



# **Recognizing Speech Acts in Weather Proverbs by English Foreign Language Postgraduate Students**

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**(Received in 28/9/2022 Accepted in 20/2/2023)**

## **Abstract:**

Recognizing the metaphorical meaning of phrases, sentences and conversations is of a great importance to avoid misunderstanding and to be a cooperative element in any conversation. Weather proverbs carry, in addition to their predictive meaning as an apparent speech act, a figurative meaning embodied in certain weather proverbs such as request, warning, exhibit or exhorting ,etc. Therefore, the present study aims at testing the ability of postgraduate students to recognize speech acts implied in these proverbs. The researcher prepared a multiple choice test consists of (25) weather proverbs. The test was exposed to a number of experts, and the researcher made all the modifications presented by them. After finding the validity and reliability of the test, she asked the samples to recognize speech acts hidden in weather proverbs. The study concluded that English foreign language postgraduate students achieved a slight level of recognition of speech acts in general. For the variable of gender, males and females achieved equal level of recognition of speech acts. For the speech act of warning, English foreign language postgraduate students achieved high level of recognition more than the other two acts: exhorting and exhibit. Concerning each speech act and according to variable of gender, females achieved higher level of recognition of both warning and exhibit than males who achieved high level of recognizing “Exhibit” speech act than females.

**Keywords:** exhorting; exhibit; Speech acts; weather proverbs; warning.

## تمييز افعال الكلام فى امثال الطقس من قبل طلبة الدراسات العليا فى اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية

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### ملخص البحث:

ان تمييز المعنى المجازي للعبارات و الجمل والمحادثات ذات اهمية كبيرة لتجنب سوء الفهم والقدرة على ان نكون عنصرا تعاونيا في أي محادثة لان امثال الطقس تحمل ،بالإضافة الى معناها التنبؤي والذي يمثل فعلا كلاميا ،معنى مجازيا يتجسد في امثال الطقس هذه مثل الطلب، التحذير ،العرض والحض .لذلك ،تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى اختبار قدرة طلاب الدراسات العليا على التعرف على افعال الكلام الضمنية في هذه الامثال. اعدت الباحثة اختبار متعدد الخيارات يتكون من خمسا وعشرون فقرة. قد تم عرض الاختبار على عددا من الخبراء حيث قام الباحث بإجراء كافة التعديلات المقدمة من قبلهم. بعد التحقق من صحة وموثوقية الاختبار ،طلب من العينات التعرف على افعال الكلام المتضمنة في امثال الطقس .توصلت الدراسة الى ان طلبة الدراسات العليا فى اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية قد حققوا مستوا طفيفا فى التعرف على افعال الكلام بشكل عام. بالنسبة لمتغير الجنس ،لا يوجد اختلاف واضح بين كلا الجنسين .بالنسبة للتحذير ،فقد حقق طلبة الدراسات العليا فى اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية مستوا ال فى تمييز فعل الكلام هذا اكثر من الفاعلين الاخرين: الحض والعرض. اما بالنسبة لمتغير الجنس ووفقا لكل فعل كلام، فقد تفوقت الاناث فى تمييز كلا من التحذير والعرض اكثر من الذكور الذين حققوا نجاحا فى تمييز الحض.

### 1. Introduction

Getting deeply into the meaning of phrases, sentences and conversations plays an important role to be a good communicative element in any conversation. Indirectness is a conversational strategy commonly used. Thus, one of the aspects of language which can be considered under the category of speech acts as used by Austin (1979) in his book “**How to Do Things with Words**” is indirectness .Indirect speech acts are mainly used in connection with politeness (Leech,1983:108).

The current study deals with weather proverbs as a subject to be dealt with indirectness and how speech acts implied in these proverbs. Proverbs tackle social situations, and are used to strengthen an argument or express certain general information (Gramley &Putzold,1992:81).

Before the development of weather forecasting, the reliance on knowing the weather was through predictive weather proverbs. Weather proverbs were considered good

forecasting means; they present predictive function as well as their implied functions.. Thus, being able to guess the implied speech act, support people to arrange and prepare themselves for what is going to happen.

Generally speaking, weather proverbs endure the speech act of prediction apparently which is a unique speech act which help people to make their plans for coming unexpected future events like rain, wind, storms, and others.

In particular, proverbs can be implemented in various ends and summarize life experience and express general truths i.e. they endure different speech acts: advice, warning, exhorting ,etc. (Bukallic,1985 as cited in Hussein &Khalaf,2002:3).

### **1.1. The Problem of the Study:**

Understanding metaphorical or implied meaning is not an easy task; it requires pragmatic competence and ability to recognize meaning behind words and sentences especially for EFL postgraduate students as they represent learners at a high level of education. The researcher noticed that postgraduate students lack the skill of distinguishing selected speech acts: advice, warning and exhorting which are included in weather proverbs and mainly used in literature, pragmatics and other branches of linguistics which constitute the basics of curriculum for postgraduate students.

### **1.2 The Aim of the Study**

The present study aims at:

1. Evaluating the ability of EFL postgraduate students to recognize speech acts implied in weather proverbs.
2. It also aims at finding which speech act is the mostly used by EFL postgraduate students.
3. Also, the study aims at describing if the variables of gender affects EFL postgraduate students' ability to recognize speech acts.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Speech Acts**

Pragmatics is a study whose belief is what is communicated is more than what is said. Thus, it sheds light on the analysis of what people mean by their utterances more than what the words or phrases mean by themselves in the sentences (Yule,1996: 3).

Yule (1996:47) states that speech acts are actions which are performed through utterances. Biner (2013) meets Yule (1996) in that uttering something means doing something. Thus, people can perform actions by uttering words, sentences, etc.

## 2.2 Classifications of Speech Acts

Speech acts are classified into three types

### a. Locutionary

Locutionary speech act means uttering certain utterance with certain sense and reference(Austin,1962:108).According to Yule(1996), locutionary acts mean the act of producing meaningful utterances.

#### **The weather is hot in your room**

The above example indicates the heat of the weather

### b. Illocutionary

Yule (1996:48) states that illocutionary act is performed through the communicative force of an utterance like: warning, advice request, etc.It can be the real representation of interaction condition.

#### **The weather is hot in your room**

The above example , shows how the speaker asks the listener indirectly to open the window.

### c. Perlocutionary

A perlocutionary act is defined as an effect and the influences as the result of the speaker's speech(Austin,1962:101).They are what is done by uttering the words; it is the effect of the hearer (Cutting,2002:16).

#### **The weather is hot in your room**

The above example, the listener is going to switch the air conditioner on.

## 2.3 Speech Acts and Indirectness

Generally speaking, the principle of “indirectness” means using different forms to indicate a certain idea. Indirect speech act can be defined as one that is “performed by means of another” Searle quoted in Thomas, 1995: 93).This reflects the presence of indirect relationship between the form and the function of the utterance. The relationship between the form of the sentence and its function doesn't correspond which shows an indirect relationship (Yule,1996: 56).

According to Crystal (1987:12), using some speech acts to address a listener directly, while the majority of acts are indirect in everyday conversation. Performing speech acts involves pragmatic meaning occurs through another speech act (Cutting, 2002:19).It includes performing a locutionary act, the act of producing recognizable grammatical utterances the language. The illocutionary act attempts to accomplish some communicative purposes like: warning, exhorting, etc.(Tragoutt&Pratt,1980:229).

The mechanism to identify whether an utterance is a direct or indirect speech act can be recognized through three approaches presented by Searle (Huang, 2007).

- 1.If an utterance is literal or direct; non-literal or indirect.
- 2.Finding the relevant felicity conditions.
- 3.Using the cooperative principle.

## **2.4 Proverbs**

Proverbs are presented by many scholars as “term which refers to a short, repeated witty statement of experience which is used to further social end(Yusuf,1997:1).Proverbs aren’t understood by their literal meaning, but they extend to show metaphorical or metonymic meaning(Makhlef &Ali, :56).

Structurally, they are ready-made structures or utterances forming grammatical point of view regarded as sentences (Lyons,1968:177).

Functionally, proverbs are considered as useful tools for expressing our needs and requirements for communication; they express and share our needs, attitudes and beliefs (Hernad&Steen,1999 :8).

The main reason behind uttering proverbs as proposed by Meider (1985:119) that “a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form which is handed down from generation to generation”.

## **2.5 Weather Proverbs and Prediction**

Weather proverbs were used as a means to expect weather.Thus, they were like tools for people what are coming. Having knowledge about weather is considered important especially to arrange our decision when we leave, plan for activities and other preparations.

Previously, in the past time, people were mainly depending on weather proverbs as a means to predict weather as a meteorological method before the development of weather forecasts.

Recently, people depend on meteorologists and government agencies dedicated to predicting the weather.

Following Stiles(1981:234) uttering of weather proverb may involve the performance of two interrelated acts(formal and intentional),thus proverbs endure speech acts.

Apparently, weather proverbs involve the speech act of prediction which is one of the speech acts of assertive(web1).

Implicitly, weather proverbs are “formulaic utterances yield general advice and conduct climate aspect of life”. Therefore, they can endure advice, warning, exhorting implicitly, etc.

## **2.6 Analytical Description of Selected Weather Proverbs**

The following weather proverbs have been selected according to four criteria: currency, popularity, didacticism and locality. People’s observations were what determine weather proverbs, not scientific investigations. The core of weather proverbs as stated by Taylor (1975:77f) was the didactic functions in a society. They support people with experience in daily life. People depend on their prediction to describe weather.

### **A. Wind direction:**

People use “wind-direction”; climatic words like sky, rain, frost, dew, clouds as pointers to upcoming events.

Weather Proverbs	Function
If clouds move against the wind, rain will follow	warning
Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning	warning
Rainbow before seven, clear before eleven	warning
The higher the clouds, the better the weather	Exhibit
when small clouds join and thicken, expect rain	Exhibit
when clouds appear like rocks and towers the earth's refreshed with frequent shower	warning
when there's a clear moon, there's a frost coming soon	warning

### B. Plants/Animals behavior

People depend in their prediction on animals behaviour or referring to plants and insects i.e. people notice that some animals behave strangely before rain.

Weather Proverbs	Function
when the forest murmurs and the mountain roars, then close your windows and shut your doors	Warning
If the geese honk high, it means fair weather. If the geese honk low, foul weather	Exhorting
If spiders are many and spinning their webs, the spell will soon be dry	Warning
Frogs croaking in the lagoon, means rain will come real soon	Warning
Flowers smell best just before rain	Exhibit

### C. Time

Time is of crucial role in weather proverbs. People use words or expressions indicate time in weather proverbs like evening, morning, day, year, May , April, etc.

Weather Proverbs	Function
Evening red and morning gray, help the traveller on his way	Exhorting
Three days rain will empty any sky	Exhorting
April snow breeds grass	Exhorting
A year of snow, a year of plenty	Exhibit

#### D. People behavior/Domestic equipment

People sometimes use their parts of body, to indicate climate case like joints, feet, etc.

Weather Proverbs	Function
If you wet your feet with dew in the morning, you may keep them dry for the rest of the day	Exhibit
When joints all start to ache, rainy weather is at state	warning
When pipes smell stranger, it's going to rain	Warning
Doors and drawers, stick before a rain	Warning
Chimney smoke descend, our nice weather ends	Warning

### 3. Methodology and Data Analysis

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants of the current study were EFL postgraduate students at University of Mosul, college of Arts, Department of English and college of Education as well.

#### 3.2 Tools

The researcher used a multiple-choice test; it consists of (25) items. Each item consists of four options; only one is correct. The researcher exposed the test to a number of



experts at University of Mosul, College of Arts, and Department of English. The experts presented some modifications like reducing the number of items from (45) to (25).The researcher asked EFL postgraduate students to recognize speech acts in each weather proverb. The researcher chose three speech acts: warning, exhorting and exhibit as the target and the mechanism of selecting weather proverbs was according to the four criteria: currency, popularity, didacticism and locality (**See Appendix**).

### **3.3 The Validity of the Test**

Five experts at University of Mosul, College of Arts, Department of English, were asked to judge and evaluate the items of the test

used; their appropriateness, effectiveness of the options as well. They presented a number of modifications which were changed by the researcher like reducing the number of the items used from (45) to (25) and choosing the easiest ones.

It was found that the test was valid in both face and content validity. The test validity was 0.81.It was found by the arithmetic mean of all scores by the experts.

### **3.4 Reliability of the Test**

To measure the reliability of the test, the researcher used Cronbach’s Alpha, which shows how closely related a set of items are as a group. The researcher asked (10) EFL postgraduate students who were not of the same sample used in the test and he found that the reliability of the test is 0.82.

### **3.5 Scoring**

The scheme applied in scoring this test is (one score is given for correct option and zero for incorrect one.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

**Overall Differences According to Test Value**

N	Mean	Test Value	S.D.	T-cal.	T-tab.	Sig.
31	13.7419	12.5	2.74430	2.520	2.042 (0.05)(30)	sig.

It is clear from the table(1),that EFL postgraduate students have a level of recognition of speech acts in weather proverbs slightly raised because the mean is greater than the hypothetical mean of the test and the calculated value of T is greater than the tabulated

value of T. This can be attributed to the common climatic words shared between English and Arabic cultures as pointers to predict and describe upcoming climatic phenomena in both languages: English and Arabic especially that the samples of the research are at high level of learning.

#### Differences According to the Variable of Gender

N	Mean	Test Value	S.D.	T-cal.	T-tab.	Sig.
31	13.7419	12.5	2.74430	2.520	2.042 (0.05)(30)	sig.

After measuring the difference the research sample, using, “**One Sample T-Test**”, according to the variable of gender, it is found that there is no difference between these samples.

#### The Percentage of the Sample Answers According to the Type of Speech Act and Gender

tape	N	Warning (12)	Exhorting (8)	Exhibit (5)	
total	31	Mean	7.065	4.129	2.548
		%	58.87%	51.61%	50.97%
male	12	Mean	6.583	4.167	2.333
		%	54.86%	52.08%	46.67%
female	19	Mean	7.368	4.105	2.684
		%	61.40%	51.32%	53.68%

It is observed from table (3) that after measuring the percentage of students’ answers to recognize speech acts, it is found that the speech act of “warning” takes first place if compared to the two speech acts: exhorting and exhibit. This can be attributed to the fact that “warning” is commonly used and is considered as of necessary nature; it differs from other acts because it may lead to upcoming negative consequences unlike those of “Exhorting” and “Exhibit”.

For the speech act of “Exhorting”, it is found that this act is also of importance, but less than “Warning”; it evokes people to achieve their interests. Concerning the act of

“Exhibit” ,it takes third place because it is not an of urgent nature and has no future consequences.

For the variable of gender, it is found that females showed progress more than males in recognizing both the acts of warning and exhibit which males have achieved progress on females.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the light of the research results, it is concluded the following:

1. EFL postgraduate students achieved slight recognition level of speech acts.
2. For the variable of gender, it is found that no differences between males and females at speech acts recognition level.
3. The sequence of distinguishing speech acts were warning, exhorting, exhibit in order.
4. For the variable of gender, females showed progress in recognizing warning and exhibit unlike males who show progress in recognizing the act of exhorting.



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مجلة أبحاث كلية التربية الأساسية ، المجلد ١٩ ، العدد (٢) ، لسنة ٢٠٢٣

*College of Basic Education Researchers Journal. ISSN: 7452-1992 Vol. (19), No.(2), (2023)*

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## Appendix

### Identify Speech Acts of the following weather proverbs(choose one)

1. Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning.  
a. cursing    b. Exhibit    c. Warning    d. Insisting
- 2.If clouds move against the wind, rain will follow.  
a. Enjoying    b. Suggesting    c. Asserting    d. Request
- 3.When pipes smell stranger, it's going to a rain.  
a. Offering    b. Request    c. Informing    d. Urging
- 4.Flowers smell best just before rain  
a. Protesting    b. Congratulating    c. Exhibit    d. Blaming
- 5.Doors and drawers, stick before a rain  
a. Cursing    b. Insisting    c. Warning    d. Exhibit
- 6.Red sky at night, sailor's delight  
a. Confessing    b. Exhorting    c. Forbidding    d. Warning
- 7.Rainbow before seven, clear before eleven  
a. Warning    b. Exhibit    c. Asserting    d. Urging
- 8.If spiders are many and spinning their webs, the spell will soon be dry  
a. Refusing    b. Asserting    c. Exhorting    d. Warning
- 9.Three days rain will empty any sky  
a. Asserting    b. Congratulating    c. Exhorting    d. Warning
- 10.When dew is on the grass, rain will never come to pass  
a. Advice    b. Suggesting    c. Exhorting    d. Asserting
- 11.The higher the cloud, the better the weather  
a. Request    b. Threatening    c. Exhibit    d. Warning
- 12.Frogs croaking in the lagoon, means rain will come real soon  
a. Confessing    b. Request    c. Declaring    d. Asserting
- 13.When joints all start to ache, rainy weather is at state  
a. Vowing    b. Exhort    c. Exhibit    d. Warning
- 14.The sharper the blast, the sooner it will pass  
a. Advice    b. Warning    c. Confessing    d. Exhibit
- 15.April snow breeds grass  
a. Request    b. Exhibit    c. Exhorting    d. Warning
- 16.When halo rings the moon or sun, rain's approaching on the sun  
a. Request    b. Advice    c. Warning    d. Offering
- 17.When there's a clear moon, there a frost coming soon



- a. Request b. Warning c. Advice d. Confessing  
18. When the forest murmurs and the mountain roars, then close your windows and shut your doors  
a. Warning b. Advice c. Exhorting d. Request  
19. If you wet your feet with the dew in the morning, you may keep them dry for the rest of the day  
a. Advice b. Request c. Compliment d. Exhibit  
20. A year of snow, a year of plenty  
a. Request b. Guessing c. Threatening d. Asserting  
21. If the goose honk high, it means fair weather. If the goose honk low, foul weather  
a. Exhorting b. Exhibit c. Warning d. Request  
22. When the small clouds join and thicken, expect rain  
a. Advice b. Warning c. Exhorting d. Exhibit  
23. Chimney smoke descend, our nice weather ends  
a. Request b. Exhibit c. Asserting d. Warning  
24. When clouds appear like rocks and towers, the earth's refreshed with frequent shower  
a. Blessing b. Refusal c. Exhorting d. Vowing  
25. Evening and morning gray, help the traveller on his way  
a. Exhorting b. Warning c. Request d. Vowing