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**Egyptian EFL Speakers' Direction-Giving Strategies:
A Cross-Cultural, Cross Linguistic Study**

MA Thesis

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2012

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the people who have helped write this thesis either directly or indirectly.

I am very grateful to my thesis supervisor Professor Amal Al-Kary for her constant support and advice during the writing of this thesis. She has shown great constancy and cooperative attitude that helped me work in a stable environment to write my thesis. She has never imposed certain ideas on the writing of the thesis, but her method has been always the professional academic way which encouraged me to think and create. Indeed, I owe her a great deal. May her soul rest in peace.

I am also grateful to Doctor Nadia Abdulgalil Shalaby who has helped me from the very beginning of the journey of writing my thesis. She has worked a lot with me since writing my pre-proposal and has been always supportive and encouraging. Her illuminating comments and discussions had always been an asset to me.

My deepest-felt gratitude is to Doctor Ingy Arafa who has helped and encouraged me since I was an MA student in the Preliminary year. In fact, she is the reason I am now able to write an MA thesis. I owe her more thanking and recognition

My thanks are due to my family, especially my father who has always been supportive and encouraging. If I am what I am today, it is because of my family's kindness and love.

Special thanks to all my friends and volunteers who had helped in collecting the data. They have exerted a great effort in collecting the naturally-occurring data despite having many other responsibilities to do. Their support has been a true asset to the writing of the thesis.

Abstract

This study is a cross-cultural, cross-linguistic study that depends on natural data to examine the strategies of direction-giving used by Egyptian students learning English as a foreign language and compares the strategies used in those sequences to direction-giving sequences in Egyptian Arabic. The research investigates the applicability of Wunderlich and Reinelt's (1982) "interactional scheme" to the Arabic language as L1 and English Language as L2. The research also examines the role of language transfer in the acquisition of English L2 direction-giving. The data was collected from naturally-occurring direction-giving exchanges on Cairo University Campus. The data was then analyzed both qualitatively, using the Wunderlich and Reinelt's (1982) "Interactional Scheme", and quantitatively by counting the frequencies of direction-giving linguistic strategies. The qualitative analysis of the data revealed that the direction-giving exchanges in Arabic L1 and English L2 are highly conventionalized. The Interactional Scheme proposed by Wunderlich and Reinelt does apply to the direction-giving exchanges provided by Egyptian native and EFL speakers, but with some proposed modifications. It has also shown that language transfer, particularly transfer of training, plays a role in the production of EFL direction givers. The quantitative analysis, on the other hand, has indicated that Arabic L1 and

English L2 direction givers use similar direction-giving strategies, but with different frequencies. The results of the study revealed the routinized nature of the direction-giving exchanges both in Arabic and EFL English. This extends the results of the conventionalized nature of the speech act of direction giving in other languages, such as German, French and English. Results also showed that while Arabic L1 direction givers tended to use more landmarks, indirect imperatives, indicative verbs, and future verbs, English L2 direction givers used more English L2 direction givers used more relative directions, bald imperatives, and present verbs. The study concludes with a discussion on the pedagogical implications, the limitations, and suggestions for further research.

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Chapter One

1. Introduction

Despite the widespread use of maps, travelers still frequently make use of verbal directions in finding their way to unfamiliar places (Freundschuh, Mark, Gopel, & Couclelis, 1990). According to Allen (1997) the production and comprehension of route directions occur in a situational context which has important cognitive, linguistic, social, and geographic dimensions, and therefore provides an important area for research.

Similarly, Mark and Gould (1995) argue that many people rely on obtaining directions to find their way, and would have difficulty finding it without the availability of verbal directions from strangers while en route. Besides, spontaneous provision of verbal directions for way-finding requires the direction-giver to perform both spatial and verbal cognitive tasks. Thus, direction-giving for way-finding provides an interesting area for research.

According to Taylor-Hamilton (2004) many of the models provided in ESL/EFL textbooks are based on the writers' intuition about how directions are given by native speakers. As a result, such models ignore very important aspects of the direction-giving exchange

including its grammatical and cultural complexity. Hence, research is needed to provide authentic data for pedagogical materials to prepare the students for real-world interactions (Taylor-Hamilton, 2004; Coulmas, 1981).

1.2 Rationale for the study:

Researchers have rarely examined the speech act of direction-giving (Ewald, 2010; Taylor-Hamilton, 2004). As Kasper and Rose (1999) said, most of interlanguage pragmatics research has been done on speech acts that involve the cross-cultural perception of politeness, such as requests (e.g. House & Kasper, 1981; Blum-Kulka, 1982; El-Shazly, 1993), refusals (e.g. Hsieh & Chen, 2005; Nelson, Carson, Al-Batal, & El-Bakari 2002), and apologies (e.g. Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Andrawis, 1989). Most of the speech acts that have been addressed in interlanguage pragmatics research have social consequences for the second language learner. When Thomas (1983) referred to socio-pragmatic failure, she was referring to the kind of failure in speech acts that would lead to social breakdown. Studying direction-giving, however, looks at speech behaviour failure of another kind; it is the failure that would not result

in a social misunderstanding, but rather in getting lost (Taylor-Hamilton, 2004).

One main reason for the paucity of studies on direction-giving is that there has been an assumption that most cultures think, view and talk about space in similar ways (Taylor-Hamilton, 2004). For example, Foley (1997) stated that all people talk about space in relational terms in relation to their bodies (e.g. right, and left). However, studies such as that conducted by Brown and Levinson (1993) among a group of people in Tzeltal in Australia show that some cultures may conceive of and talk about space in non-relational terms only. Thus, the case of “Tzeltal” underscores the point that researchers can not assume that there will be one-to-one correspondence in the form that direction-giving takes between any two languages, just as the case of requests and apologies. It is therefore crucial that we study the baseline data of a speaker’s L1 and L2 so that we may better understand the nature of L2 direction-giving and how it differs from L1.

Although many studies have been conducted in cognitive science and cognitive psychology on the nature of spatial description, few studies have been conducted on spatial description in the context

of giving of directions (Ewald, 2010). To illustrate, many studies in cognitive psychology focused on how humans find their way, which is referred to as “way-finding” (see for example, Couclelis, 1996; Hund, Seanor, & Hopkins 2006; Baker et al., 2008). Such studies on direction- giving in the field of cognitive psychology ignored the linguistic nature of the direction-giving exchange, and focused on how people find their way.

Similarly, there are very few studies that focused on how people describe the route to a particular destination which is known as “route description” (e.g. Psathas & Kozloff, 1976; Wunderlich & Reinelt, 1982; Klein, 1982; Ewald, 2010). However, none of the studies on direction-giving has focused on the Arabic language, with the exception of one study by Taylor-Hamilton’s (2004). In a study based on role-play direction-giving data in an ESL\EFL context, Taylor-Hamilton (2004) investigated L1\L2 difference in giving directions by analyzing the direction-giving strategies, such as the use of landmarks and street names among college students in Emirates and native British English speakers. She confirmed that the direction-giving exchange varies from language to language and culture to

culture. She found that male students in the UAE use different direction-giving strategies from the British native speakers.

Taylor-Hamilton's (2004) study, however, has many limitations. First, she depended mainly on male students and therefore the results can not be generalized to all Arabic speakers because it is not a gender-balanced study. Second, the interlocutors who collected the L1 Arabic data were non native speakers of Emirati Arabic and this might have affected the results since Arabic has a wide variety of dialects and regional differences might have played a role in the results. Third, the cultural context in the UAE is very different from countries outside the Arab peninsula, as Egypt for example. So the results may be due to the participants' unfamiliarity with the modern context of urban towns. Fourth, she depended on role-play which is inevitably different from the spontaneous nature of the direction-giving exchange.

1.3 The Scope of the present study:

The present study is a cross-cultural, cross-linguistic study that depends on natural data to examine the strategies of direction-giving used by Egyptian students learning English as a foreign language and

compares the strategies used in those sequences to direction-giving sequences in baseline data (L1 Egyptian Arabic speakers). The research will investigate the applicability of Wunderlich and Reinelt's (1982) "interactional scheme" to the Arabic language as L1. The research will also examine the role of language transfer in the acquisition of English L2 direction-giving.

1.4 The Research Questions:

- 1- What are the different phases of the direction giving exchange in Arabic, and what are the linguistic strategies used in route-description? (The "interactional scheme" from Wunderlich & Reinelt, 1982.)
- 2- What are the different phases of the direction giving exchange in English used by Egyptian EFL students, and what are the linguistic strategies used in route-description?
- 3- How do the norms of Egyptian EFL learners in giving directions compare to the norms the speakers' own L1?
- 4- What role does language transfer of training play in the acquisition of English L2 direction giving?

1.5 Significance of the study:

According to Scotton and Bernstein (1988) attention should be paid to naturally-occurring conversations in the development of pedagogical materials for L2 teaching. Similarly, Taylor-Hamilton (2004) argued that textbook direction-giving units are often based on incorrect assumptions about how directions are given in English, and ignore important aspects of direction-giving, such as using street names, or referring to landmarks, or even mixing the different strategies together to give directions. Such incorrect assumptions make the dialogues presented non-authentic and therefore fail to prepare the students well for real-world interactions.

The data for the present study is collected from naturally-occurring direction-giving exchanges to provide an analysis for the speech event of direction-giving in English as L2 and Arabic as L1. Hence, this research should help language teachers know the difficulties their students might face while learning how to give directions in English through investigating the nature of direction-giving in English as L2 and Arabic as L1 and tracing the effects of language transfer from L1 (Arabic) to L2 (English). It will also help EFL/ESL textbook writers particularly with regard to the development

of direction-giving pedagogical materials for EFL students. The importance of this research also lies in its cross-cultural and cross-linguistic focus. This is one of the ventures on direction-giving exchanges in spoken Egyptian Arabic, compared to Egyptian EFL students' direction-giving, and to English native speakers' direction-giving exchanges in English.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis:

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction. The second chapter includes a review of the research done on speech acts in general and direction-giving in particular. The third chapter outlines the methodology of the research. The fourth chapter includes an analysis of the collected data. Finally, in the last chapter the results of the study together with pedagogical recommendations and limitations are presented.

1.7 Conclusion

Although maps are spread, people still make use of verbal directions to find their way to unfamiliar places. There is, however, paucity in the research on direction-giving. This is because previous