

## Optimal Relevance in English Dialogues by EFL Iraqi Students

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### Abstract

The major concern of this study is to investigate the type of difficulties faced by EFL Iraqi students in their quest for the most appropriate utterance to express their ideas. One of the problems that face the language learners is how they can convey their thoughts with more contextual effects and with least mental effort. The learners have to be competent in using the language in real-life situations outside the classroom. The teachers must have the ability to convey the language as closely to the native speaker's as possible by being aware of the necessity of optimal relevance since the learners are not in direct contact with native speakers. The sample of the study is composed of two main groups, each of which consists of (20) students. The first group represents fourth year Iraqi college students, namely, those of College of Education – English Department, the second group represents second year Iraqi college students, namely, those of College of Education. The test is composed of 20 questions. Actually, there are different situations which are designed to focus on different aspects in learning/acquiring English. Each question has three alternatives, one of them is the optimal one, the other two choices are relatively relevant to the given information of the situation, but they may have irrelevant or inappropriate information to the given situation. The 5th test shows that students are equal in their relevant answers. Both reach to the rate of 22% out of all the answers. The results show that Learners' mother tongue, in general (both groups), has an impact on giving the correct answer.

**Key word:** Optimal Relevance, Dialogue

## المخلص

هذه الدراسة تهتم بالبحث عن نوع الصعوبات التي واجهها الطلاب العراقيين للغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية في بحثهم عن العبارة المناسبة للتعبير عن افكارهم. واحدة من تلك المشاكل التي يواجهها المتعلمين للغة هو كيف بإمكانهم نقل افكارهم مع الكثير من الاثار المتعلقة بسياق الكلام والقليل من الجهد العقلي. المتعلمون يجب ان يكونوا كفوءيين في استعمال اللغة في مواقف الحياة الحقيقة خارج قاعة الدرس. المعلمون يجب ان يمتلكون القدرة على نقل افكارهم باللغة الانكليزية بصورة قريبة الى الذين هم لغتهم الام اللغة الانكليزية وبصورة ممكنة من خلال ادراك الضرورة الى (Optimal Relevance) لان المتعلمون ليس في اتصال مباشر مع المتكلمين الذين لغتهم الام اللغة الانكليزية. عينة البحث تتألف من مجموعتين، كل مجموعة تتكون من 20 طالباً. المجموعة الاولى تمثل المرحلة الرابعة من طلاب الكليات في العراق وهو طلاب كلية التربية/ قسم اللغة الانكليزية. المجموعة الثانية تمثل طلاب المرحلة الثانية في نفس الكلية. الاختبار يتكون من 20 سؤالاً. في الواقع هناك مواقف مختلفة والتي صممت لتركز على مظاهر مختلفة في تعلم واكتساب اللغة الانكليزية. كل سؤال له ثلاث بدائل، واحد منها يعتبر الامثل والاثنين الاخرين عبارة عن اختياريين لهما صلة بالمعلومات المعطاة لكل موقف لكن يمكن ان تكون معلومات غير مناسبة او ليس لها علاقة بالموقف المطلوب. الاختبار الخامس يبين ان الطلاب متساويين في اجاباتهم. كلا المجموعتين حصلت على 25% من نسبة العدد الكلي للإجابات. النتائج توضح ان اللغة الام للمتعلمين بصورة عامة ولكلا المجموعتين لها تأثير على اختيار الاجابة الصحيحة.

## Introduction

### 1.1 The Problem of The Study

One of the problems that face the language learners is how they can convey their thoughts with more contextual effects and with least mental effort. The students have to be competent in using the language in real-life situations outside the classroom. The teachers must have the ability to convey the language as closely to the native speaker's as possible by being aware of the necessity of Optimal Relevance since the learners are not indirect contact with native speakers. To convey the idea with more contextual effects and with least mental effort, the learners of the language have to understand the concept of Optimal Relevance which is introduced by Sperber and Wilson (1986). Sperber and Wilson (1995: 260) state that "every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its

own Optimal Relevance", and they present two conditions of Optimal Relevance, and they are as follows:

- 1- The ostensive stimulus has at least relevant enough to be worth the speaker's effort to process it, and
- 2- The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the speaker's abilities and preferences.

The two conditions which are used in this study as the principles have to be used by the learners in order to solve the decision problem when they choose the optimal utterance.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1 Relevance Theory(RT)**

#### **Relevance theory**

is framework for understanding utterance interpretation first proposed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson and used within cognitive linguistics and pragmatics. It was originally inspired by the work of H. Paul Grice and developed out of his ideas, but has since become a pragmatic framework in its own right (Sperber and Wilson:1995: 7 ).

Relevance theory is psychological model for understanding the cognitive interpretation of language of language, as well as "an inferential approach to pragmatics". It stands opposed to classical code model whereby information is encoded into a message, transmitted and decoded by another party, with another copy of the code. Inferential approaches to pragmatics hold that linguistic meaning of the words decoded by the receiver is just one of many inputs that can affect interpretation.

The core of the theory is the "communicative principle of relevance", which states that by the act of making an utterance the speaker is conveying that what they have said is worth listening to, i.e. it will provide "cognitive effects" worthy of the processing effort required to find the meaning. In this way, every ostensive act of communication (that is the lexical "clues" that are explicitly conveyed when we speak/write) will look something like this:

1. The speaker purposefully gives a clue to the hearer, ("ostensifies"), as to what she wishes to communicate – that is a clue to his or her intention.

2. The hearer infers the intention from the clue and the context-mediated information. The hearer must interpret the clue, taking into account the context, and surmise what the speaker intended to communicate.

For Sperber and Wilson, relevance is conceived as relative or subjective, as it depends upon the state of knowledge of a hearer when they encounter an utterance. However, they are quick to note that their theory does not attempt to exhaustively define the concept of "relevance" in everyday use, but tries to show an interesting and important part of human communication, in particular ostensive-inferential communication.

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1. Sperber, Dan/Wilson, Deirdre (1995): *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Second Edition, Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 2–9.
  2. Reddy, M. (1979): "The conduit metaphor – a case of frame conflict in our language about language." In: Ortony (ed., 1979), *Metaphor and Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 284–324.

### 1.1.1 Cognitive Principle of Relevance

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

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

The major part in this theory is the human cognition which has advanced a variety of deductive (innate or acquired) mental mechanisms or biases that tend to give attention to inputs with greatest expected relevance, and to process them in the most relevance-enhancing way (Wilson, 2009: 394).

The conclusion is that that relevance is an arrangement between effort (i.e. cost) and effects (i.e. reward) (Allott, 2013: 59-60). The degree of relevance of an input to an individual between cognitive effects and processing effort will be explained as follows:

### **i) Reward: Cognitive effects**

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

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

### **ii) The Cost: Processing Effort**

Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time. (Wilson & Sperber 2004, 604; the original formulation, at Sperber & Wilson 1986, 153).

According to this definition of Relevance, the claim is that the human cognitive systems work with the input to save the mental effort of an individual at least as possible (Allot, 2013: 61). Simms (2009: 194) states that processing effort is the process that the hearers take to understand the speaker's meaning, and this process depends on the speaker's utterance and the hearer's inference of that utterance, as well as the effort that must be expended by the hearer to compute the cognitive effects of the utterance. In other words, 'processing effort' is the effort that

requires processing an input to the point that its cognitive effects are derived. In addition, Wilson argues that effort is "to represent the input, access contextual information and derive any contextual effects." In fact, RT does not aim to define sources of processing effort, but it tries to study perception, memory and inference and these are the results of the fields of psychology (Wilson, 2009: 394).

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

### 1.1.2 Communicative Principle of Relevance

Sperber and Wilson differentiate between two separate models of communication: a conventional and non-inferential one, known as the code model (Pre-Gricean), and a non-conventional one, which is called by Grice and his followers as inferential model (Márquez, 2006: 42).

#### i) The Code Model

The theory of code model has developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949). The main idea of Shannon and Weaver is the transmission of a message where the sender conveys his message as a signal (whether spoken words, electric signals, gestures, or written words) through various channels which can be affected by noise whilst the addressee receives them and tries to decode the sender's message to understand it (Gordon, 2009:6).

When the role of the context is either minimal or extremely easy to describe the utterances, then the successes of the code model have been attained in general. According to the code model, misinterpretation of the provided evidence will result

some failures in communication, whereas understanding the intended meaning of the utterance by the audience will lead to effective communication (Wilson and Sperber, 1994: 88-89).

## ii) The Inferential Model

The central claim in Grice's Theory is the expression and recognition of intentions which is regarded as the fundamental feature of most human cognition whether verbal or non-verbal, and this claim may be regarded as a main concern in RT (Loukusa, 2007: 43). For Grice, the speaker may say something and at the same time he means another thing and this depends on the speaker's intention, i.e. what the speaker intends to say (Allott, 2013: 71). So, Grice emphasizes on the importance of the recognition of the sender's intention by the receptor. He asserts that "Communication is successful not when hearers recognize the linguistic meaning of the utterance, but when they infer the speaker's 'meaning' of it." Inferential model is called by Sperber & Wilson as the 'Ostensive Model.'

This new term, 'ostensive-inferential communication', is explained by Sperber and Wilson as follows:

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

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

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

A: Would you like to have dinner with me?

B: I have headache.

As it appears, B does not refuse A's invitation directly, he only says that he has headache. In this example we have two intentions, the first intention is the informative information where B tells A that he has headache and B knows this information whilst the second one is the communicative intention which is more important than the first one because B has another intention to express what he wants to convey (Yi-bo, 2015: 603).

### 1.2 Optimal Relevance

According to the optimal relevance, the hearer has to understand the speaker's meaning with least processing effort and with more contextual effects (i.e. the utterance is worth processing and clear enough to the hearer) which means that the speaker makes his/her intention manifest to the addressee because processing effort is seen as a negative factor. As a result, the greater the processing effort will lead to the lower relevance of the utterance. The communicator tries to convey a message in which the interpretation calls for less processing effort, as well as the addressee expects that the communicator attempts to communicate something which is worth his processing effort (Casacuberta, Figueras, and Martínez, 1999: 49). So, the communicator aims to make his utterance as easily understood as possible, i.e. the communicator has aimed at optimal relevance (Moreno, 2003:117).

### 1.5 Language Learning of Classroom Conversation

Conversation has two elements, the informational and the phatic. Phatic is a type of speech in which the words fulfill a social function. So, it is used to create social relationships rather than convey information (Miller, 1999: 2).

In second language acquisition, the learners need not only to acquire the linguistic forms, but also to interact with other learners or speakers using the forms. Interacting in classroom can facilitate language learning because it will create a

good opportunity for learners to communicate and expose their input (Nookam, 2010:8). Through conversation, the teacher and the student can understand each other by using words, actions and reflections. Classroom talks are organized into different components (Nookam, 2010:8):

1- An adjacency pair: two students or more take their role in a conversation, such as a greeting-greeting pair or a question-answer pair.

2- Preference organization: the learners' point of view take into consideration as if they agree with some social actions or not.

3- Turn construction units: they have three organizational resources: syntax, prosody, and pragmatics. Syntax allows to participants to project what a unit type it may be, whether sentential, clausal, phrasal, or lexical, and how and when it may come to an end. Prosody allows them to make the speakers know how to finish or continue his/her speech. Pragmatics has to do with the action of a certain turn construction unit performs, which can be treated as ongoing or completed (ibid: 9-10).

For Watkins, classroom conversation is fundamental for effective human relations and believes. He has identified some aspects in his model as follows:

- i- Students operate together to improve knowledge.
- ii- Students help each other to learn.
- iii- Learning goals emerge and develop during enquiry.
- iv- Students create products for each other and for others.
- v- Students review how best the community supports learning.
- vi- Students show understanding of how group processes promote their learning, etc. (Lyie, 2008: 232).

In fact, conversation is an important element in second language acquisition, and dialogue lessons are part of classroom conversation. Indeed, the use of the

dialogue is part of developing the comprehension and skills of second language acquisition.

## **Methodology**

### **2.1 The Adopted Model**

This study includes Sven Ove Hansson's Decision Theory that includes an important explanation of Decision Theory and the using of utility theory in decision-making which is important in determining the optimal utterance. The main aim of forming this model is to test the learner's own interests to give optimal relevant information to the addressee, i.e. minimizing the addressee's effort (within the parameters set by the speaker's own abilities and goals/preferences), in the sense that, the speaker is expected to have found a vehicle for the communication of his/her thoughts. Sperber and Wilson (1986) state that:

"It is in the speaker's interest to achieve a greater degree of relevance as long as she is capable of achieving it and has no specific preferences which would prevent her achieving it " cited in (Noh, 2000: 64).

### **2.2 Decision Theory and Utility Theory**

To use Optimal Relevance in the realm of Optimality Theory, we have to use the notion of Decision Theory and Utility. According to Decision Theory, we have three stages that are introduced by Condorcet (1847).

1- The first stage, one "discusses the principles that will serve as the basis for decision in a general issue..." In this model, the speaker will follow the principles of optimal relevance where s/he avoids the utterance that causes more processing effort, and less contextual effects.

2- In the second stage, the decision is reduced to a choice between a manageable set of alternatives.

3- The third stage consists of the actual choice between these alternatives (Hansson, 2015: 9).

The speaker tries to decide or choose between alternatives (options), according to some standards which are expressed in a precise and useful way. When you go to a restaurant, your value standard may be related to price, taste, or any combination of these. Assume that you like soup A better than soup B or soup C, and soup B better than soup C. Clearly, you will choose the soup A (ibid: 13). So, the relation "better than":

A is better than B

B is better than C

A is better than C

Thus, A is better than other alternatives to choose. To compare alternatives, we use phrases such as "better than", "worse than", "equally good", etc. The mathematical relation " $A > B$ " is used instead of "A is better than B", and " $B < A$ " is used to express that "B is worse than A" as well as "A is better than B" because worse is the converse of better (Hansson, 2015: 14-15). We use the symbol  $\equiv$  to refer to equal relation which means A and B have the same values ( $A \equiv B$ ). The last symbol  $\geq$  is used to refer to "at least as good as". These relations summarized into two rules:

(1) A is better than B if and only if A is at least as good as B but B is not at least as good as A. ( $A > B$  if and only if  $A \geq B$  and not  $B \geq A$ ).

(2) A is equally good as B if and only if A is at least as good as B and also B at least as good as A. ( $A \equiv B$  if and only if  $A \geq B$  and  $B \geq A$ ).

Using utilities in decision-making is both simple and manifest:

1- Choose the alternative with the highest utility.

However, as in this example of political candidates:

Ms. Anderson 15

Mr. Brown 15

Mr. Carpenter 5

Obviously, the two candidates, Ms. Anderson and Mr. Brown, have the same maximal values; as a result, we will pick one of them:

2- Choose the alternative with the highest utility. If more than one alternative has the highest utility, pick one of them (no matter which) (ibid).

### 2.3 The Sample

The sample of the study is composed of two main groups, each of which consists of (9) students. The first group represents fourth year Iraqi college students, namely, those of College of Education – English Department, and the second group represents MA students, namely, those of University of Baghdad - College of Education –English Department.

### 2.4 Test Construction

The test is composed of 20 questions. Actually, we have different situations which are designed to focus on different aspects in learning/acquiring English.

Each question has three alternatives, one of them is the optimal one, the other two choices are relatively relevant to the given information of the situation, but they may have irrelevant or inappropriate information to the given situation.

### 2-5 Test Items

A multiple choice item is adopted in this study where this type of test gives several possible answers.

The alternatives are collected from Michael Ockenden (1986).

### Data Analysis

### Test Item No.1

Bella asks John if he wants '*a cup of coffee*', so she says:

"I expect you could do with a cup of coffee, couldn't you?"

John's reply has three alternatives:

a- I would rather have a cup of tea, if you don't mind.

b- If you don't mind. I would rather have a cup of coffee.

c- I would rather have a cup of tea. You know that tea is made from the leaves of a bush called *Camellia Sinesis*.

Bella asks John if he wants a cup of coffee, John has to give Bella the appropriate answer with less mental effort. One of these utterances is the optimal answer. In utterance (1a), John provides Bella with input relevant to her question. This utterance, '*I would rather have a cup of tea, if you don't mind*', is directly stated with greatest possible cognitive effects for the smallest possible amount of processing effort. By using this form, John will provide Bella with clear evidence of what he wants to drink.

The second utterance (1b) is not appropriate because the construct "I would rather" is used to talk about preferring one thing to another, not to express the same thing that is presented by the speaker as in the case of second utterance. If John uses the word 'coffee' instead of 'tea', this will be grammatically and semantically incorrect. Therefore, this utterance will be relevant if Bella asked John that he would like a cup of tea, not a cup of coffee. In the case of (1c), the utterance has the same conceptual structure of (1a), but the extra information conveyed by (1c) is absolutely unrelated to the context and has no contextual effects. According to utility value, (1a) is equal to (1c), but (1c) gives more information that is useless to solve the decision problem than (1a), therefore; (1a) is still relevant than (1c).

As a result, (1a) is better than (1c) in case (1c) gives more information that is irrelevant to the question. As well as, (1a) is better than (1b) in case (1b) is grammatically and semantically incorrect. According to decision theory, A is better than B ( $A > B$ ), C is better than B ( $C > B$ ), and A is better than C ( $A > C$ ). Consequently, A is the optimal response to choose by the learners. In fact, this question depends on the learners' knowledge about language forms.

The 1<sup>st</sup> test shows that MA students are better than BA students. The rate of optimal relevant in the answers of MA students reaches to 55% compared with BA students which reaches to 44%.

### Test Item No.2

Carol wants to know the way to Bond Street in London. Therefore, she asks someone in the street.

a- Do you know the way to Bond Street? I'd like to change some notes into coins.

b- Excuse me. They told me that Bond Street is in the west of London, but I cannot find it.

c- Excuse me. Can you show me the way to Bond Street, please?

For the first utterance (2a), Carol wants to know the way to Bond Street to change some notes into coins. (2a) is not the optimal because the addressee may not have the time to know why you want to go to Bond Street. This utterance will be more relevant if the addressee asks Carol why she wants to go to Bond Street, but if he did not ask her why, then there wouldn't be a need to say that she wanted to change some notes into coins.

The second utterance, Carol uses indirect way to ask someone in the street about the way. Sometimes, this utterance cannot be considered as a question because Carol does not directly state that she wants to go to Bond Street. As well as, the addressee may expend some processing efforts to infer what she exactly means.

The last utterance (2c) is a highly relevant utterance to the addressee. It gives sufficient cognitive effects with less mental effort, i.e. it gives brief and understandable question to the addressee which may facilitate the comprehension of the speaker's communicative intention. Obviously (2c) is directly stated to the addressee; therefore, it is considered as the optimal one.

Summing up, (2a) is relatively clear but not optimal, in case it gives the information which does not have any relation to the current question. (2b) is implied and needed some considerable effort. (2c) is the optimal one because it is fully comprehensible without unnecessary effort. According to decision theory:

C is better than A ( $C > A$ )

A is better than B ( $A > B$ )

C is better than B ( $C > B$ )

The 2<sup>nd</sup> test shows that MA students are better than BA students. The rate of optimal relevant in the answers of MA students reaches to 100% compared with BA students which reaches to 67%.

### Test Item No.3

The waitress asks Mr. Smith:

"Have you decided on something, sir?"

Mr. Smith wants Haddock and chips:

a- Yes. Haddock and chips. It is a hot meal of Italian origin.

b- Yes. I'd like to try Haddock and chips, please.

c- Yes. Fish and chips for me, please.

In this item, the waitress asks Mr. Smith if he has chosen something to eat. The first utterance (3a) is relevant to the waitress but it has unrelated information. Sometimes, the information may be irrelevant to the hearer, as in the case, when the waitress knows that 'fish and chips' is a hot meal of Italian origin. In sense that, the second utterance (3b) would be more relevant than (3a) because it gives relevant answer to the waitress. The last utterance (3b) may be considered as the optimal one, in case that the restaurant has only one kind of fish and Mr. Smith knows this information because he has visited this restaurant before, but if it is not so, then the waitress will ask him if he wants Haddock and Chips or Cod and Chips. So, it is better to determine the kind that he wants to eat in order to save time and effort.

According to the principles of Optimal Relevance, where the speaker avoids the utterance that causes more processing effort and less contextual effects, the decision theory is reduced to choose (3b) as the optimal form.

B is better than A ( $B > A$ ).

B is better than C ( $B > C$ ).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> test shows that MA students are better than BA students. The rate of optimal relevant in the answers of MA students reaches to 78% compared with BA students which reaches to 33%.

#### Test Item No.4

Samara wants to book an airline ticket to Geneva, so she telephones the travel agent and says: "Hello. I want to fly to Geneva on or about the first." Travel agent: "I'll just see what there is."

Samara needs a cheap class and open return.

a- I'll need to travel an economy class open return.

b- I'll need to travel not in the first class.

c- I'd like to travel economy because I don't have money.

According to the given information, Samara wants to book an airline ticket to Geneva, and she needs an economical class and open return. The first utterance (5a) is regarded as the optimal one in accordance with the given information. In general, people tend to use formal and accurate information when they speak with travel agent to book an airline ticket. Samara has used formal language as well as she clarifies directly what she wants exactly from the agent in order not to spend some efforts without getting any effect. For the second utterance (5b), Samara has implied that she wants to travel in economy class. In case of (5c), the travel agent does not care if she has money or not, i.e. it is not his business.

As a result, (5a) is still better than (5b) and (5c) in case (5b) costs some unnecessary efforts to the addressee, and (5c) has irrelevant information which makes no sense to her utterance. (5a) is the most appropriate one because it gives accurate information. For decision theory, A is better than B and C ( $A > B$  and  $C$ ).

The 4<sup>th</sup> test shows that MA students are better than BA students. The rate of optimal relevant in the answers of MA students reaches to 89% compared with BA students which reaches to 56%.

### Test Item No.5

Linda telephones her friend, Frank. She wants to know if he is at home.

a- Hello. This is Linda. Is Frank there, please? He told me to call him at this time.

b- Hello. Could I talk to Frank, please? This is Linda.

c- Hello. My name is Linda Duncan. Could I talk to Frank, please?

In this item, Linda calls her friend, Frank, to know if he is at home or not. According to the first utterance (6a), Linda has used informal language to communicate with one of Frank's family members. The statement, *is Frank there, please?*, is informal which may indicate that she knows the person on the other line. Additionally, Linda gives a reason for her call in this time because she expected Frank to answer her. It is possible that the person on the other line knows Linda from Frank. Besides, he/she thinks that Linda has arranged to talk to Frank in this time. This answer is the appropriate answer because Linda introduces herself and gives the reason behind her call.

According to the second utterance, Linda has used formal statement, *could I talk to Frank, please?*, which may refer that she does not know the person that she talks with or she wants to sound quite polite. In effect, starting with asking about the person and then introducing yourself are rarely existed in English telephone conversations.

The last utterance (6c) is very formal because Linda gives her full name and uses formal statement (*could I talk to Frank, please?*). This may refer that Frank's family does not know her or even does not talk with her before. According to this utterance, Linda knows Frank but she does not have any relation with his family which means that their friendship is not very strong.

In fact, all utterances will not cost any unnecessary effort, besides they are fully comprehensible to any addressee, but the differences between them are in the social relationship that reflects in the speaker's speech and in the way of ordering the sentence as in the case of (6b) which is rarely used by native speakers. Actually, all utterances are relevant to the addressee, but (6a) is the optimal one, i.e.  $A > B$  and  $C$ .

The 5<sup>th</sup> test shows that MA students and BA students are equal in their relevant answers. Both reach to the rate of 22% out of all the answers.

## Conclusions

1- Learners' mother tongue, in general (both groups), has an impact on giving the correct answer.

2- Culture plays a role in determining the optimal utterance. So, the learners are not fully aware of the culturally proper ways to address people. Both groups try to transfer their Arabic culture into English culture.

3- The learners are attentive to focus on the accuracy of the target forms away from meaning or on meaning away from form. Thus, the learners have not realized the gap between second language knowledge and communicative needs.

4- The rate of optimal relevant answer in MA students reaches to 70% whilst BA students reaches to 44%.

5- The correct and the wrong answers are in favor of second group (MA students) in most items. The logical justification for this case is that the professors tend to use English in a communicative way with MA students because their number is usually less compared with BA students, which give the professors a chance to talk with each student individually.

6- Another justification for the superiority of MA students is that the nature of studying in each group. The study in MA students tends to take a shape of analysis which enable MA students to analyze and choose the optimal relevant answer.

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