Pragmalinguistic Failure of Iraqi EFL Fourth-year University Students in Interpreting Some Political Proverbs

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Research Article

ABSTRACT

Interpreting proverbs (including political proverbs) requires knowledge about linguistic, cultural and social information related to L2. What is more important is that such types of knowledge seem to be a burden placed on Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students when using these proverbs, particularly, when used in various situations. So, the problem lies in the fact that learners are unaware of the pragmatic knowledge that a proverb has because they do not recognize the purpose of the communicative act that a proverb has socio-pragmatically. In other words, they do not recognize if the proverb conveys, for example, warning, advice, command and so on. In addition, misinterpreting proverbs may be the result of lack of linguistic knowledge including syntax and semantics.

Keywords: Linguistics, Pragmalinguistics, Pragmatic failure, Linguistic competence

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are important aspects of verbal discourse within the socio-cultural contexts in which knowledge, ideas and emotions are communicated. They reflect the people's social and cultural orientations, philosophy, worldviews, as well as psychological and literary make-ups that generally depict the experience of life. Proverbs are an essential and enduring part of daily speech in all societies by stating basic principles of folk wisdom and conduct. Since they are an outgrowth of common experiences, very often the precepts of one culture are the precepts of another.

Any person speaking a foreign language is well aware of the communicative difficulty with proverbs. However, it would be improper to know only the literal meaning of the words used in a proverb in order to explain what it means or what message it conveys. In addition, knowing the general meaning of proverbs would also be insufficient to understand what they mean. Indeed, to know the meaning of a proverb in most cases relies heavily on the socio-pragmatic knowledge that a speaker and listener have. Such knowledge includes the linguistic and sociocultural knowledge and this represents the socio-pragmatic knowledge.

It is assumed that Iraqi EFL learners misinterpret political proverbs and lack pragmatic knowledge required for the interpretation of such proverbs. Moreover, they also seem to lack semantic and syntactic knowledge, that lead to pragmalinguistic failure. The influence of L1 pragmatic knowledge leads to misinterpret the proverbs concerned pragmatically.

The present study is limited to a specimen of 20 Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students majoring English at the University of Baghdad, College of Education/Ibn Rushd, Department of English for the academic year 2012-2013. The proverbs concerned are those that are related to the theme of politics as stated by most prominent paremiologists.

PROVERBS: GENERAL REMARKS

Proverbs are a part of every language as well as every culture. They have been used to spread knowledge, wisdom and truths about life from ancient times up until now. They have been considered an important part of the fostering of children, as they signal moral values and exhort common behavior. According to the famous American paremiologist,

Wolfgang Mieder [1], proverbs have been used and should be used in teaching as didactic tools because of their content of educational wisdom. Mieder says that "*since they belong to the common knowledge of basically all native speakers; they are indeed very effective devices to communicate wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large*" [2].

There are literally thousands of proverbs in the multitude of cultures and languages of the world. Proverbs have been collected and studied for centuries as informative and useful linguistic signs of cultural values and thoughts. The earliest proverb collections stem from the third millennium BC and were inscribed on Sumerian cuneiform tablets as common sensical codes of conduct and everyday observations of human nature. Since proverb collections usually list the texts of proverbs without their social contexts, they do not reveal their actual use and function that varies from one situation to another [3].

One importance of using proverbs is that when the proper proverb is chosen for a particular situation, it is bound to fit perfectly and it becomes an effective formulaic strategy of communication. And contrary to some isolated opinions, proverbs have not lost their usefulness in modern society. They serve people well in oral speech and the written word, coming to mind almost automatically as pre-fabricated verbal units. While the frequency of their employment might well vary among people and contexts, proverbs are a significant rhetorical force in various modes of communication, from friendly chats, powerful political speeches, and religious sermons to lyrical poetry, best-seller novels, and the influential mass media. Proverbs are in fact everywhere, and it is exactly their ubiquity that has led scholars from many disciplines to study them from classical times to the modern age [1].

TRADITIONAL DEFINITIONS OF PROVERBS

Proverbs are often exploited to convey a great deal of meaning, associated with people's thoughts, habits, beliefs, experiences, traditions and patterns of life. They constitute an integral part of the people's folklore, and are used whenever the various situations they serve recur. Therefore, many attempts have been made to define the term 'proverb'.

Because of the different meanings that can be conveyed by proverbs and because of the various functions they serve in real life, scholars, philosophers, linguists, anthropologists, and particularly paremiologists offer different definitions each serves a certain purpose. However, no one definition can be labeled comprehensive and complete. The following are the most representative definitions offered beginning with the most common (general) one as applied in everyday life then going through specific definitions offered in terms of field of knowledge.

Briefly speaking, Mieder [4] identifies a proverb as "*wisdom expressed in a sentence*". Such a definition only focuses on the didactic property of the proverb, i.e., a proverb is held to express wisdom, morals, orders and warnings. This definition lacks the essential properties a proverb possesses, such as traditionality, popularity, familiarity, wit, wisdom, rigidity of form, etc.

Pragmatically, proverbs are used for communicative purposes and pragmatic reasoning is required in order to understand them. That is, they are used with a certain communicative aim that transcends their linguistic form and meaning. They can be manipulated by language users. They can often be attributed to contextual, pragmatic meaning which may result in substituting, perhaps, temporarily their literal and figurative meaning which they may fail to interpret the proverb, even in cooperation with the situation. This contextual meaning will supplant and transcend through employing the situational dimension of context or either of the latter's dimension: pragmatic dimension or the semiotic one [5]. Consider the proverb '*actions speak louder than words*' in the following situation: Wife: *Can't you hear me, George …I've been calling for the fifteen minutes?* Husband: Sure, I can't hear dear, actions speak louder than words.

In the context above, there are at least two major interpretations for the manipulated proverb. The first is the original interpretation of the proverb, i.e., its standard proverbial interpretation which is irrelevant to the interaction. In other words, if the proverbial response of the husband is regarded through the original standard proverbial interpretation, the manipulated proverb will seem irrelevant to the conversation or context simply because the husband is not expected to be judged by the noise he is making.

The use of a proverb can bear manifold communicative-pragmatic, social and also other functions, which is true for interactional situations as well different genres of written and oral texts. Moreover, it seems important to underline that proverbs not only serve as a disseminator of traditional wisdom, knowledge and apparent truths handed down from generation to generation. Proverbs are basically conversational, but occur commonly in both spoken and written communication, e.g., lectures, newspapers, speeches, books, fables and poetry. Proverbs are used in a wide range of situations, and according to Mieder [6] there are no limits to the use of the proverb. They can be used to "*strengthen our arguments, express certain generalizations, influence or manipulate other people, rationalize our own shortcomings, question certain behavioural patterns, satirize social ills, poke fun at ridiculous situations*". They are exploited to "*advise, console, inspire, comment on events, interpret behaviour and foster attitudes, such as optimism, pessimism and humility*" [7].

To sum up, Moosavi [8] claims that proverbs might be used for either of these functions:

1. Proverbs are used as a title of a book or title of a literary work on the whole (e.g., Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*).

2. In press, hot news is circulated through a proverb in the heading or text of it which reflect news topic.

3. Statesmen and government authorities use proverbs in their speech in different occasions.

4. Proverbs might attract consumers' attention in ads (either commercial or political).

Perhaps, the most representative and conclusive definition is offered by Mieder [1] while acknowledging the difficulty of providing comprehensive definition, holds that the proverb is "*a short generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom ,truth ,moral and traditional views in a metaphorical and memorisable form and which is handed from generation to generation*".

METHODOLOGY

This section is mainly devoted to a detailed explanation and analysis of the responses made by Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students. The analysis would be made according to the difficulty (or failure) they have faced while trying to interpret the given political proverbs starting from pragmalinguistic difficulty, lack of socio-pragmatic knowledge, pragmalinguistic knowledge, semantic knowledge, syntactic knowledge, and negative transfer of L1 and other minor linguistic factors.

GENERAL RESULTS

On the basis of the investigation and analysis of data-collection, the following results are drawn, based on the students' responses in both recognition and production aspects as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1: General Results.

Type of Test	Students' Scores	Whole Scores	Percentage
Recognition	92	200	46%
Production	168	800	21%

Generally speaking, Iraqi EFL university students fail in attaining duties related to pragmalinguistic interpretation of political proverbs. As for the recognition test, students have failed to specify the nominated speech acts as they give 230 correct responses out of the total number of scores 500, i.e., constituting 46%.

On the other hand, the production test reveals the students' pragmalinguistic failure in interpreting these political proverbs, constituting 21%, as they have 168 scores out of the total scores 800. This means that students are mostly unable to predict the pragmalinguistic interpretation of political proverbs and even identify the speech acts used. Definitely, there are a number of certain factors leading to or causing such failure or deviation which will be discussed in the following pages.

Recognition Level

Iraqi EFL students seem to fail to recognize a number of the speech acts used in the conducted test because of certain influences and factors that lead them to have such failure. The students' lack of the social and cultural norms (and the situations) of the target language (TL) force them to fail when trying to approach the appropriate illocutionary acts. The lack of such knowledge is seen to be a factor of confusion and then failure.

In respect of the recognition test, the researcher guesses that students might find difficulty in realizing the meaning of some unfamiliar speech act verbs such as: supplications, pledge, insult, etc.; therefore, he explains such unfamiliar speech act verbs. He sometimes resorts to interpreting them in Arabic in order to let them understand the aim of his experimental work.

The responses of the students of fourth-year grade mostly seem to be inexact in assigning the nominated illocutionary act to the given political proverbs. Their correct answers record 92 out of 200, i.e., constituting 46%. This means that they are weak in the recognition of the specified speech act. **Table 2** illustrates the political proverbs given with students' scores and percentages in the recognition test:

Table 2: Recognition Test.

NO.	Proverb Used	Students' Scores	Percentage
1	Better a live coward than a dead hero	9	45%
2	Forewarned is forearmed	15	75%
3	If you can't beat them join them	9	45%
4	If you want peace, prepare for war	10	50%
5	Lean liberty is better than fat slavery	7	35%
6	Never tell your enemy that your feet aches	9	45%
7	Strike while the iron is hot	12	60%
8	The fear of war is worse than war itself	7	35%
9	The treason is loved, but the traitor is hated	6	30%
10	Who serves at court, dies at straw	8	40%
TOTAL		92	46%

This table clearly reveals that Iraqi EFL students fail to identify the type of the speech acts used in these political proverbs. There are, of course, certain factors which lead to such failure, namely:

Lack of socio-pragmatic competence (social norms, conventions, traditions, way of thinking, way of living) of the target language, Students fail to identify the speech acts used in these political proverbs due to their lack of their socio-pragmatic knowledge of English language. Besides, they do not know the contextual meaning of these proverbs, so that they cannot figure out the purpose behind using such proverbs, which lead to misinterpretation.

The influence of the learners' L1 culture on their comprehension of these proverbs, they usually resort to reflecting that they are unaware of the cultural norms of the target language. What happens is that they use their cultural knowledge of their L1 when interpreting the proverbs and this is the negative transfer of L1.

Lack of linguistic knowledge (partial or total lack of the syntactic and semantic knowledge). Some students fail or misinterpret some lexical items and this inability to recognize these lexical items leads to misinterpretation of the whole meaning of the political proverb. This leads also to failure of identifying the intended speech act used in this proverb.

Production Level

Pragmatic interpretation of political proverbs requires that a learner should have knowledge of the context of situation (the social context) in addition to knowledge of the socio-pragmatic norms of the target language. Many of the learners' responses have shown that they lack such knowledge and, hence, have failed to interpret these proverbs properly. In the first rank, learners have been unable to attach the proverb to its intended meaning because they have not recognized (or ignored) the social situation in which the proverbs are produced. In other words, while trying to interpret the proverbs, they fail to do so because they could not relate the proverbs to their situations and have explained them as being mere statements not as a general truth, command, advice, warning and so on. By doing so, they have interpreted them in a way that is socio-pragmatically different or, in some cases, not related to the intended meaning of the proverb.

Each item is given 4 scores; the 50 students' correct answers for each item will be out of 80. Table 3 illustrates the number of each item with students' scores and the percentage of the students' correct answers of each item of the production test:

Table 3: Production Test.

No	Proverb Used	Student' Scores	Percentage
1	Every man has his price	10	12.5%
2	Keep your friend close and your enemy closer	34	42.5%

3	Laws catch flies, but let hornets go free	16	20%
4	Might makes right	20	25%
5	Politics makes a strange bedfellow	14	17.5%
6	Put your trust in God, but keep your powder dry	12	15%
7	The more laws, the more offenders	18	22.5%
8	The voice of the people is the voice of God	14	17.5%
9	Truth is the first casualty of war	12	15%
10	We must all hang together, or we shall all hang separately	18	22.5%
Total		168	21%

The wording of these political proverbs plays a crucial role in helping students in interpreting these proverbs. Lexically, students are mostly able to recognize and interpret proverbs containing familiar words and common expressions more easily than those that contain words and expressions that are unfamiliar or idiomatic. Knowing what a proverb means is an essential point towards what is meant by this proverb. The two are interrelated. Arriving at the collective (literal) meaning of a proverb will surely lead to guessing its pragmatic meaning. In other words, a hearer (or a listener) can make use of the literal (direct) meaning of the lexical items constituting the proverb to approach the pragmatic (indirect) meaning in terms of the context in which this proverb is used. In order to have a better understanding of why students fail to arrive at the proper interpretation of political proverbs, an account of causes and reasons behind such failure seems to be essential in this respect.

PRAGMATIC FAILURE

Generally speaking, Ziran and Xinren [9] point out that pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication occurs under the following four circumstances.

1. The speaker chooses an inappropriate topic. Different cultures usually have different beliefs, value views and living habits. Therefore, people need to distinguish between free and constrained topics in intercultural communication.

2. The speaker uses expressions which have different implications in the target language, or which deviate from his own intention in producing such utterances. This kind of pragmatic failure commonly happens in greetings. Besides, misuse of fixed expressions in the target language also gives rise to misunderstanding.

3. The utterance made by the speaker to express a certain idea does not conform to the convention of the target language. Since people with different cultural backgrounds tend to use different expressions and strategies to convey the same information, they tend to commit pragmatic failure while speaking a language other than their mother tongue.

4. A participant in a conversation makes an inappropriate response to a certain question or statement.

In a more specific way, Guan-lian [10] remarks that "*Pragmatic failure is committed when the speaker uses grammatically correct sentences, but unconsciously violates the interpersonal relationship rules, social conventions, or takes little notice of time, space and addressee*".

Pragmalinguistic Failure

Pragmalinguistic failure occurs when the pragmatic force mapped by the speaker onto a given utterance is systematically different from most frequently assigned to it by native speakers of the target language, or when conversational strategies are inappropriately transferred from the speaker's mother tongue to the target language [11]. It can be considered from both sides of the conversation. On the one hand, the speaker commits pragmatic failure because he takes for granted that the listener is able to understand his meaning and he, thus, makes an inappropriate utterance. On the other hand, the listener commits pragmatic failure by deducing the meaning of the speaker's utterance incorrectly [9].

In pragmalinguistic failure, speakers fail to convey their meaning because the message's pragmatic force is misunderstood. A speaker might translate something from an L1 into a target language without the knowledge that the communicative conventions of the target language are quite different. For example, the formulaic expression '*How are you?* in English generally means little more than '*Hello*'. Pragmalinguistic failure occurs when learners sometimes fail to get the meaning of an utterance due to the fact that the communicative conventions behind such an utterance used are

different. Such an error or problem is considered as a pragmalinguistic one since it has a little to do with speaker's perception of what constitute appropriate behaviour, and moreover it has a great deal to do with knowing how to phrase an utterance (a request, for instance), so that it will be interpreted as a certain speech act (a request) rather than as an information question.

Pragmalinguistic knowledge requires mappings of form, meaning, force and context [12]. As it is a well-known fact that a proverb can be expressed in different ways in different languages and in many cases it is not possible to have a literal translation. Pragmalinguistic knowledge refers to which particular linguistic choices can be used to express different types of meaning (i.e. contextual, pragmatic including speech act).

The inappropriate use of the linguistic items within the produced forms made students fail to match the proper pragmatic interpretation of these political proverbs; the illocutionary acts seen in the TL situations. The inappropriate linguistic use made by the students is attributed to certain inappropriate behavior of semantic and syntactic aspects when making responses. Such inappropriateness is largely caused by wrong or redundant linguistic items resulting in unclear or awkward production of the political proverbs as well as identifying the speech acts concerned.

Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students, sometimes, translate some utterances from their first language into the target language, thinking that they have the same linguistic meaning. They, however, fail to get the utterance meaning across because the communicative conventions behind the utterances used are different. This, as Jenny Thomas points out, is more a linguistic, hence pragmalinguistic, problem than a pragmatic one because: (1) it has little to do with speaker's perception of what constitutes appropriate behavior; and (2) it has a great deal to do with knowing how to phrase a request. For instance, in '*Every man has his price*' this proverb should be interpreted as a request rather than as stating information. The clear picture of pragmalinguistic failure can be given through the presentation of the following political proverbs.

Prov. 1: Every man has his price.

Student (1): 'this means that everything in life has value even the man has a value by his manner and works in his life'.

Student (2): 'we must deal with people in according to their doing so if they works hard they must be respected'.

Student (3): 'the people in the community respect the person that have a well behaviour and he presents good things to his community'.

Student (4): 'anyone in the world know himself very well and know his price or know his value. It means that any man has his price or his value'.

Some Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students have produced unclear or nonsensical interpretation which might be related to the fact that they have not partially (or completely) understood what proverbs are intended to convey, they fail to match linguistic aspect to pragmatic meaning such a proverb intends to be. They, perhaps, ignore the fact that it is insufficient to rely on formal meaning to arrive at the pragmatic meaning a proverb expresses.

An investigation of the four examples above, it is apparent that Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students have interpreted the proverb literally without paying attention to its pragmatic consideration. They have not interpreted it as a kind of warning or even an advice. Therefore, it is possible to say that Iraqi EFL students have relied on the word '*price*' to interpret this political proverb, neglecting the other possible pragmatic meanings of this utterance containing the word '*price*'. The result is an interpretation that does not match the given situation.

Prov. 2: Truth is the first casualty of war.

Student (5): 'the speaker shows the state or quality of being true when the person talks the truth in his life may casualty because it the first casualty of conflict in his life'.

Student (6): 'truth is the best thing in human personality so men must speak truthly and trust each other and never hurt other people'.

Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students could not relate the proverb to its pragmatic context, and thus they have interpreted the word '*truth*' literally. Pragmatically, it is possible to say that they have relied on the word '*truth*' to interpret this political proverb, neglecting other possible interpretations of this word. This improper interpretation is caused by the lack of pragmatic and linguistic competence. The result is an interpretation that does not match the given situation at all. Evidently, it seems that they fail to correlate the linguistic form of this proverb to its suitable speech act. They interpret this proverb as predicting the speech act of statement or command rather than being an illocutionary act of warning.

Prov. 3: Might makes right.

Student (7): 'the greater the history, there are who make the story of history. They are who write the history of nation because as they say how something of greater of glory aims something of lesser glory and when the moon shone, we didn't see the candle'.

Student (8): 'the person must become sure in order to give the right judgement because this will affect his life. So the patience sometimes gives the correct judgement'.

Pragmatically speaking, learners have involved in the idea of righteousness in which they interpret the word '*right*' as '*the right judgement*' whereas the proverb does not indicate this literal idea at all. The word '*right*' refers to the fact that 'the argument put forward (=right) by those who are strong (=might)'. Such pragmalinguistic failure in interpreting this political proverb leads students to what is called pragmatic misinterpretation.

Prov. 4: Politics makes a strange bedfellow.

Student (9): 'the speaker wants to say that don't make many strange relationships and don't make others take part in your life and you don't want this'.

Student (10): 'if any strange know my political view in everything in the life may make that this strange accept this political view and bedfellow me'.

Obviously, Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students interpret the word '*strange*' literally not pragmatically, as '*a stranger*' not as '*different*'. They also misinterpret the word '*bedfellow*' as '*followers*' not as '*opponents*'. Thus, they expound the proverb as '*politics makes strange followers*', instead of the right pragmatic interpretation 'In politics, people who have always been opponents often work together at different times for their own interests'.

Socio-Pragmatic Failure

Socio-pragmatic failure is concerned with '*what to say*' and '*whom to say it to*'. Many of the misunderstandings that occur stem from what is identified as differences in evaluation regarding 'size of imposition', 'cross-culturally different assessments of relative power or social distance', and 'value judgments'. Socio-pragmatic failure results from different cultural norms and pragmatic principles that govern linguistic behaviors in different cultures. Since speakers with different cultural backgrounds have different understandings of the appropriateness of linguistic behavior, there may be barriers to effective communication. In addition, different cultures have different ways of thinking, rules of speaking, social values and place different relative weights on the pragmatic principles, and these cross-culturally different assessments of social parameters have negatively affected language users' linguistic choices, which finally result in socio-pragmatic failure [11].

Ziran and Xinren [9] confirm that socio-pragmatic failure occurs when the speaker does not give attention to the identity and social status of the listener during the conversation. He may produce pragmatic failure by using a polite form of expression towards a close person or someone of a lower social status, or by addressing a remote person or someone of a higher social status with an intimate form. The speaker's lack of knowledge about the politeness principle of social interaction is a major cause of socio-pragmatic failure.

Socio-pragmatic failure is caused due to the social circumstances surrounding the speech act, such as the social distance, politics, religion, morals, gender, power and the closeness of relationships between the interactants, i.e., knowledge about the world. So, this type of transfer occurs when the speaker does not know what to say, when, why and to whom. For example, not knowing the pragmatic force of a '*thank you*' might cause a pragmalinguistic failure, but cultural differences of when to say it, in which occasion and for what reason might cause socio-pragmatic failure [13].

Within this aspect, students fail to understand and produce a number of the required political proverbs and specify the speech acts issued by the political proverbs. This can be attributed to certain influences and factors that lead them to have such failure. On the one hand, they seem to be directly under the control of their L1 culture and thus recognizing and producing the required illocutionary acts, using their culture and not the culture of the target language. But, bear in mind that their illocutionary acts are different from those understood and produced by the native speakers. What they did is that they recognize and produce them on the basis of their knowledge of their L1 culture. Mostly, they achieve this by translating the situations of the target language, as given to them in the tests, into their language and then translating the speech acts found in their culture in order to recognize and produce the given target speech act. To have an obvious view of the reasons behind the socio-pragmatic failure of the fourth-year students in interpreting the given political proverbs, it is essential to consider some fruitful examples taken from the responses on the production question:

Prov. 5: Laws catch flies, but let hornets go free.

Student (1): 'you should be aware from laws of anything your government or you should be strong like hornets'.

Student (2): 'the government should be fair with all of people and put God between its eyes'.

Seemingly, these interpretations reflect the learners' potential fear of a tyrant government's laws. In correlation with Iraqi environment, these two students reflect their attitudes towards tyrant laws. Therefore, they interpret this proverb as a warning not as a criticism of laws in relation to the influence of their L1 culture. They give a direct translation from Arabic religious cultural norms and conventions into English, particularly 'put God between its eyes', which means that a government should be fair and should treat all citizens equally (metaphorically *speaking between its eyes* means *fair* in L1 context). Particularly, this non-native interpretation utilized by students takes place due to their lack of pragmatic knowledge of the target language.

Pragmatically, the two interpretations appear to be the result of the conditions which the learners live in. Being affected by the circumstances under which they live, they have interpreted the proverb with the ideas of '*corruption*' '*bribery*' while the proverb is directed to criticize the law. That is, this proverb is issued to express the illocutionary act of criticizing not of warning as they guess. In other words, the pragmatic misinterpretation occurs owing to the influence of the society with its norms, beliefs and artifacts.

On the basis of semantic grounding, they explain it as a kind of warning: "*to be aware of laws*", whereas the proverb is intended to issue the speech act of criticizing the law which catches the small thieves and let the big ones go freely. The words like 'law', 'flies' and 'hornets' have been exploited semantically by students to arrive at pragmatic interpretation. Nevertheless, the result is an interpretation that does not match the given one.

The influence of the L1 culture on the recognition and production of the political proverbs might be seen as being negative L1 transfer. Negative transfer occurs because the L1 forms, norms or principles used in TL production are not part of the TL forms, norms or principles. Therefore, the resultant utterance is erroneous [14]. Here, in the case of the two examples above, pragmatic transfer (interference) takes place because students copy from L1 to TL their perceptions of pragmatic and cultural schemata. They sometimes overgeneralize L1 socio-pragmatic aspects and norms and attempt to use them in TL. On the other hand, their lack of the social norms (the situations) of the target language culture has forced them to fail when trying to approach appropriate illocutionary acts. They, seemingly, seek to approach them in the TL but they fail to do so and instead produce certain situations related to speech acts already existed in L1. For more elaboration, consider the following example:

Prov. 6: Keep your friend close and your enemy closer.

Student (3): 'be afraid from your friends more your enemies, your friend will be change sooner or later to be your enemies'.

Student (4): 'we should be aware in choosing friends, since true friends are the nearest relations and if they are false friends they will be worse than open enemy, so we should try our friends before trusting them and we should fear our enemy once and our friend a thousand times'.

Student (5): 'not to trust anyone because sometimes suspicious makes us in the safe side'.

Student (6): 'you should not so hard nor so weak you should between them in order not to make lots of enemies you should keep asid and in equall with all parts and partial and enter only in some circumstances'.

Although the production test reveals that this proverb is the easiest one among the other political proverbs, yet there are some misinterpretations offered by Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students, which deserve to be mentioned here. Apparently, Iraqi EFL students, in their interpretations, tend to give the literal meaning '*Keep your friend close* = be afraid from your friends' of this proverb which is entirely different from the pragmatic one 'keep an eye on your friend'. It is obvious that Iraqi EFL students are under the influence of their native culture, conventions and norms, giving the Arabic version '*false friends they will be worse than open enemy*' of the literal meaning of this proverb which is not applicable or match to the pragmatic meaning of this political proverb. That is, they apply their L1 social norms in interpreting these proverbs due to their deficiency of the target language cultural and social norms. This is what is known as *negative transfer*, when students transfer or use their L1 cultural knowledge when interpreting the proverbs thinking that they are applicable to the TL. This generally occurs due to their ignorance of the target language cultural knowledge.

As mentioned earlier, pragmatic interpretation of political proverbs requires that a student should have knowledge of the context of situation (the social context) in addition to knowledge of the socio-pragmatic norms of the target language. These two factors lead to a proper interpretation of the proverbs. Nevertheless, many of the responses of the learners have shown that they lack such knowledge and, hence, have failed to interpret them properly. They fail to arrive at the exact speech act used owing to the above semantic mismatching the pragmatic (indirect) interpretation.

Prov. 7: Every man has his price.

Student (7): 'the people in the community respect the person that have a well behaviour and he presents good things to his community'.

Student (8): 'you should be respectable in your country and you should respect others'.

Student (9): 'men are various in features and every man has own features that distinct him from the other, every man has his price'.

Apparently, Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students could not relate the proverb to its context (or do not realize this fact) and thus have interpreted the proverb as an evaluation of a man, by taking the word 'price' as the basis for their own socio-pragmatic interpretation. The resulting interpretation is totally not related to the nominated proverb. Instead of interpreting the word '*price*' as a '*bribe*', they consider it as an evaluation of human good deeds and behavior.

Pragmatic misinterpretation has been noticed in the students' responses. This misinterpretation can be explained as the direct result of the influence of the learners' L1 culture, which they usually resort to when explaining pragmatic issues, reflecting that they are, pragmatically, unaware of the cultural norms of the target language. What happens is that they use their cultural knowledge of their L1 to interpret improperly pragmatic aspects related to TL since both English and Arabic language reflects different cultural means, rules and norms, this predicts the idea of interference (negative transfer). Consequently, they produce inexact pragmatic interpretation of these political proverbs.

Prov. 8: We must all hang together, or we shall all hang separately.

Student (10): 'we must all hang together means dead together or all hang separately means all dead separately. So, in any situation we must hang'.

This nonsensical interpretation of the above political proverb reveals the students' total lack of pragmatic and even linguistic competence. Lack of target language cultural and social norms and lack of pragmatic competence lead to cross-cultural failure. This also reveals that Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students are likely unfamiliar with such type of proverbs because they have not been exposed to them earlier during their learning English.

Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students tend to interpret the nominated political proverbs in terms of their L1 pragmatic knowledge. It seems that they are greatly influenced by their L1 cultural pragmatics. That is, students, while interpreting political proverbs, rely on their pragmatic knowledge of their native language. Further, they are unaware of the pragmatic behavior of the target language, which is completely different from that of L1.

Prov. 9: The voice of the people is the voice of God.

Student (11): 'the speaker talks about the nature of all human beings when the go to the God in their prayer. So the voice and sound of all people is the same of voice of the God because God creater all of them and all of them will be return to the God'.

Despite the grammatical and spelling mistakes, Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students, again, are under the influence of their native culture and norms by translating, literally, the Arabic religious and cultural norms '*go to the God in their prayer, the voice and sound of all people….voice of the God because God creater all….return to the God*' into English language which is totally non-native and not applicable or match the pragmatic meaning of this political proverb. They apply their L1 religious, cultural and social norms in interpreting these proverbs due to their lack of the target language religious, cultural and social norms. In other words, they lack pragmatic knowledge of the target language.

Students' interpretation seems to be awkward, hesitant, non-native and even sometimes nonsensical one. They, moreover, fail to guess the appropriate speech act used. The reason behind this failure is their pragmatic interpretation. In correlation with Arabic culture, the proverb is interpreted as a speech act of assertion rather than the speech act of advice.

Prov. 10: Put your trust in God, but keep your powder dry.

Student (12): 'the person should believe in the God and he should walk in the correct way to obtain the mercy of God'.

Student (13): 'in any time you should put your trust in God because God is the only who help you in any time. Just put your trust in God because God is the nearest to human'.

Student (14): 'you must turn all your move and dependence in your life for God because God is the creator of all human beings and the mercy of God is general if they really believe and dependence on the God'.

Student (15): 'faith will move mountains and take your power from your God and will pass any zigzag path'.

Student (16): 'you are trusted person and people rely on you to guide them'.

Student (17): 'put your trust in God because God will always help us and direct us to the right way'.

Apparently, Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students are under the influence of their native culture and norms, conveying the Arabic religious, social and cultural norms '*the person should believe in the God ….walk in the correct way to obtain the mercy of God, God is the nearest to human, the mercy of God is general, take your power from your God*' into English language, which are non-native and not applicable or match the pragmatic meaning of this political proverb at all.

Students, here, resort to Islamic teachings and instructions to explain this proverb. In addition, they mostly utilize the literal meaning to give their interpretations, neglecting contextual and pragmatic meaning, and how the former (literal) is related to the latter (contextual) since they are interrelated.

LACK OF LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE

This factor has influenced the Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students' understanding and production of the nominated political proverbs and, consequently, specification of the intended illocutionary act. Lack of linguistic knowledge is attributed to total or partial lack of syntax and semantics of the students leading to the inappropriate recognition and production of the speech acts concerned. Such lack is seen at different levels including wrong use of tenses, prepositions, articles and so on, in addition to the lack of meanings or misinterpreting the intended meanings. This reflects the fact that the repertoire of the students' linguistic knowledge is insufficient. The students' pragmatic interpretation of political proverbs, thus, is characterized with awkwardness, and hesitancy and in some cases, this factor leads to very obscure responses.

Total Lack of Linguistic Knowledge

Surprisingly, some of the answers have been '*I don't know*' or they have been left out without any comment. This might be attributed to total lack of linguistic knowledge as far as interpreting the proverbs are concerned. The lack of both semantic and pragmatic knowledge could be assigned to such failure as in **Table 4.**

Table 4: Total lack of Linguistic Knowledge.

Proverb Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
No Responses	6	0	4	5	4	3	1	3	7	3	**36**

In most of the students' responses, the pragmatic misinterpretation occurs owing to the improper use of linguistic knowledge and improper interpretation of the meaning itself (linguistic disorder) as in the following examples:

Student (11): 'the speaker may be talks about many and every kind of men in general in society, so every man has his price and his cost by works and strong in this life'.

Student (12): 'don't some any weapones in your battles'.

Student (13): 'no more parties, no polician only face-book, tweefer, you-tufe internet is the truth in the world'.

Student (14): 'who warns you as if he pleases you'.

Student (15): 'If you can't do something unpleasant to them hug them to you'.

Such improper or unclear interpretation is specifically found in proverb No. 9 "*Truth is the first casualty of war*" of the production test.

Student (16): 'this means that the good person who have the good intend and he wants to assert about his country he becomes the first victim in the war because he is a noble person that he sacrifices himself to make his country live in peace'.

Student (17): 'be truthful in any situation in your life because lying is shame and be honest'.

Pragmatically, it is possible to say that Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students have relied on the literal meaning of the proverbs expressions and words, such as '*casualty*' and '*truth*', to interpret this political proverb regardless of other possible interpretations of these words. This semantic misinterpretation indirectly results in pragmatic failure. Students often arrive at the hidden (pragmatic/intended) meaning on the basis of the formal meaning an utterance exhibits. Consequently, they have shown, in some occasions, some nonsensical or awkward interpretations. This lack of linguistic knowledge has led the students to interpret this proverb as predicting the speech act of advice or command rather than being an illocutionary act of warning.

Semantic Knowledge

As noted in the data analysis, some of the political proverbs have been misinterpreted owing to the lack of semantic knowledge, which has led Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students to produce interpretations that are completely not related to the intended ones of the given political proverbs.

Knowing the semantic meaning of the English lexical items is very important to the Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students simply because it (the semantic knowledge) mostly leads to the proper pragmatic meaning. The students do not

know the meanings of certain lexical items used in the political proverbs and accordingly they have misinterpreted proverbs containing these lexical items. In all cases, this leads to the failure of interpreting these political proverbs as well as recognizing the speech acts used.

Some lexical items employed in the political proverbs have been misinterpreted by Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students resulting in producing improper and inexact interpretation of these proverbs, as shown in the aforementioned misinterpretations of the lexical items 'strange' and 'bedfellow' in page 15.

Syntactic Knowledge

Within this aspect, students have shown lack of the syntactic aspects when interpreting political proverbs pragmalinguistically; and thus the produced interpretations are unclear and awkward. Consequently, they fail to express the concerned illocutionary acts. There are no certain syntactic shortcomings that occurred randomly; each student shows lack of syntactic knowledge as regards to different grammatical rules and aspects of English and Arabic languages, consequently produced unclear and awkward interpretation as well as improper illocutionary acts as in:

Student (18): 'the person should believe in the God and he should walk in the mercy of God'.

Student (19): 'in any time you should put your trust in God because God is the only who help you in any time. Just put your trust in God because God is the nearest to human'.

Student (20): 'you must turn all your move and dependence in your life for God because God is the creator of all human beings and the mercy of God is general if they really believe and dependence on the God'.

Student (21): 'faith will move mountains and take your power from your God and will pass any zigzag path'.

Student (22): 'the speaker talk about the nature of all human beings when the go to the God in their prayer. So the voice and sound of all people is the same of voice of the God because God creater all of them and all of them will be return to the God'.

Student (23): 'you should not so hard nor so weak you should between them in order not to make lots of enemies you should keep asid and in equall with all parts and partial and enter only in some circumstances'.

Obviously, the above examples reveal that Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students' answers have shown lack of syntactic knowledge, e.g., wrong use of tenses '*the speaker talk about the nature of all human beings when the go to the God in their prayer*' and improper use of functional words '*dependence on the God*', '*return to the God*'. The inappropriate use of the syntactic knowledge indirectly leads to misinterpretation of political proverbs and failure to identify the nominated speech acts.

The percentage of both aspects (i.e. semantic and syntactic knowledge) for the linguistic failure of the production test can be summed up as in Table 5:

Table 5: Linguistic Failure.

Type of Linguistic Failure	Occurrences	Percentage
Lack of Semantic Knowledge	177	88.5%
Lack of Syntactic Knowledge	170	85%

In correlation with the aforementioned table, it has been noticed that most of Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students lack linguistic competence in English language, i.e., they lack semantic knowledge about English language as well as the syntactic one. In the light of the adopted production test, 177 out of 200 students' responses have shown lack of semantic knowledge about English language during their interpretations of the political proverbs, i.e., constituting 88.5%. Concerning the lack of syntactic knowledge, 170 out of 200 students' responses have shown this type of lack and constituting 85%.

CONCLUSION

The misinterpretation or difficulty Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students have faced while trying to interpret the political proverbs is mainly attributed to their lack of pragmatic knowledge.

The pragmatic difficulty or failure is seen as a result of their linguistic inability to attach the given proverb to its social context (or they have not recognized that a proverb is to be interpreted in relation to its context) and the result has been the interpretation of mere statements. In other words, they have interpreted the proverbs on the basis of interpreting the

meanings of the items of the proverbs not on the basis of interpreting them as being general lessons which include warning, advice, pledge, promise, etc.

The pragmatic failure has also attributed to interference of the learners' L1 culture, norms and beliefs. This kind of failure has resulted into non-native interpretations of the given proverbs. Mostly, they have been considered as a direct translation of their L1 cultural norms, principles and beliefs into the target language.

Some responses have shown nonsensical interpretation owing to students' linguistic inability (or mixture of the linguistic resources they have) to interpret the proverbs and the result is unclear interpretation or non-related one. Other responses have shown that they lack the meanings of some of the lexical items found in the given proverbs (lack of semantic knowledge) and, consequently, they have interpreted them with reference to other meanings not related to the intended interpretation.

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