

HEDGING THE SPEECH ACT OF ADVICE BYIRAQI EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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التعبير التحوطي لفعل الكلام الخاص بالنصيحة من قبل طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجامعات العراقية

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المستخلص

من خلال إعطاء النصائح، يحصل الناس على إرشادات حول كيفية أداء الأمور بطرق أفضل. ومع ذلك، قد تكون آراء الأخرين صعبة القبول لأن بعض الأشخاص لا يقبلون عادةً التوجيهات حول ما يجب فعله أو عدم فعله. وهذا يتطلب من مستخدمي اللغة تخفيف نصائحهم لتقليل التأثير السلبى على المرسل إليه باستخدام أدوات لغوية محددة لتجنب فرض الضغط على المستمع أو المتلقى، وبالتالى التعبير عن اللباقة. ومع ذلك، فإن فعل الكلام الخاص بالنصيحة وكيفية تحويره باستخدام أدوات لغوية مثل عبارات التحوط للتواصل بلباقة لم يحظّ باهتمام كبير . لهذا الغرض، تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى فحص كيفية أداء طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجامعات العراقية لفعل النصيحة واستخدامهم لعبارات التحوط في سياقين مختلفين: العلاقة بين الطالب والمُدرس، والعلاقة بين الطالب والطالب. تم استخدام استبيان مفتوح على شكل اختبار إتمام الخطاب (DCT) لجمع البيانات من ثلاثين طالبًا جامعيًا عراقيًا في جامعة تكريت. لتحليل البيانات، تم استخدام تصنيف هينكل (١٩٩٧) لأنواع النصائح لمعرفة كيفية تقديم هؤلاء الطلاب للنصيحة لغومًا، وتم أيضًا استخدام تصنيف هولمز (١٩٨٤) لفئات التحوط لدراسة العبارات المستخدمة من قبل المشاركين لتحويط نصائحهم مع الوظائف البراغماتية التي حققوها. أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب استخدموا النصائح المخففة باستخدام تعابيلر التحوط بشكل أكثر تكرارًا عند تقديم النصيحة لمعلم مقارنة بالنصيحة للأصدقاء. وكانت أداة التحوط الأكثر استخدامًا في العلاقات بين الطالب والمُدرس هي عبارة التحوط الشخصية للتعبير عن الآراء باستخدام الأفعال الاستطرادية، بينما تضمنت النصائح المقدمة للأصدقاء معدلات عالية من الأدوات المعجمية التي تستند إلى معرفة المتكلم لإظهار التعاون والحصول على موافقة المستمع. أكدت النتائج على أهمية فهم السياق الاجتماعي في التواصل وقدمت نتائج الدراسة بعض الأفكار للمعلمين حول كيفية مساعدة الطلاب على تطوير الكفاءة البراغماتية والجوانب الثقافية لتصبح مهارات اللغة أكثر نجاحًا.

الكلمات المفتاحية :إعطاء النصائح، التحوط، متعلموا اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، فعل الكلام.

Abstract

By giving advice, people receive guidance on how to perform things in better ways. However, others' opinions might be difficult to digest because some people do not usually accept being directed on what to do or not to do. This requires the language users to attenuate their advice to reduce the negative effect on the addressees by using specific linguistic devices to avoid placing imposition on the hearer or addressee, thus expressing politeness. However, the speech act of advice and how it is transformed by linguistic devices like hedges to communicate politeness has received very little attention. For that purpose, the current study aimed to examine how Iraqi EFL undergraduate students perform the speech act of advice and their use of hedging devices in two different contexts: student-instructor, and student-student relationships. An open-ended questionnaire in the form of a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used to collect the data from twenty-five Iraqi undergraduate students at the University of Tikrit. For data analysis. Hinkel's (1997) taxonomy of advice types was used to find out how these students give advice linguistically, and Holmes'(1984) taxonomy of hedges categories was also used to examine the hedging devices performed by the participants to modify their advice with their achieved pragmatic functions. The results showed that the students used hedged advice more frequently when they advised an instructor while tended to use more direct advice to a friend. The highly frequent hedges device used in student-instructor relationships was personalized hedging to state opinions by using the parenthetical verbs while advice to peer friends included high rates of lexical devices that had the knowledge of the speaker as a stem to show cooperation and to elicit the hearer's agreement. The findings highlighted the importance of understanding the social context in communication. The results of the study provided some insights for teachers on how pragmatic competence and cultural aspects aided students in becoming successful language users. Keywords: Advice-giving, hedging, EFL learners, Speech Act.

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The speech act of advice is an essential activity in our daily lives, however, giving advice as a speech act is troublesome (Abass & Jameel, 2020). People's perception of advice varies from one person to another, some receive advice as feedback on how to perform things in better ways and learn more about different things in their lives. However, others usually view advice as a directive speech act since it influences the listener to do something, and some people have difficulty accommodating other people's viewpoints because they do generally not tolerate being told what to or not to do (Farnia & Sattar, 2014). The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines advice as "an action offered by the speaker as a type of opinion to execute an action in a particular scenario."

The speech act theory explains how speakers further perform or request others to perform actions by using words through utterances. These utterances and their intended actions form what Austin (1962) called 'speech acts'. According to Austin, each of these acts comprises three components, namely, locution (the exact words), illocution, (the function of the utterance), and perlocution (the intended effect on the hearer). Austin classified the types of speech acts based on the meaning of the verb used to act. Accordingly, five categories of speech acts were proposed: assertive, commissives, directives, declarations, and expressive. Austin's classification was criticized by Searle (1979), who

Austin's classification was criticized by Searle (1979), who observed that such a lexical classification fails to consider the socio-pragmatic context in which the speech act is performed, nor the interpersonal relations among the participants. To this end, Searle (1979) developed the speech act theory by assigning a force

to each illocutionary act. Such a force conveys the communicative intentions of the speaker. Searle also distinguished between the direct and indirect speech acts in which the social context of the speaker and hearer plays a pivotal role in facilitating the understanding of the real intentions behind uttering the speech acts. To achieve such a state, the speaker and hearer are required to have a mutual and shared understanding of the facts and background information. Searle (1979) gives the example of "It's hot in here" which literally describes the temperature of a place, suggesting that it is hot. However, based on a shared understanding of the situation between the speaker and the hearer, the utterance could be translated into a request to open the window. The new meaning of the locution is inferred by the hearer in the form of a perlocution or effect. Meanwhile, the locution has an illocutionary meaning expressed by the force effect in the utterance. In the case of the example, the illocutionary force is the directive by which the speaker indirectly asks the hearer to act. Based on these considerations, Searle (1979) proposed five classifications of speech acts that are dependent on the sincerity condition of the real intention of the speaker, namely representatives (expressing speaker's belief), directives (expressing speaker's desire or want), commissives (expressing speaker's intention to perform future action), expressive (expressing speaker's state of affairs), and declarative (expressing speaker's decisions to change the state of affairs).

Communicating successfully and appropriately in the target language requires the learner to possess a level of linguistic and pragmatic competence over the form and function of that language. This competence helps learners send and receive communicative messages clearly and effectively. It also enables these learners to express politeness and reflect their cultural,

social, and religious norms. These norms vary depending on the participants' age and rank in family or community among others which are reflected in how politeness is expressed (Farhat, 2013). The study of language function extends to include the study of how language communication works especially by expressing various speech acts. In communicative and interactive spoken discourse, for example, people use language in forms of speech acts to advise, praise, complain, argue, order, etc. in which the context of the utterance is an important variable. However, the performance of these speech acts is subject to success or failure. The success in performing the speech act depends highly on the level of knowledge and awareness the learners have of the forms and functions of these speech acts. The failure involves the lack of this knowledge and awareness which may lead to negative consequences in communication or what is called 'language breakdown'. To avoid language breakdown, possessing a level of pragmatic knowledge and awareness is required to enable learners "to pair sentences with the contexts in which they would be appropriate" (Levinson, 1983, p. 24).

After Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1979) work on speech acts, studies have focused on how these speech acts can be modified by using certain linguistic items such as *hedges* (e.g., sort of, might, probably, kind of, among others). Linguistically, hedging takes place when language users perform specific linguistic devices to display degrees of uncertainty and lack of commitment towards the propositional content of their speech acts (e.g., advice, requests, apology, compliment, praise, persuasion, etc.). For example, by using attributes (e.g., I think / I believe), questions (Why don't you? Don't you think/ feel?), shield (e.g., it seemed that it appeared, I believe), among others, a level of indirectness and lack of commitment or certainty is shown by the speaker. This

might make the advice more convincing and acceptable to others. Additionally, hedging the speech acts in general and advice, in particular, can maintain good rapport and a sense of caring and sharing between the interlocutors. In an academic context such as the one taking place between students and their classmates or their professors, the purpose of hedging is to make the process of giving and receiving advice smooth, palatable, effective, and successful (Hinkle,1997; Darweesh & Al-Aadili, 2017). Fraser (1975) as cited in Fraser (2010, p. 18) noted that the function of these linguistic devices which can be in the form of models (e.g., should, must, or can) is to attenuate the illocutionary force of the speech acts such as to request, apology or advice.

Pragmatically, according to Martinez-Flor (2003, p. 144), the types of advice could be located under three main strategies (1) direct by using imperatives like "study" or "Don't go out until late" and declarative sentences or models like "should" or "ought to" as in "You should study more for that exam" (2) indirect conventionalized strategies or as called by Hinkel (1997) "hedges advice" using "need to" or other softeners or hedging advice, lexical hedging ("maybe, I think"), or questions, and (3) indirect comment when the speaker's intention is produced explicitly resulting in no advice or as in "You want to pass, don't you" suggestions (Hinkel, 1997; Martinez-Flor, 2003, p. 144). The speech act-hedge relation has been thoroughly studied by Brown and Levinson (1987) and called 'Speech act hedges' by Fraser (2010). They studied the role of these modifiers in the expression of politeness. They argue that human beings have a 'face' that can be enhanced or threatened, and any speech act has

the potential to threaten either the positive or negative face of the speaker or that of the hearer. Enhancing or threatening the face can be affected by the type of speech act. When 'directives'

speech acts such as requests and offers are performed, negative politeness strategies are used to reduce the effect of imposition on the hearer realized by this type of speech act. For example, when one says "Open the door", a kind of imposition is placed on the hearer which is negatively received by using this directive utterance. To attenuate this negative effect, a speaker usually uses hedges such as "If you wouldn't mind" which is a disclaimer to reduce the negative effect of imposition on the hearer. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the use of such kind of hedges is a negative politeness strategy that saves the negative face of the hearer.

Concerning politeness revealed by using hedging strategies, the final judgment as polite or impolite will depend on the type of strategy (hedging) used in modifying the speech act (Holmes, 1990, p. 185). This means that the type of speech act itself cannot reflect politeness unless both the speech act and the strategy of attenuation are considered, as in the following examples:

[1] You *might want to consider* saving a little each month, but of course, *it's up to you*.

[2] Honestly, you should start saving more each month

In example [1] above, the speaker puts a hedge phrase "might want to consider" and an optional qualifier (it's up to you), reducing the prescriptive nature of advice. This style makes the listener feel both dignified and not pressured, producing a delicate appraisal of their advice. In contrast, as in example [2], if someone says "Honestly you should start saving more each month," the word 'honestly' is a direct hedge used as an attempt to make it seem candid, the lack of softening makes it sound a bit too pushy. It can come off as a threat to the positive face of the listener, since it could imply the speaker's better knowledge,

damaging the listener's independence. In light of this interpretation, a hedging strategy is used to soften the unwelcomed or negatively received effect of the negative speech act performed on the hearer or addressee (Fraser, 1980; Holmes, 1984).

In addition, other non-textual dimensions such as authority, distance, or rank may come into play behind the utterance and can decide the type of 'politeness strategies as negative or positive, to mitigate the speech act. Politeness strategies are pragmatic claims of good manners to make listeners feel respected and eager to communicate.

This study aims to analyze how Iraqi EFL undergraduate students perform the speech act of advice by utilizing various hedging devices. This helps to understand their pragmatic competence in using English. In this study, the unit of analysis will be the speech act of advice and the hedging devices that come up with Iraqi EFL undergraduate students. The focus of the current study is to find give linguistically how students advice out these and pragmatically in two academic contexts namely, student-student and student-instructor relationships.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The speech act of advice has been studied widely in the West (e.g., Baca, 2011; Decapua & Dunham, 2007; Decapua & Huber, 1995; Hinkle, 1997; Flor, 2003; Nadeau, 2009; Smith & Peterson, 2007; Waring, 2005) and with less frequency in the East (e.g., Al-Shboul & Zarei, 2013; Farnia & Sattar, 2014). The research in this area focused on understanding how the speech act of advice is being given or received by the interlocutors. It also attempted to identify the different types of advice and their effects on student's academic performance. An example of Western studies is the study of Smith and Peterson (2007) who investigated the types of advice and how they affect the student's performance and achievement. The researchers maintained that the advice communicated in class about academic issues improves academic performance. They added that advice is also communicated about outside-class issues such as friendship. This kind of advice can add new resources for learning thus enhancing and reinforcing academic achievement.

In the East, Farnia and Sattar (2014) examined the performance of Malay university students over the speech act of advice. The researchers suggested teaching advice in classrooms to help second language students better perform these speech acts. Al-Shboul and Zarei (2013) conducted a study on a group of Iranian EFL male and female students studying in Malaysia. The researchers attempted to see whether there was a difference in the perception of advice-giving in terms of its appropriateness among these students. The findings showed that there was a difference between male and female groups in terms of the selected strategy of advice and their perception of its appropriateness. The researchers suggested that EFL students receive training in the English language that improves their awareness regarding the appropriateness of the advice strategies.

In the Asian context, a great body of pragmatic studies in the field of speech acts has been analyzed. For example, <u>Banikalef and</u> <u>Marlyna (2013)</u> analyzed the speech act of apology among Jordanian learners. The speech acts of request behavior among Saudi females is examined by Al-Ammar, (2000). Al-Qahtany (2009) conducted a study to compare the use of politeness strategies realized by the speech act of offering between Saudi

Arabic and British English learners. The speech act of thanking is examined by Al-Khateeb, (2009), among others. Abed, (2011) conducted a pragmatic investigation into the refusal strategies used by Iraqi EFL learners of English as compared to those strategies used by American native speakers of English. The pragmatic aspects of speech acts are also studied within the context of public health communication by Raheem and Nehal (2021). Lastly, a comparison between the linguistic and pragmatic realization of Advice and suggestion speech acts strategies by Iraqi EFL students is examined by Darweesh & Al-Aadili (2017). The available studies on the Arab EFL learners' spoken and written discourse have focused mainly on the speech act performance such as advice without analyzing how these speech acts are modified using hedges to express politeness. For example, In a study by Al-Shboul et al. (2012), the speech act of advice has been analyzed in terms of the appropriateness of advice from the American and Jordanian learners' perceptions. In this study, the use of hedges has not been also considered. Very little effort has been exerted to analyze the speech act of advice and how it is modified by linguistic devices like hedges to express politeness. For that purpose, the current study examines the speech act of advice in the written discourse of a group of Iraqi EFL undergraduate students in terms of the primary types realize by the use/non-use of hedges and the pragmatic functions achieved by utilizing these devices.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

- 1- Examine *the types of advice* expressed in Iraqi EFL undergraduate students' written discourse.
- 2- Identify *the hedging devices and their pragmatic functions* employed by Iraqi EFL undergraduate students when giving advice in English.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the objectives aforementioned, the following research questions are guiding the current study:

- 1. What are the types and frequency of *advice* realized by Iraqi EFL undergraduate students in their written discourse?
- 2. What are the types and frequency of *hedging devices* performed by Iraqi EFL undergraduate students to modify their advice and how these devices are realized pragmatically?

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Sample

The sample in the study consisted of twenty-five Iraqi undergraduate students (15 males and 10 females) aged between 18-21 years. The students speak Arabic as their first language and study English as a foreign language at the translation department at the University of Tikrit in Iraq. For sampling, the students were selected purposively to suit the purpose of this study. The number of subjects is considered desirable as according to <u>Creswell (2013:</u>

209), the number of subjects in qualitative studies can range "from 1 or 2 to 30 or 40" and "the larger number of cases can become unwieldy and result in superficial perspectives." The data collected in this study was massive as the subjects produced long sentences when responding to the DCT's open questions, which were enough to reach the saturation point and achieve the aims of the study.

5.2 Research Design

The design of this study is descriptive and involves analyzing the written discourse of a group of Iraqi EFL undergraduate students in their academic settings. The analysis aims to determine and categorize the type of advice speech act realized by Iraqi EFL students and to find out the linguistic devices used to hedge the speech act of advice. These devices which can include 'modals', 'tag questions', and 'shields', among others are used to attenuate the negative effect of the directive speech act of advice on the hearer. It is also concerned with figuring out how these devices are used to realize the pragmatic functions of advice. The possible functions can include showing uncertainty towards the utterance, expressing politeness, or managing the rapport to maintain harmony among the interlocutors.

5.3 Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

The study looked at how a group of Iraqi EFL undergraduate students employ the speech act of advice in their written discourse and how it is transformed by linguistic devices like hedges to communicate politeness based on their relative power and social distance (equal status (=P), high status (+P), and familiar (-D) interlocutors). As a result, the data was collected using an adapted version of an open-ended Discourse Completion Task (henceforth, DCT) proposed by Hinkle (1997).

The DCT consists of two parts. The first part includes four situations for the students with their familiar instructor (+ P, - D, social dominance) while the second part includes another four situations with familiar friends (= P, - D, peer acquaintances). The students were asked to read each situation carefully, imagine themselves within the situation, and then write down what they would say in each situation. A detailed description of student-instructor and student-student situations is shown in Tables 1 and 2 below.

 Table 1: Description of Student-Instructor Situations Based

 on Hinkle (1997)

Situations	Title	Description
S1	Library	The instructor works in the library late at night and is visibly tired.
S2	Bookstore	The instructor is thinking of buying an expensive book
S3	Restaurant	The instructor is about to order a greasy hamburger that the student ordered before and didn't like.
S4	Department Office	The instructor is working and looks ill and doesn't feel very well

Social	Dominance	(high	status)
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Table 2: Description of the Student-Student Situations Based on Hinkle (1997)

Peer Acquaintances (equal status)

Situations	Title	Description
S1	Frequently breaking down car	The student is planning on driving to New York to see some relatives.
S2	Taking a course	A student considers taking a difficult academic course
S3	Repair shop	A student plans to take a car to a repair shop far from the campus
S4	Library	The student is working very late in the evening and looks tired.

5.4 Models of Analysis

The first research question in this study asks for the types of advice performed by Iraqi EFL undergraduate students in their written discourse. To answer the question, the data will be analyzed based on Hinkel's (1997) taxonomy of advice types. Hinkel classifies the speech act of advice into three types as illustrated in the following table:

Advice type	Description	Example
Auvice type	Description	Example
Direct	Responses where the speaker attempts to cause the addressee to do something including imperatives and the modal verb 'should' without hedging.	at home".
Hedged	Responses where the speaker uses hedging devices to reduce his commitment to the truth and relevance of the proposition such as "Why don't you", "I think", "It seemed that", "It appeared", "I believe" and many more.	rest for a while? <i>I think</i> maybe we should survey the price first.
Indirect	Responses that could have more than one illocutionary force and in which no explicit or hedge advice was identified	· ·

Table 3: Hinkel's (1997: 11) Taxonomy of Advice

Note: the examples were taken from Farnia & Abdul Sattar, 2014 The second research question asks for the types and frequency of hedging devices performed by Iraqi EFL undergraduate students to modify their advice with their achieved pragmatic functions following the taxonomy of hedges identified by Holmes (1984). Based on their pragmatic functions, Holmes classifies the types of hedges that are mainly used to modify various speech acts such as advice into different categories as shown in the following table:

Table 4: Holmes (1984) Taxonomy of types of hedges
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Types of Hedges	Explanation	Items
Stating opinion/ personal view	 To express the speaker's doubt or uncertainty of the validity of the proposition being asserted. To express epistemic modality To express a positive politeness strategy 	
Modify Directives	-The speaker desires to cooperate with the other participant as the target of the attenuation to do some action for the hearers' benefit and to maintain social harmony	

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Types of Advice

To answer the first research question of this study, the frequencies and percentages of advice types utilized by the students in both student-instructor and student-student relationships were calculated. The analysis was based on two social variables of "relative power" (student-student relationship) and "social distance" (student-instructor relationship) between participants. The following table shows the results of frequencies and percentages in both variables:

Types of advice	Stu	dent-	Instr	uctor	[+ P , – D]	1			Stud	ent-S	tudent [·	-P, -D]
	Situations											
	S1	S2	S3	S4	Freq.	Per.	S1	S2	S 3	S4	Freq.	Per.
Direct	4	5	3	6	18	15%	20	13	9	15	57	47.5%
Hedge	16	18	17	16	67	56%	5	4	3	4	16	13%
Indirect	8	6	8	7	29	24%	5	11	17	10	43	36%
No advice	2	1	2	1	6	5%	0	2	1	1	4	3%
Total	30	30	30	30	120	100%	30	30	30	30	120	100%

Table 5: Frequencies and percentage of advice types in bothsocial variables

In student-instructor advice, students offer advice to a familiar instructor in four different situations (see Table 1), the social type of this relationship is described as hearer dominance and high familiarity relationship. The analysis showed that the students have a great tendency to convey their messages by the use of

hedge and indirect strategies when they offer advice to their instructors. They utilized the three types of advice with their instructor with a total number of 120 responses in the four situations. Among these types, the hedge advice act occupied most of the students' answers, as it was used 67 times with a percentage amounted to 56%. The second most frequently used type of advice was the indirect advice act (29 responses, 24%) across all situations.

The students showed a level of indirectness and lack of commitment or certainty by using attributes (e.g., I think / I believe), questions (Why don't you? Don't you think/ feel?), shield (e.g., it seemed that it appeared, I believe) to hedge their speech act of advice to their speaker (instructor). These two advice strategies helped the students to build rapport, show politeness and solidarity, and create a good interpersonal relationship with their instructor.

The findings of student-student types of advice showed that 47.5% (N= 57) of the students' responses were direct advice. The students used direct strategies when they advised their friends using imperative devices like the use of modals "should" "shouldn't" and "can" to suggest a strong obligation to do the advised action directly. Additionally, findings showed that 36% (N= 43) of the students preferred to perform their advice indirectly to show cooperation and maintain their friends' public self-image and thus achieve politeness. The analysis also showed that the use of hedge advice was less preferred by the student in this type of relationship as indicated by the fact that only 13% of responses were hedged. Furthermore, they sometimes showed their preference for not offering advice for various reasons.

6.2Hedging Devices Employed by Iraqi EFL Students

6.2.1 Types and Frequency of Hedges in Student-Instructor Advice

In the first four situations, the students were asked to express their Advice while discussing four proposed topics: (1) the instructor working in the library very late in the evening, (2) the instructor is considering purchasing an expensive book, (3) the instructor about to ordering a hamburger in a restaurant, and (4) the instructor looks ill and does not feel well. It is mentioned earlier that 56% (n=67) of students' responses in student-instructor relation were hedged using different hedging devices to mitigate the negative effect and any threat to the positive face of the instructor (see Table 5). These hedges are identified as hedges based on stating opinion or personal point of view. However, other types of hedges explained in the taxonomy of Holmes are not found in this type of advice. The total numbers of hedges identified in the students' responses are presented in the following table:

Table 6: Types and Frequency	of Hedges	Forms	in	Student-
Instructor Advice				

Hedge Category	Linguistic device	Examp	Freq	Perce
neuge Category	Linguistic device	le	•	nt
		I think	21	30%
	Parenthetical verb	I suggest	5	7%
		I believe	4	6%
		Can	5	7%
Stating opinion/ personal view	Modal verbs	Could	2	3%
		Might	2	3%
		Probab ly	4	6%
	Modal adverbs	May be	5	7%
		Perhap s	2	3%
Modify Dispetison	Questions to convey the positive	Why don't you?	5	7%
Modify Directives	hedged assertion	How about .?	12	17%
Double hedges	I thinkcan		2	3%
	I advise/ because		1	1%
Total			70	100%

As shown in Table 6, Iraqi EFL students utilized three types of hedges namely: *hedges to state opinion personal view, hedges to modify directives, and double hedges.* Five forms of linguistic devices were performed to attenuate the force of the speech act of advice with a total number of seventy hedges (n=70) across the four situations. Most of the hedges proposed in Holmes's (1984) taxonomy were found in the data. The highly frequent hedges used were personalized hedging to state opinions by using the parenthetical verbs 'I think', 'I believe', and 'I suggest'. The use of the parenthetical verb '*I think*' with the highest frequency 21

(30%) among all the discovered hedges, "*I believe*" was detected 4 times (6%), and "*I suggest*" 5 times (7%). Generally, the pragmatic functions of these hedges were mainly to state the subject's opinion over the given topic based on their point of view. They were also used to attenuate the force of the propositional content of the speech act of advice. In examples (1-3) below, the students used 'I think', 'I believe', and 'I suggest' to hedge their advice, so they communicated their message clearly and appropriately in a less offensive way. This was mainly done by showing uncertainty towards the ideas they were proposing. By doing so, the subjects saved the positive face or the self-image of the addressee by showing a level of respect and expressing politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

[1] *I think* you can buy a cheap copy of the book from another store. [S2]

[2] You look very tired sir, *I believe* you need some rest. [S1]

[3] *I suggest* ordering something healthy, their hamburger is so fatty. [S3]

To avoid imposing their opinion on the other participant (the instructor) and to save their positive face, the participants showed a kind of uncertainty towards their personal opinion by using the hedge device of modal verbs (can 7%, could 2%, might 2%) and modal adverbs (probably 4%, maybe 5%, perhaps 2%). Pragmatically, these devices were used as positive politeness strategies to mitigate the negative effect and any threat to the positive face of the hearers. By showing uncertainty, possibility, and probability and minimizing the threat on the negative face of the hearer in examples (4), (5), (6), (7), (8), and (9) indicated that the students wanted to communicate their advice smoothly with a less degree of imposition. By doing so, they wanted to appear

paying deferent to the hearers' view of themselves and their selfimages.

[4] *Maybe* you should get some rest until you get better. [S4]

[5] *Perhaps* it will be a good idea if you change your choice. [S3]

[6] Sir, working until late *probably* hurts your health. [S1]

[7] You *can* take some rest. [S4]

[8] You *could* order Pizza, the hamburger here is so bad. [S3]

[9] Sir, you look tired, you *might* take some rest. [S4]

The second type of linguistic device most frequently used by students in this study was performing advice using questions to convey positive hedged assertions using 'How about' (12 responses, 17%) with a high frequency and 'Why don't you' with lower frequency (5 responses, 7%). The student's intention in the use of this device was mainly to empower and elicit the hearer's agreement on the proposed advice. In examples (10) and (11) below, the students used 'how about' and 'why don't you' to look less authoritative or a person who does not just impose on others. In other words, the students gave the chance to the hearer to share the proposition as a strategy for empowerment and to eliminate any kind of action impediment placed on the hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

[10] Sir, *how about* taking some rest, you can finish your work tomorrow. [S1]

[11] *Why don't you* buy the book from another store, it is expensive here. [S2]

Furthermore, the student's responses revealed the use of the modal adverbs *probably*, *maybe*, and *perhaps* with fewer percentages amounted (6%, 4%, and 3%) respectively and the use of the modal verbs *can* (7%), *could* and *might* (3%) for each. The function of these devices is to show uncertainty towards the

proposition and attenuate the force of the propositional content of the speech act of Advice.

The data analysis showed that the students in some responses showed a higher level of politeness by using more than one hedging device. In example (12), the student used the parenthetical verb *think* with the modal verb *can*, and in example (13) the parenthetical verb *advise* and giving reason to justify the advice with *because* to show respect, benevolence, and as a strategy to build rapport and good interpersonal relationship with the instructor.

[12] The price is unimaginably high, I *think* you *can* go to another store. [S2]

[13] I advise you to take some rest because you look pale. [S4]

6.2.2 Types and Frequency of Hedges in Student-Student Advice.

The second part of the DCT contains another four situations, the students were asked to express their advice to a friend while discussing four proposed topics: (1) the student is planning on driving to New York to see some relatives in his frequently broken car, (2) A student considers taking a difficult academic course, (3) A student plans to take a car to a repair shop far from the campus well, and (4)the student is working very late in the evening and looks tired.

As mentioned earlier in Table 5, 13% (n=16) of students' responses in student-student relations were hedged using two hedging devices to mitigate the negative effect and any threat to the positive face of the friends. These hedges are namely: hedges based on stating opinions or personal points of view by utilizing different linguistic devices such as *parenthetical verbs, modal verbs, and modal adverbs,* and hedges based on eliciting

agreement using lexical devices such as *you know, everybody knows, and as you know*. The total numbers of hedges identified in the students' responses are presented in the following table: **Table 7: Types and Frequency of Hedges Forms in Student-Student Advice**

Hedge Category	Linguistic device	Example	Freq.	Percent
		I think	1	6%
	Parenthetical verb	I reckon	1	6%
		I advise	1	6%
Stating opinion/ personal view	Modal verbs	Can	1	6%
		Might	1	6%
	Modal adverbs	Probably	1	6%
		You know	5	31%
Eliciting agreement	Lexical devices	Everybody knows	3	18.7%
		As you know	2	12.5%
Total			16	100%

Table 7 shows that the subject's responses in this part include high rates of lexical devices that had 'the knowledge of the speaker' as a stem. Based on Holmes (1984), language users usually practice many lexical devices such as 'you know', 'you see', 'as you know', and 'everyone knows' to pragmatically express their desire or willingness to cooperate and to elicit agreement from the hearers as the target of attenuation to do some action for hearers' benefits. Based on the shared understanding and knowledge, the students desire to elicit agreements from the hearer, thus minimizing the threat on the positive face of the hearer.

A device such as '*you know*' was the highest among all which was detected 5 times (31%) followed by '*Everyone knows*' used 3 times (18.7%) and '*As you know*' used only two times (12.5%). In examples (14), (15), and (16) below, the students used the three lexical devices: *you know*, *everybody knows*, *and as you know* to

show cooperation and to elicit the hearer's agreement, so the hearer accepts and takes the advice creating a sense of shared understanding and cooperative tone.

[14] Man, *you know* this course is difficult, so think well before you decide. [S2]

[15] Your car is broken *as you know*, take my car [S1]

[16] But there is a very near repair shop *everybody knows* it [S3] In example 17, the student used the negative form of I *know* which is considered by Weatherall, (2020) as a prepositioned epistemic hedge. The student intended to make the advice less confrontational or judgmental, reduce the negative impact on the listener's feelings, and show a sense of caring while avoiding a direct confrontation.

[17] My friend, *I don't know* why you are hurting yourself [S4] For the parenthetical verbs as another type of hedge proposed by Holmes, *'I think' 'I reckon'* and *'I advise'* were allocated with low frequencies and used only one time(6 %). for each device. Consider the following examples:

[18] *I think* it isn't a good idea, your car is dangerous. [S1]

[19] *I reckon* you will face trouble when you go in your car. [S1][20] My friend, you look tired, *I advise* you to go home and finish your work later [S4]

The three hedges stated above show students' uncertainty or doubt towards his/her opinion which is based on personal belief to minimize the threat to the speaker's positive face (self-image)

7. CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to find out how Iraqi EFL undergraduate learners hedge their advice in their academic context linguistically and pragmatically to express politeness in two different contexts. Results of the present study showed that the students used hedged advice more frequently when advising an instructor. The percentage of hedged advice in this context is 56%, which indicates that students are more cautious and polite when addressing someone of higher status or authority. This suggests that the students are aware of the hierarchical relationship and choose to soften their advice to maintain respect and avoid being perceived as presumptuous or disrespectful.

In situations where the advice is given to a peer (another student of equal status), students tend to use more direct advice, with 47.5% of their responses being direct. This indicates that when the power dynamic is equal, students feel more comfortable being straightforward and less concerned about hedging their language. They may perceive that there is less risk of offending someone of the same status, or they may feel that directness is more appropriate and effective in peer interactions.

The difference in the use of hedged versus direct advice lends support to the idea that social hierarchy is a major factor overseeing how these students communicate. The students seem to bring their knowledge of norms into influencing power relations and language strategies. The results of the study point to the necessity for social context, when we consider communication, given that respect for authority and face are particularly valued attitudes within these more collectivist or low-assertive oriented cultures. In sum, the findings provide a clear picture that Iraqi EFL undergraduate students are sensitive

to social dimensions of addressee identity and vary their advicegiving strategies accordingly by being more hedging towards someone with high status while favoring directness when addressing peers.

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