



A Quantitative study of verbal aggressiveness in Iraqi EFL Female Learners

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Abstract:

The main purpose of this study is to detect verbal aggressiveness and its frequency in Iraqi female EFL learners by using Infante & Wigley, (1986) VAS (verbal aggressiveness scale). Data was collected and analyzed by conducting a questionnaire on a sample of 80 students. The study seeks to answer the following questions: (i) To what extent do Iraqi EFL female learners use verbal aggressiveness? (ii) What is the most frequently used type of aggressiveness by Iraqi EFL female learners? The study concludes that females tend to be using moderate degrees of verbal aggressiveness. They also resort to using positive more than negative types of aggressiveness.

(Keywords: Verbal Aggressiveness, Quantitative Study, EFL)

دراسة كمية للعنف اللفظي لدى متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق

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الملخص:

الغرض الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو الكشف عن العنف اللفظي وتواتره لدى متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق باستخدام مقياس انفانت و ويجلي (1986) للعنف اللفظي. تم جمع البيانات وتحليلها من خلال إجراء استبانة على عينة مكونة من 80 طالبة. تسعى الدراسة إلى الإجابة عن الأسئلة التالية (أ) إلى أي مدى تستخدم متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية في العراق العنف اللفظي؟ (ب) ما هو النوع الأكثر استخداماً من العنف اللفظي من قبل متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية العراقيات؟ وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن الإناث تميل إلى استخدام درجات معتدلة من العنف اللفظي. كما يلجأون إلى استخدام أنواع العنف اللفظي الإيجابية أكثر من السلبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العنف اللفظي ، الدراسة الكمية، اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية

2. Introduction

Throughout history, language has been the primary means of human communication. Human language is more than just a way of passing useful information from one person to another; it's also a way of shaping relationships and thus negotiating interpersonal meaning and relationships. We reveal something about ourselves and our relationships with others when we use language (Locher, 2013). Because we need to employ polite [or impolite]



language for fruitful conversation, people use language to promote, discourage, enhance, or even cause conflict between interlocutors" (Omar & Wahid, 2010, n.p.). The deviation from the constraints of politeness is referred to as impoliteness or aggravation which is considered the opposite of politeness.

The linguistic phenomenon of verbal aggressiveness is referred to as *aggravation* by Lachenicht (1980), or as *rudeness/impoliteness* (Kienpointner 1997; Culpeper 1998, 2011; Pearson et al. 2001; Locher & Watts 2008; Archer 2008; Bousfield 2008). It is usually included within the framework of (im)politeness theory. In these works, verbal aggressiveness is classified as a form of impoliteness that has been intensified or aggravated. It is seen as a hyperonym of impoliteness (i.e. impolite behaviour is a type or sub-category of aggressive behaviour). (Biscetti, 2020: 20)

The main purpose of this study is to detect verbal aggressiveness and its frequency in Iraqi female EFL learners by using Infante & Wigley, (1986) VAS (verbal aggressiveness scale).

3. Theoretical Background

3.1 Verbal Aggressiveness

Verbal aggressiveness is a complex and elusive communicative phenomenon involving pragmatic, psychological and cognitive aspects. (Biscetti, 2020: 19)

Verbal aggressiveness is described as an attack on an individual's perception to cause emotional suffering to another person through communication. Physical aggression is a precursor for verbal aggression, which is considered a damaging element of communication (Infante & Wigley, 1986: 53). Therefore, verbal aggressiveness can be defined as "any verbal action carried out with the intent to harm the interlocutor or force his/her compliance" (Tedeschi & Felson 1994, 33)

Aggressiveness is viewed as either an amplified, aggravated type of impoliteness or the result of premeditated but non-spiteful/malicious behavior in socio-pragmatic research. As a result, aggressiveness is always explained in terms of (im) politeness theory (Biscetti, 2020: 13).

The use of harsh or inappropriate language is not a new phenomenon. Verbal abuse is as old as language itself. All aspects of polite language, such as social padding, wrapping, and circumlocution, are eliminated with violent language. As a result, impolite language often includes forbidden terms about sex, death, and body functions like excrement. Aggressiveness is noticed in situations of social breakdown, affront, quarrel, or institutions requiring extreme urgency and efficiency and it is deployed for a variety of purposes, including to express contempt, to be aggressive or provocative, to mock authority, to simply draw



attention to oneself, to release tension, and rarely for verbal seduction. (Thakur, 2008: 139).

The objective of using aggressive language, according to Lachenicht (1980: 607), is to harm or destroy the hearer's public self-image or face. His social face is torn, and real personality is exposed. Aggravation shows in direct complaints, open criticism, and compulsion, and the aggravation victim is denied freedom of action and freedom from imposition (Thakur, 2008: 139).

As a result, aggressiveness may be defined as communicative techniques designed to assault face by committing purposeful FTAs, which have the potential to cause social conflict and disharmony (Culpeper et al. 2003: 1546; Bousfield 2007: 2186).

Aggressiveness strategies, like politeness strategies, can be both positive and negative. Positive aggressiveness techniques are defined by Thakur (2008: 140) as expressing disapproval, criticism, ridicule, complaint, contempt, accusations, reprimand, insult, and disliking of personal traits, characteristics, beliefs, values, and possessions . Whereas interferences, impositions, warnings, arguments, contradictions, and even threats and violence are all examples of negative aggressiveness methods. Positive aggressiveness is usually low-key, indirect, and convincing, with plenty of hints about underlying dangers or threats. Negative aggressiveness, on the other hand, is frequently loud, aggressive, and pompous . There are certain tactics in using aggravation in discourse, according to Lachenicht (1980: 634). In any rude discourse, there are both positive and negative aggressiveness methods at work.

3.2 Positive Aggressiveness (positive aggravation)

In positive aggressiveness, the speaker may communicate his opinion or belief that he does not share any ideological, group, or emotional affinity with the addressee, either openly or implicitly. He may also signal that the speaker-hearer relationship is asymmetric, and that he has no intention of cooperating with the addressee to satisfy the latter's facial desires (Thakur, 2008: 140). There are twelve positive aggravation strategies, according to Lachenicht (1980, p. 634). The following are the twelve positive aggravation strategies: (1) expression of dislike for the addressee, (2) denial of in-group status, (3) use of non-valid imperatives, (4) offending the addressee's sensibilities and beliefs, (5) expression of ill-will for the addressee, (6) use of sarcasm, (7) use of negative politeness, (8) disclaiming common opinions, (9) ignoring and interrupting, (10) showing disinterest in addressee's projects, (11) failure to offer or ask for reasons and (12) refusals.

3.4 Negative Aggressiveness (negative aggravation)



Negative aggressiveness strategies can be used to fulfill the speaker's goal of causing offense, shame, humiliation, shock, and terror. Negative aggravation techniques can be implemented by indirectness (Lachenicht, 1980: 658). The negative strategies are: (1) use of indirectness, (2) use of the speech of powerful persons, (3) references to the speaker's power, (4) questions, (5) insistence on the addressee being humble, (6) teasing and baiting, (7) use of positive politeness, (8) attempt to indebt the addressee, (10) deflation, (11) indirect and explicit challenges, (12) references to rights and obligations, (13) disagreements and contradictions, (14) increase in imposition, and (15) use of threats and violence.

4. Research objectives and Questions

The following study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are Iraqi EFL female learners aggressive?
2. what is the most frequently used type of aggressiveness by Iraqi EFL female learners?

5. Methodology

Data collection and analysis

The data were collected from 80 Iraqi female EFL learners at Al-Imam AL-Kadhum college who voluntarily participated. Respondents completed a 20-item verbal aggressiveness Questionnaire model.

The Scale of Verbal Aggressiveness VAS by Infante & Wigley (1986) is used. The scale takes the form of a questionnaire, which consists of 20 items. These items were created in such a way to determine the tendency of individuals to verbally attack others. The 20 items in this scale consist of 10 positively worded items (e.g., *"I refuse to participate in arguments when they involve personal attacks," "When I try to influence people, I make a great effort not to offend them"*) and 10 negatively worded items (e.g., *"If individuals I'm trying to influence really de- serve it, I attack their character," "When individuals insult me, I get a lot of pleasure out of really telling them off"*).

The subjects were asked to determine the degree to which each statement is true for them personally when trying to influence other people. They rated how well each item describes them using a 5-point scale, ranging from *almost never true* (=5) to *almost always true* (=1). The scoring of this questionnaire followed the scoring principles set by Infate and Wigley.

Positively worded and negatively worded items were scored individually. The sum of negatively worded items of each subject was subtracted from 60, then the sum of positively worded items of the subjects was added to the subtraction output. The



resulting number constitutes the verbal aggressiveness score. Table (1) shows these processes of data analysis.

Table (1) Verbal Aggressiveness scoring

Subjects	step 1: sum of negatively worded items	Step 2: sum of positively worded items	step 3: output of subtraction process.	step 4: verbal aggressiveness score
subject 1	22 / 15	48 / 15	12 / 15	34 / 15
subject 2	17 / 15	44 / 15	16 / 15	33 / 15
subject 3	23 / 15	54 / 15	6 / 15	29 / 15
subject 4	35 / 15	35 / 15	25 / 15	60 / 15
subject 5	31 / 15	36 / 15	24 / 15	55 / 15
subject 6	31 / 15	35 / 15	25 / 15	56 / 15
subject 7	21 / 15	44 / 15	16 / 15	37 / 15
subject 8	33 / 15	26 / 15	34 / 15	67 / 15
subject 9	15 / 15	44 / 15	16 / 15	31 / 15
subject 10	25 / 15	41 / 15	19 / 15	44 / 15
subject 11	26 / 15	43 / 15	17 / 15	43 / 15
subject 12	19 / 15	33 / 15	27 / 15	46 / 15
subject 13	16 / 15	24 / 15	36 / 15	52 / 15
subject 14	13 / 15	41 / 15	19 / 15	32 / 15
subject 15	20 / 15	43 / 15	17 / 15	37 / 15
subject 16	20 / 15	40 / 15	20 / 15	40 / 15
subject 17	25 / 15	37 / 15	23 / 15	48 / 15
subject 18	19 / 15	45 / 15	15 / 15	34 / 15
subject 19	34 / 15	50 / 15	10 / 15	44 / 15
subject 20	19 / 15	45 / 15	15 / 15	34 / 15
subject 21	14 / 15	44 / 15	16 / 15	30 / 15
subject 22	16 / 15	23 / 15	37 / 15	53 / 15
subject 23	18 / 15	41 / 15	19 / 15	37 / 15
subject 24	23 / 15	29 / 15	31 / 15	54 / 15
subject 25	13 / 15	44 / 15	16 / 15	29 / 15
subject 26	30 / 15	41 / 15	19 / 15	49 / 15
subject 27	16 / 15	51 / 15	9 / 15	25 / 15
subject 28	26 / 15	48 / 15	12 / 15	38 / 15
subject 29	24 / 15	30 / 15	30 / 15	54 / 15
subject 30	25 / 15	36 / 15	24 / 15	49 / 15
subject 31	13 / 15	23 / 15	37 / 15	50 / 15
subject 32	14 / 15	31 / 15	29 / 15	43 / 15
subject 33	16 / 15	45 / 15	15 / 15	31 / 15
subject 34	20 / 15	47 / 15	13 / 15	33 / 15
subject 35	22 / 15	20 / 15	40 / 15	62 / 15



subject 36	24 / 15	39 / 15	21 / 15	45 / 15
subject 37	12 / 15	30 / 15	30 / 15	42 / 15
subject 38	13 / 15	26 / 15	34 / 15	47 / 15
subject 39	13 / 15	35 / 15	25 / 15	38 / 15
subject 40	28 / 15	46 / 15	14 / 15	42 / 15
subject 41	23 / 15	42 / 15	18 / 15	41 / 15
subject 42	21 / 15	44 / 15	16 / 15	37 / 15
subject 43	17 / 15	38 / 15	22 / 15	39 / 15
subject 44	18 / 15	36 / 15	24 / 15	42 / 15
subject 45	26 / 15	36 / 15	24 / 15	50 / 15
subject 46	37 / 15	42 / 15	18 / 15	55 / 15
subject 47	29 / 15	42 / 15	18 / 15	47 / 15
subject 48	22 / 15	43 / 15	17 / 15	39 / 15
subject 49	33 / 15	40 / 15	20 / 15	53 / 15
subject 50	15 / 15	41 / 15	19 / 15	34 / 15
subject 51	13 / 15	34 / 15	26 / 15	39 / 15
subject 52	28 / 15	46 / 15	14 / 15	42 / 15
subject 53	17 / 15	48 / 15	12 / 15	29 / 15
subject 54	14 / 15	44 / 15	16 / 15	30 / 15
subject 55	35 / 15	41 / 15	19 / 15	54 / 15
subject 56	14 / 15	44 / 15	16 / 15	30 / 15
subject 57	20 / 15	41 / 15	19 / 15	39 / 15
subject 58	16 / 15	41 / 15	19 / 15	35 / 15
subject 59	21 / 15	48 / 15	12 / 15	33 / 15
subject 60	23 / 15	42 / 15	18 / 15	41 / 15
subject 61	14 / 15	46 / 15	14 / 15	28 / 15
subject 62	27 / 15	35 / 15	25 / 15	52 / 15
subject 63	27 / 15	49 / 15	11 / 15	38 / 15
subject 64	23 / 15	33 / 15	27 / 15	50 / 15
subject 65	20 / 15	39 / 15	21 / 15	41 / 15
subject 66	21 / 15	33 / 15	27 / 15	48 / 15
subject 67	21 / 15	29 / 15	31 / 15	52 / 15
subject 68	21 / 15	33 / 15	27 / 15	48 / 15
subject 69	24 / 15	31 / 15	29 / 15	53 / 15
subject 70	25 / 15	30 / 15	30 / 15	55 / 15
subject 71	18 / 15	27 / 15	33 / 15	51 / 15
subject 72	28 / 15	38 / 15	22 / 15	50 / 15
subject 73	17 / 15	23 / 15	37 / 15	54 / 15
subject 74	27 / 15	39 / 15	21 / 15	48 / 15
subject 75	30 / 15	28 / 15	32 / 15	62 / 15
subject 76	24 / 15	20 / 15	40 / 15	64 / 15
subject 77	18 / 15	35 / 15	25 / 15	43 / 15



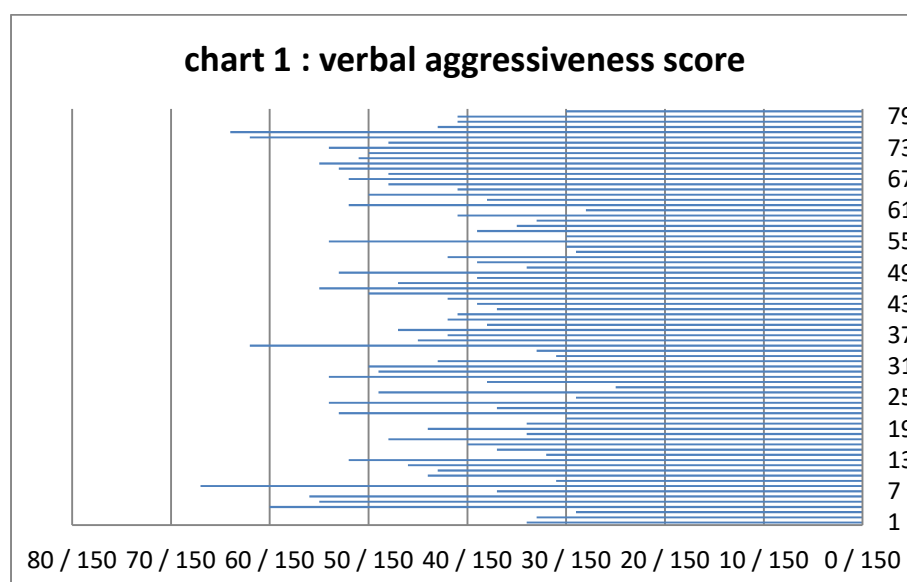
subject 78	18 / 15	37 / 15	23 / 15	41 / 15
subject 79	26 / 15	45 / 15	15 / 15	41 / 15
subject 80	11 / 15	41 / 15	19 / 15	30 / 15

6. Results and Discussion

In their verbal aggressiveness scale, Infate and Wigley indicate that if the verbal aggressiveness scores range between 59-100, subjects will be characterized with high degree of verbal aggressiveness, and those ranging between 39-58 have a moderate degree of verbal aggressiveness, whereas subjects whose scores range between 20-38 have low degree of verbal aggressiveness.

The analysis of the data shows that only 5 subjects (6.2%) have shown high degrees of verbal aggressiveness, and their scores ranged between 60-67. Data also show that those who scored low degrees of verbal aggressiveness were only 12 subjects (15%). The majority of subjects (79%) scored between 39-58 showing moderate degrees of verbal aggressiveness as in chart (1).

Table (1) shows that the scores of negatively worded items are lower than those of positively worded ones. These relatively low scores of negatively worded items indicate that most Iraqi EFL females tend to use positive aggressiveness strategies more than negative aggressiveness strategies when verbally attacking others.



Results also show that Iraqi EFL female learners tend to depend on the situation to decide their verbal behavior. In certain situations, using impolite, aggressive language helps them create power and dominance over others in a difficult situation to safeguard their safety interests.



The frequent use of the options of "*rarely true*" and "*almost always true*" in answering most of the questionnaire items, especially negative ones, indicates that female speakers resort to negative aggressiveness whenever the situation requires them to do so, and whenever they believe that other indirect ways would not cause the required effect.

7. Conclusion

Throughout this study, a number of conclusions were reached at:

1. Iraqi EFL female learners have shown moderate degrees of verbal aggressiveness indicating that females tend to be careful when threatening other people's faces.
2. The study also shows that Iraqi EFL females tend to use positive aggressive strategies more than negative ones. This is shown through the higher scores of positively worded items and lower scores of negatively worded items.
3. It is also shown that using impolite, aggressive language is determined by the situation and the speaker's feelings towards the addressee.

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