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Analysis of Errors Made by Iraqi EFL University Students in Using Indirect Questions

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Abstract

This research study aimed to highlight the misuse of indirect questions by Iraqi EFL learners. For the academic year 2021–2022, a test was administered to the English department 4th-year students in the University of Babylon's College of Basic Education. The test showed that many students made an error when they asked indirect questions.

Key words: Indirect question, errors, Iraqi EFL learners

تحليل الأخطاء التي يرتكبها طلبة الجامعة العراقيين متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية في استخدام الأسئلة غير المباشرة

امجد جبار مجيد

كلية التربية الأساسية/ جامعة بابل

المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على عدم مقدرة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من استخدام الأسئلة غير المباشرة بشكل صحيح . تم إجراء اختبار لطلاب السنة الرابعة من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية الأساسية بجامعة بابل للعام الدراسي 2021–2022 . أظهر الاختبار أن العديد من الطلاب ارتكبوا أخطاء تتعلق بالأسئلة غير المباشرة.

الكلمات الدالة: سؤال غير مباشر، أخطاء، الطلبة العراقيين متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

1.1 Introduction

All students find it difficult to locate the suitable word whose symbols accurately convey the ideas they are thinking and to find the perfect phrase to fit a notion when learning a foreign language.[1]

Questions are very important in daily communication and cannot be avoided by people. They have grown with the growth of people until they became one of the important fields of knowledge. Therefore, it is noticed that they are very important in peoples' daily life. They are frequently used both directly and indirectly. A question does not express a certain state, but it is a desire by the speaker to know what he or she is asking.

Iraqi learners are supposed to have many challenges when studying English, like other English learners. These challenges drive them to make linguistic, semantic, syntactic, and phonological errors of various kinds.

1.2 Aims

The goal of the current research paper is:

- 1- Addressing basic concept on indirect questions.
- 2- Recognizing the performance of Iraqi EFL university learners using indirect questions.
- 3- Determining the errors of using indirect questions by Iraqi EFL university learners.

1.3 Hypothesis

To fulfill the purpose of this research paper, the following hypothesis has been put forth:

- 1- Many Iraqi students studying at EFL universities are not always fully competent at using indirect questions.

1.4 Limits

This study is restricted to university students in their fourth year in the Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Babylon during the academic year (2021-2022). Since fourth-year students are thought to be the most knowledgeable and skilled in the subject of using indirect questions at the university level, they were given the test.

1.5 Definitions of Basic Terms

In this research paper, for clarity and accuracy, some terms need to be defined:

- 1- **Indirect question:** a question that, rather than using the exact terms of the original question, is conveyed to the others in speech or writing for example "He asked me what was wrong." [2]
- 2- **Direct question:** a question asked in direct speech, such as Why did you come? [3]
- 3- **EFL University Learners:** They are students whose primary subject in English departments at universities in Iraq is English as a foreign language.

2.1 Direct and Indirect Questions

In English, there are primarily two ways to ask a question: directly and indirectly. The following traits apply generally to both direct and indirect questions:

2.1.1 Direct questions:

- A. They are independent, i.e. they're standing alone.
- B. The verb and the subject have to be reversed, except when the word is the subject of the question.
- C. It is important to put a question mark at the end.
- D. They explicitly pass the speech from the questioner directly.

2.1.2 Indirect questions:

- A. In higher sentences, they are embedded.
- B. It is not to invert the verb and the subject, but to maintain the order they have in a sentence.
- C. The question mark is to be omitted.
- D. They may or may not explicitly pass the speech from the questioner.

Direct and indirect questions are either informational or yes / no answers. The information questions are those that depend on wh-interrogative word if it is direct or indirect to the questions. But the case is different in terms of yes / no questions. The direct ones rely on different kinds of auxiliaries that take the place of the words of the wh-interrogative words:

- (1) Does he know the reply?

While only 'if' and 'whether' take their place in indirect questions:

- (2) I don't know whether (if) he knows the reply.[4]

2.2 How and When to Use Indirect Questions

Both, directly and indirectly, posed questions are acceptable in English. Both have the same meaning. On the other hand, indirect questions are employed when we want to be more formal or polite.

Direct question: (3) Where is my father?

We use indirect questions to be more polite or formal.

- (4) Could you tell me where my father is?

2.2.1 Sentence Structure and Word Order in Indirect Questions

The word order in a direct question changes when we make indirect questions; instead, it takes on the form of a longer sentence or question.

(Subject + verb + object)

Direct question: (5) How many colors are there?

Indirect question: (6) Do you know how many colors there are?

2.2.2 Indirect Questions and the Auxiliary Verb "Do"

The auxiliary verb "do" is not used when changing direct questions into indirect ones.

Direct: (7) When does the show start?

Indirect :(8) could you tell me when the show starts?

2.2.3 "If" and "Whether" in Indirect Questions

If the direct question doesn't contain a question word (such as who, what, etc.), we need to use if or whether in the indirect question.

Direct (9) Did he reach the bus station on time today?

Indirect: (10) Can you tell me if/whether he reached the bus station on time today? [5]

3. Methodology

Language testing is a method of focusing on language and knowledge in a controlled manner [6]. Language testing needs to strike a balance between its practical and technical components that is neither overly complex nor simplistic. [7]

The purpose of this research study is to categorize and characterize the challenges faced by Iraqi EFL students in the English Department of the College of Basic Education at the University of Babylon while using indirect questions.

To identify and classify these difficulties, a question of 10 items was given to 25(7 males & 18 females) 4th stage students of the Dept. of English. The allotted time given for them to answer the question was 40 minutes.

Students were informed that their identities would remain unknown. All the answers were analyzed.

4. Results and Discussion

This research paper aimed at determining the difficulties of using indirect questions by Iraqi EFL university learners. To get a clear idea about these difficulties, table (1) showed the correct and wrong answers of the learners.

(Table 1) Numbers of correct and wrong answers

Item's No.	Correct answers	The ratio of Correct answers	Wrong answers	The ratio of Wrong answers
1	9	36%	16	64%
2	6	24%	19	76%
3	8	32%	17	68%
4	10	40%	15	60%
5	5	20%	20	80%
6	6	24%	19	76%
7	4	16%	21	84%
8	7	28%	18	72%
9	9	36%	16	64%
10	7	28%	18	72%
Total	71		179	

From (Table 1), it is noticed that the wrong answers of the EFL university learners were higher than the correct answers in using indirect questions.

The wrong answers showed that the main difficulties the EFL university learners faced were the wrong use of the auxiliary verb (do), wrong word order, and wrong use of (if\ whether).

5. Sources of the Errors

The following shows the opinions of some scholars about the sources of errors: Richards [8], concluded that Interlingual and intralingual errors were the two most common types of errors. The first is when students write sentences in the target language

while erroneously applying the rules of their native tongue. The second errors made by the learners happen as they are learning the target language. The four categories of errors include induced, intralingual, communication strategy-based, and interlingual errors, according [9]. On the other hand [10] categorizes errors into four groups: communication strategies, learning environment, intralingual transfer, and interlingual transfer.

In a summary, the writing samples of the participants identified four main sources of the errors, as follows:

5.1 Interlingual Errors

In contrast to interlingual errors, which are brought on by interference from the native language, errors of this kind are generated by mother tongue influence, argues[11]. These errors are brought on by the learners' usage of native language elements in their spoken and written target language performances. In most cases, it is impossible to learn a foreign language without drawing on some of the linguistic components of the language you have previously mastered. In any event, interference can happen in a variety of linguistic areas, including phonology, morphology, grammar, syntax, lexis, and semantics, according . [12]

5.2 Intralingual Errors

These are errors that originate from poor learning qualities, such as incorrect rule application and ignorance of rule limitations [11]. Thus, native language interference has no impact on intralingual errors; instead, the target language is what causes them. These errors frequently happen when language learners lack appropriate knowledge during the learning process[13].

5.3 Limited Knowledge of English Grammar

The participants' poor command of English grammar is a significant contributor to their errors. Students who don't comprehend English grammar well make errors. [14]. The responses confirm that Iraqi EFL students' English grammatical knowledge needs to be enhanced.

6. Conclusion

This research paper checked the errors of using indirect questions made by Iraqi EFL university learners in the Dept. of English / College of Basic Education, University of Babylon for the academic year (2021-2022). It also aimed at presenting the sources of these errors. The sources of these errors were interlingual errors, intralingual errors, and limited knowledge of English grammar.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest

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