes connections between the social roles played by interactants, it can be realized through the mood pattern (Eggin, 1994, p.65). The mood of clause '*would be grateful*' is a type of interrogative. This typical choice of clause is used when asking an interactant to do something where the power between the interactants is not equal, the contact is infrequent, and/or the affective involvement low (e.g. between a student and lecturer).

The interrogatives also involve the use of words such as "*would*" or "*could*", which describe the functioning to modulate or attenuate a request. Clauses which package requests indirectly, using structure other than imperatives, are examples of grammatical metaphor. This is the typical choice of clause which is mostly not used when commanding family and friends, in informal version the clauses such as *open the door, get off your butt* are utilized. Thus, one of the realizations in the tenor of the situation can be seen in the choice of mood and related grammatical areas during a context (Poynton, 1985, cited in Eggins 1994, p.64). In addition, it is interesting to note that in SFG theory the mood element is picked up with a mood tag question (Eggins, 1994, p. 26). In the sentence under analysis, the mood tag is '*couldn't you*?', which refers to the most important part of the sentence lies in the projected clause '*could you answer me before the 10th of July*?' If the sentence is changed into '*answer me before the 10th of July*', the tone of the sentence would be weakened, and the meaning of the whole sentence will be slightly different. In this case the situation is changed from formal to informal, thus the sentence is changed from indirect or polite into a command. Any choice of tenor will greatly influence the role of speech as well as any texts within the social relationship of interactants.

Finally, the mode refers to how language is being utilized in the interaction to realize the meaning of the context. Aa reported byEggins (1994, p. 53-55) that there are two types of distances to identify meaning;1) "Choice of the theme"; and 2) "Choice of rheme of the sentence". The focal sentence theme is '*if you could answer me*', that can be described as a typical theme with the understanding a cohesive relation forward to new information and back to previous discourse. An immediate feedback will be provided by this theme since the listener can say; "*Yes I can answer you before 10th of July*" or "*Sorry, I cannot answer you by this date*". Here the language is utilised to ask about information. However, if the relationship between speaker and listener changes into writer and reader, since the reader might not know which kind of information that the writer asks about, the writer should use some words to introduce what kind of information he/she is looking for. Hence the sentence might become more complex such as '*I would be grateful if you could answer me about my employment application which I have already sent to your company before 10th of July, because after this time I will be overseas*'. In this sense, the language is utilized to inform the reader of the writer's feeling that they '*would be grateful*'. In a word, in a social situation "the spatial/interpersonal distance" and "experiential distance between interactants" determine the selection choices of meaning andmode.

Generally, the polite/indirect request is used to report peoples' needs and expectations (Dubinina and Malamud, 2017). Such a social function can be accomplished in both spoken and written modes according to different social role relationships between speaker/writer or listener/reader. The choices of vocabulary and grammar patterns occur in accordance with the specific context on the situation.

IV. A proposed classroom activity

The task-based classroom activity will be conducted at the end of the lesson of grammar knowledge when change commanding mood into polite or indirect requests. This will include some practice exercises from the textbook. This exercise will potentially make students aware of situational register variables and allowing them opportunities to use both imperative and polite requests appropriately in authentic contexts. The activity is called 'two ways for inquiring'. It sets up scenarios that the represent typical Baghdad University classrooms today.

Students will pretend that they are applicants for Baghdad University. The class will be divided into 4-5 groups. One group will act as the university members and prepare to answer questions asked by the future students. Another group will be the potential students to the university. An interview will take place and last around 15 minutes, during which the student will ask the university members questions about attending the university. The request will be an indirect polite clause due to the academic context and the power relationships between the student and members. The remaining groups play as members of the student's families, who use imperative clauses to command their children and other family members. Finally, the whole class will take part in discussions to compare the differences between the two registers. This will give them the opportunity to express their own evaluations.

V.   Two Factors Underpinning The Activity Design

Language teaching and learning is a complex process. So in language teaching, teachers need to be aware of affective factors and put students in the centre of focus during curriculum design, then they may achieve success in English language teaching. Affective factors in language learning can be branched into two kinds: 1) Personal (Individual)factors,containing,motivation inhibition, anxiety, self-esteem and extroversion-introversion, etc; 2) Logic and/or actin factors, classroom transaction,consisted of empathy, cross-cultural practices and so on (Shawer, 2017). It is important that language teachers keep these factors in mind when designing classroom activities to practice English grammar. Hence, the task-based activity for this project is concerned with enhancing student motivation and encouraging them to increase their learning autonomy.

Motivation is considered as one of the major deciding factors in prosperity developing second language proficiency as it decides the level of active and individual involvement. Without active engagement of each student, the prospect of improving communicative competence in the target language is eliminated (Isbell et al, 2017). Gardner and Maclntyre (cited in Candlin and Mercer 2000, p. 24) stated that the motivated individual "is one who wants to achieve a particular goal, devotes considerable effort to achieve this goal, and experiences satisfaction in the activities associated with achieving this goal".

For the secondary school class in this study and in order to achieve the target of this potential activity, the students need to be vital and animated and have positive attitudes towards the learning situation. The students should also appear to have positive attitudes towards their English language teacher and the L2 course. A task-based activity that is within a context that they are familiar with, and interested in, is anticipated to stimulate their motivation (Dornyei 2001). Kasper (1997, cited in Nunn, 2006) used a task-based activity for a student-centre approach, which expanded the time assigned for the students to speakand providedactivities inconversational management, employing an extensive range of communicative acts and interacting with other role players to collaborate infulfilling understanding.

Low (cited in Nunn 2006 p. 77) points out that "on no account teach a language form without a performance task". A task-based activity can combine of some activities that alarm primarily for meaning focused language exercises (Willis and Willis, 2001cited in Nunan, 2006). Thus, students demonstrate grammar knowledge which has been learnt from the textbook and practice this new knowledge in a more communicative way, becoming aware that grammatical knowledge is important in real life. In this way the students are instrumentally motivated (Dornyei 2001, p. 60).

Many purposes exist for activity-based tasks, beyond utilizing the process as a teaching activity. Enabling students to use forms of politeness and command in the English language furthers their engagement with the wider global community. In turn, students show an avid interest in foreign language learning which encompasses integrative orientation. Thus, creating a positive attitude towards the L2 community (Dornyei 2001, p. 50).

 Also, student autonomy is defined as the capacity to take charge of, or responsibility for, their own learning. Student's independence (Autonomy)does not mean in particular that is a synonym for self- instruction; or, it is not restricted to learning without a help/supervision from teacher. In the learning environment as classroom context, autonomy has not entailed a relinquishment of accountability on the teacher's shoulder; it is also not sort of allowing the learners cope with things as 'trying their best'. Autonomy is a steady state achieved by learners (Little, 1990, cited in Benson, 2001, p. 48). Woodrow (2017) states that autonomy in language learning requires being aware of three levels of learner control: learning management, cognitive processes and learning content. In the school context, utilization of autonomy can be carried out through independent tasks, such as the current task-based activity.

For this proposed project, students will be requested by the teacher to create a cooperative learning environment by being included in the decision making of what content to discuss and which behaviours to regulate to achieve goals. Following the discussion, student's as individuals will reflect on and evaluate the activity and discussion. It is anticipated that this activity will encourage students to be autonomous outside of school, in their daily life. Benson (2001) points out that the expression of autonomy will be different according to cultural context. For example, Iraqi students would not find autonomy very comfortable (Al-Seady, 2006). That's why the classroom activity is achieved in groups rather than individually, which can reduce the students' resistance and gradually expose them to an alternative learning style. In a word, conducting the task-based activity in classroom is not only to give the students an opportunity to practice English language in real-world communication but rather than to facilitate their active monitoring of their own language use (Kern,Ware and Warschauer, 2017).

VI. Expected Errors Analysis And Errors Correction

An *error*, according to Hendrickson (1980, cited in Ellis 1994 p. 320), is described as "an utterance, form, or structure that a particular language teacher deems unacceptable because of its inappropriate use or its absence in real-life discourse". In this vein, an error can be a grammatical rule or deviation from a phonological, a wrong expression or form in a specific situation. Experienced language teachers should be clear of the sequence of acquisition and hold a positive attitude towards learners' errors. Moreover, they should be able to predict, analyse and treat learners' inter-language appropriately in order to help learners improve their language performances (McDonouch, 2017).

It can be anticipated that some problems would occur in student's inter-language. James (1998, p. 238) states that there are three kinds of learners' deflection; slip, mistake, and error. The first two are self-correctable, whereas the third one springs from ignorance, so it calls for explanation. In term of slip and mistake, when changing imperative or commanding into a polite request, learners might forget to link the two clauses to reflect cohesion of a sentence. For example, to change an imperative or commanding sentence '*open the window*' a speaker might say '*I would be grateful you could open the window'*. Furthermore, they might forget to keep the other elements of grammar with a polite request, such as, verb or pronoun or phrase of place or time. Thus, they might say '*I would grateful if you open the window*' or they might say '*I would be grateful if could open the window*'. These problems have been categorized as misinformation (Ellis 2005, p. 61).

Slips and mistakes are most likely produced by the learners especially when they speak. However, if a student pays more attention to what they are saying they are able to correct grammatical errors themselves (Ellis 2005). However, for students even if they understand this grammatical rule, it is difficult for them to judge in what situations they need to follow this rule. Thus,such errors cannot be self-corrected and the teacher's correction or remediation is demanded (James 1998, p.237). Having real-world scenarios encourages students to discuss possible corrections autonomously.

Since mistakes and errors are inevitable, how to effectively correct these problems pose challenges for language teachers. James (1998, pp249-261) suggests that some options such as non-threatening correction, student's preferences, formal and functional focus correction can be useful. The purpose of correction is to help learners to acquire language awareness and to develop their consciousness raising their own capacitates. In the current case of classroom activity, the teacher is recommended to give explicit formal instruction to students to minimize mistakes and errors (James, 1998, p.243).

During the activity, the teacher should pay attention to students' utterance and generalize the main problems. At the end of the classroom activity, students will be asked to reflect and self-correct their mistakes by checking their oral reports against the grammar rules of imperative or commanding and polite requests. The teacher could summarize feedback to the whole class through non-threating corrections. If there are errors such as the ones described above, the teacher could provide more detailed explanations and give more examples to make the students aware of how to use the register variables properly.

To correct written reports, the teacher would be better to give indirect feedback and so identify the mistakes in a discussion forum. In this way learners are encouraged to be more reflective and analytical about their own issues (Ferris, 2002, p. 263). However, students are individually different and may differ in learning pace and outcomes, so it is also necessary for the teacher to give explicit, direct and face-to-face correction to individual students.

In short, the most effective way to correct students' deviances is to help them to understand errors with explanations and to encourage them to elf-correct mistakes (James, 1998, p. 260).

VII. Conclusion

To conclude, the proposed project will focus on the micro-educational setting to investigate the interactions between teacher and student with regards to register variables. Reviewing the characteristics of a good language learner Chamot (2001, p. 29), stated that they "are active learners, monitor language production, practice communicating in the language, make use of prior linguistic knowledge, use a variety of memorization techniques, and ask questions for clarification". From the sociolinguistic point of view, second language learning is a socializing process as well as a construction process. Therefore, it will help students to become good language learners if teaching encourages use of social situations to achieve better learning outcomes.

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