Investigating Iraqi EFL University Students' Understanding of Assertive Verbs with Reference to Assertion Acts in Political Context: A Pragma-Syntactic Analysis

[1]Alaa Mohamed Jaber Alzaghir ; [2] Inas Malik Mnaathar

Abstract

This paper scrutinizes Iraqi EFL University students' ability in understanding and recognizing the expressions of assertion in political assertive situations. The study investigates the use of assertive verbs in assertive situation(s) in English sentences as used by Iraqi EFL university students with reference to a speech act of assertion. In pursuing this aim, the investigated data has been captured from undergraduate Iraqi EFL college fourth-year students of Thi-Qar University, Colleges of Education and Arts, Department of English. It encompasses 50 Iraqi EFL University students wherein Arabic is their mother tongue. The data were divided into two groups and each group consists of 25 students (i.e., participants) to touch briefly on the speech act of assertion.

The study takes into consideration the gender of the participants, while the enforcement of assertion. Accordingly, the participants are asked to give a careful attention to the gender variety and its influence on the execution of the speech act of assertion in assertive situation(s). The instrument of data collection is Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs). It consists of 8 different written situations. Because the (DCTs) can be translated into any language the results, findings and outcomes are shown in percentage and then visualized in tables and figures. Based on an in-depth reading to the empirical evidence(s) from our qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study mainly found that assertion can be recognized and expressed in different sentence types with different degrees in political situations for persuasive end. (For more results and findings see section 4).

Key Words: Assertive Verbs, Speech Act: Assertion, Gender variation, Iraqi EFL learners' performance.

1. Introduction

1.1. General Background

In the philosophy of language, the concept of "assertion" has a very long traditional position in our ordinary everyday communication and in the context of politics in more particular. Historically, it dates back to

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[1]Lecturer/ Department of English, College of Education, University of Thi-Qar, Iraq, Thi-Qar
[2] M.A General Directorate of Education, Iraq, Thi-Qar
[1] allaerjab8@gmail.com, [2] Inas_mnaathar@yahoo.com,

Aristotle and Plato who discussed this concept in terms of psychological, epistemic, logical, evidential and propositional assertion. In addition, one of the central doctrines of philosophical perspective about the concept of assertion is that the only philosophically interesting function of language is that of making true or false statements, i.e. assertions. Moreover, this concept has to do with the cognitive ideas of *knowledge*, *belief* and *truth* wherein a speaker reveals his inner feeling of knowledge, belief or uses language to state what is to be true. However, this study sheds light on the term "assertion" linguistically. In this sense, the syntactic structures, semantic meanings, and pragmatic functions for the speech act of assertion must be known and examined linguistically. This is to sake of distinguishing assertion act (whether direct or indirect) from other speech acts, and because the concept of assertion recently becomes more interesting, especially after the speech act theory appeared within the study of linguistics.

To that ends, our study investigates Iraqi EFL learners' performance and experiences (recognizing and producing) of the assertive verbs with reference to assertion Speech Act in assertive situation(s). Moreover, the gender of the participants is also taken into consideration during the enforcement of the speech acts in question (i.e., assertion). Moreover, the participants are asked to pay heed to the social variable of status to see whether it affects the execution of the speech act (i.e., Assertion) under the study. The instrument of data collection is an online questionnaire (i.e., Monkey Survey). Then, the outcomes transfer to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) for statistical analysis. Next, the results are shown in percentage and visualized in tables and figures.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Linguistic Realizations of Assertion

Assertion can be investigated linguistically in terms of *syntactic, semantic* and *pragmatic* perspectives. However, our study limits itself to touch the speech act of assertion from syntactic and pragmatic perspectives as used by Iraqi EFL university students. Crystal (2003:37) defines assertion as a "term used in pragmatics and semantics in its ordinary sense of presenting information as true" but assertion more technically could be defined for that portion or part of the information encoded in a sentence (typically declarative sentence) which is presented by the speaker as true, as opposed to that portion which is only, for example, presupposed. It is also used for sentences which present information as true, as opposed to those which ask questions, issue commands, etc.

2.1.1. Syntactic View

Assertion can be utilized in the three basic sentence types: *declarative, interrogative* and *imperative.* In this connection, Palmer (1981:37) defines sentence as the basic unit of meaning that one can use to communicate with others. The word classes that signify assertion are going to be studied and examined in order to give a congruent explanation to the term of assertion. Assertion can be remarked in the grammatical system of sentence/clause types or moods. Syntactically, assertion is typically realized when a speaker utters a declarative sentence (which can be either true or false) in which a speaker is committed and responsible to the hearer that a particular state of affairs or situation exists in the world, as in:

1. Simon is in the kitchen.

In response to (1), the speaker asserts to the hearer that in the real world a situation exists in which a person named' *Simon*' is in a room specified by the referring expression *'the kitchen'*. In response, a sentence of this type is taken to be an assertion as a typical linguistic act performed by uttering a declarative sentence (Hurford *et al.*, 2007: 261-270). Due to the limitation of the study the next section sheds light on the verbs of assertion.

2.1.1.1. Assertive Verbs

Leech *et al.* (2001: 547-8) define verb(s) as a word class divided into *auxiliary verbs and main verbs.* Auxiliary verbs placed before main verbs in verb phrase. The main verb is followed by its verb pattern (of object, adverb, prepositional phrase, etc.) and refers to states and actions, for example:

2.   I have asked them to leave.

In the above example, the verb phrase '*have asked*' consists of: *'have'* as an auxiliary verb and *'asked'* as a main verb, and the complement '*them to leave* 'is the verb pattern. In this connection, Leech *et al.* (2001: 547-8) remark three major classes of verbs: lexical verbs, modal verbs and primary verbs. Because the meaningfulness of this paper hinges on the plausibility of the assumption that assertion is intrinsically related to verbs, it might be worthwhile to consider these types of verbs a little beyond the definition and give examples.

2.1.1.2. Lexical Verbs of Assertion

Quirk et *al*. (1985:1180-81) term the lexical verbs as *factual verbs*. The verbs that come in the form of declarative sentences and have the function of statement or assertion, i.e. when uttered in a declarative sentence they are used to *assert* a proposition. They also add that these verbs are employed to describe *factual* or *propositional* information. They (ibid) classify 'factual verbs' into two types: 'PUBLIC' and 'PRAVITE'.

The 'public' type consists of speech act verbs introducing indirect statements. They are generally associated with 'That-clause'. But many of these verbs are also used for introducing direct speech. When a speaker uses such verbs he typically makes a proposition *publically* known to the other people examples of public verbs: acknowledge, boast, declare, mention, reported, certify, deny, object, retort. For more examples see (Quirk *et al.*, 1985 : 1180-81).

Leech *et al.* (2001:225) describe 'indirect statement' by saying that if one wants to report a statement someone has made, he can use this pattern: SUBECT + VERB (........) + (THAT) + SUBJECT + VERB ...

3.   He said (that) the bus would be late.

4.   The radio reported (that) the snow had melted.

On the other hand, the 'Private' type of the factual verbs expresses intellectual states such as 'belief' and 'intellectual acts' such as discovery. These 'states' and 'acts' are' private' in the sense that they are not observable: a person may be observed to assert that God exists, but not to believe that God exists. Belief, in this sense, is '*private*'. Examples of Private are "accept, doubt, imagine, realize, anticipate, dream, imply, reason". For example see (Quirk *et al.*, 1985: 1180-81).

Moreover, it is reasonable to mention that the main verbs that carry the meaning of' *assertion*' and '*certainty*' are: *advance, affirm, allege, attest, aver, ascertain, assure, attest, authenticate, authorize, certify, confirm, corroborate, claim, contend, declare, defend, endorse, guarantee, notify, show, insist, lay down, maintain, press, profess, proclaim, pronounce, protest, state, stress, swear, testify to, uphold, vindicate, validate, verify, vouch* and *witness*. They have the synonymous main verbs which carry the meaning of assertion since they occur in the declarative sentences to *assert* propositions (Clark, 1989: 24; Manser, 2005: 24-56).

2.1.1.3. Primary Verbs: Be / Do

Assertion could be observed through the construction of the following primary verbs for various purposes:

(A)   Be (Categorical or plain assertion)

To make a plain assertion, Macmilian, (1964) and Jespersen, (1968) remark that "Be" *(is, are, am, was, were)* is the only verb in this construction, it functions as a main verb (i.e. a copular or a linking verb) which is followed by a complement (noun phrase, subject complement, adverbials, etc). Thus, the sentence pattern with be consists of: Status Pattern Affirmative sentence S   +   BE + COMPLEMENT (assertive sentence) He is rich. By this construction a categorical or plain assertion is made.

(B)   Do (emphasized assertion)

Using the auxiliary verbs do, does or did in the declarative sentence gives us *emphasized assertion*. This refers very strongly to the truth or existence of a situation or activity. It is used to contradict, deny another idea or to remove any doubt about a situation or activity. Do cannot be combined with another auxiliary and can introduce main verbs (Feigenbaum, 1985: 122):

5.   You *did* cut me (Biber *et al.*, 1999: 433).

Swan (2005:164-5) states that emphasizing ('strengthening') a word or expression involves the following reasons; when one may try to show a contrast between true and false, or present and past, or a rule and an exception ('contrastive emphasis'):

6.   My teacher thinks I didn't study for my test, but I *did* study (Frank, 1993:94).

Thomson & Martinet (1986:126) maintain that using the emphatic *do/did + infinitive* is possible when another speaker has expressed doubt about the action referred to, for instance,

7.   You didn't see him ~ I`*did* see him.

2.1.1.4. Semi-auxiliaries

(A) Be going to

Be going to + base form is used, like *will*, to predict the future which can express the speaker's feeling of assertion. It is generally used to indicate a present situation which points to the future, where there are signs or evidence that something will happen, whereas *will* implies that the speaker thinks or believes that it will happen (ibid: 186-7).

8. My wife's going to have a baby (Eckersley and Eckersley, 1960: 167).

The speaker's feeling of assertion is expressed here by means of prediction that his wife is going to have a baby in the future which can be based on the physical sign of her body or the evidence which comes from pregnant test.

2.1.1.5. Modal Verbs of Assertion

A speaker can use modal verbs in their secondary functions to indicate how sure a person is that an action or a situation takes place, will take place, or took place. *Sureness (assertability)* can be low (possibility), high (probability), or 100% (certainty)   (Freigenbuam, 1985: 120). In addition, Leech and Svartvik (1994, 145) tend to characterize the view of truth and falsehood in terms of a scale of *likelihood* (to say how likely what a speaker *asserts* is true or false). Their scale is ranging from the extremes of the 'impossibility' and 'certainty' (or logical necessity). The intermediate concepts are possibility and probability, etc.

(A)   Modals of Assertion

Downing and Locke, (2006: 381-2) indicate that the modal verbs of assertion (*certainty*) *will* and *must* are clearly used to express a prediction and logical necessity. They are used for present and future statements, as in the following example:

9.   There's *somebody* at the door ~that'*ll* be the postman (*Will* refers to certainty or confidence about present and future time) (Swan, 2005: 194).

10.   We*'ll* still be here in twenty years (future time prediction based on guesswork, analysis or judgments) (Foley and Hall, 2003: 72).Sometimes, aspeaker can express prediction about the future that someone made in the past. For this *would/wouldn't* are used, for example:

11.   We had to hurry to get him to the hospital. We knew it *would* be too late otherwise (ibid).

Parrott (2000: 127) suggests that *will* and *must* are utilized to reveal logical deduction when we are 100% certain (based on evidence).

12.   Can you answer the phone? It'*ll* be Mum (*Will* and *must* are interchangeable).
13.   There *must* be a mistake (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973: 56).

(B)   Modals of Probability

Modal verbs of probability include a conclusion or deduction, an evaluation based on earlier information or evidence. *Should* and *ought to* be used for present and future conclusions, and to say that things are certainly and probably true (Freigenbuam, 1985: 121).

Leech and Svartvik (1994: 149) clarify that *should* and *ought to* are used to convey *probability*, they are weaker equivalents of *must* (= *certainty*). Compare:

14. Our guest *must* be home by now ('I am *certain*').
15.   Our guest *should / ought to* be home by now. (They' *probably*' are but I am
not certain).

(C)   Modals of Possibility

The lowest levels of *assertion* is indicated by the use of the modal verbs: *may, might, can* and *could* to say that something is 'possibly' true (i.e. a speaker *asserts* something depending on the possibility that it *may/*

might/ can/ could be true). *Could* and *might* show a less possibility than *can* and *may* (Eastwood, 2005: 122-3).

Can/ May

When we talking about something that it is 'possible' to do at any time, *can* and *may* are employed and often followed by the 'passive infinitive':

16.   Stamps *can/ may be bought* at most shops which sell cards (Walker and Elsworth, 2000: 99).

Subject + can means '*it is possible*', i.e. circumstances permit to say that, for example:

17.   You can ski on the hills   (It is possible, or *not possible* if the case is *can't,* to ski, there is enough snow) (Thomson and Martinet, 1986:133). Leech & Svartvik (1994: 145-6) claim that the *theoretical* possibility *can* is weaker than *factual* possibility *may*, as shown in the examples below:

18.   The railways *can* be improved.

19.   The railways *may* be improved.

Sentence (18) claims that only in *theory* the 'railways' are' improvable', i.e. they are not perfect. But (19) could suggest that there are certain plans or strategies for improvement.

Could/ Might

Leech & Svartvik (ibid: 146) assort *could* and *might* in terms of *hypothetical* sense that often express 'tentative possibility', i.e. they refer to something which is possible, but unlikely:

20.   He *could*/*might* have been telling lies (it is just possible that he was / has been telling lies) (ibid).

21.   Our team might still win the race ('it is possible, though unlikely, that our team still win . . . . . .') (Leech, 1971: 120-1).

May/ Might/ Could

Folly and Hall (2003: 175) point out that *may, might* and *could* (except *can*) are used for *present* states of affairs:

22.   From the way he acts, he *could*/ *may*/ *might*   be a doctor (*Could* and *might* do not refer to the past time, but to the present) (Teschner & Evans, 2007:84).

They can also be used to refer to future events as in:

23.   It *may*/ *might*/ *could* snow tonight (It is possible that it will snow tonight)
(Downing & Locke, 2006: 384).

The form *may/ might/ could+ perfect infinitive* or *continuous* is used to talk about possibility in the past, as shown in:

24.   It's 8.30 so he *may have left* by now   (Walker and Elsworth,2000:100). Thomson & Martinet (1986: 132) reveal that may/ might/could can be used in conditional sentences instead of will/ won't to indicate a possible instead of a certain result:

25.   If he sees you he *will* stop (Certain).

26.   If he sees you he *may* stop (Possible).

2.1.1.5. Semi-modals

Semi-modals (or semi-idioms) are defined as a combination of auxiliary and infinitive or adverb (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990: 40), a in the following formula"

Have (got) + infinitive can be used, like *must*, to express *certainty*:

27) I don't believe you. You *have (got) to* be joking (Swan, 2005: 210).

2.2. Assertion in Speech Act Theory

Crystal (2003: 427) defines *speech act* as a term derived from the work of Austin (1911-1960) to consider the role of utterance(s) in relation to the behaviour of a speaker and hearer in interpersonal communication. To place assertion in context, Pagin (2007: 1-3) defines assertion as a speech act in which something is claimed to hold. He adds that assertion is a propositional act in that it relates the speaker to a *proposition*, or is an act with propositional content. In this connection, MacFarlane (2009: 1) explains that to *assert* something is to perform a certain kind of act. This act is different in kind of other speech acts, like *questions*, *requests*, *commands*, *promises*, *apologies*, etc., and from acts that are not speech acts. Accordingly, Yule (1996: 53) defines *'assertives'* as a kind of speech acts that state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Statements of facts, *assertions*, conclusions and descriptions:

28. The earth is flat.

29.   Chomsky didn't write about peanuts.

In using an 'Assertive', the speaker makes words fit the world (of belief).

Syntactically, assertion is made typically by means of uttering a declarative sentence.

Austin[3] (1911-1960) claims that when someone uses language he/she is performing certain act, i.e. not only to say things (to make *statements* or *assertions*), but to do things (perform actions) (Thomas, 1995:31). In Austin's classification, assertion would be best placed under *expositive*, since the prefix *'I assert'* is of an expository nature. Expositive is defined as acts of expounding of views, conducting of arguments, and clarifying of usages and references, e.g. *deny, inform, concede, refer*, etc. Then it developed by John. R Searle, the first who proposes an extensive formulation of the Austin's theory. Searle (1969: 33-42) draws attention to the constitutive rules. He (1971: 40) states that "to perform illocutionary acts is to engage in a *rule-governed* form of behaviour. Moreover, Searle also modifies Austin's *felicity conditions*, in which he argues that to perform a speech act is to obey certain *conventional rules* that are constitutive of that type of

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[3] Austin is the founding father of the general theory of speech act.

act which he calls constitutive rules–rules that create the activity itself– of speech acts   (Huang, 2007: 104). He identifies four basic categories, namely:

1- *Propositional contents*: are concerned with what the speech act is about. The simplest type of *propositional content* is expressed by means of acts of *referring* and *predicating*, wherein a speaker *refers* to something and then characterizes it, for instance, when a speaker utters the sentence:" Agassi is tired."

He thereby '*asserts*' that '*Agassi is tired*'. In making this assertion, the speaker is also performing the *propositional acts* of referring to '*Agassi* ' with the name *Agassi* and of characterizing him with the predicate *is tired* (Akmajian *etal.*, 2001: 397).

2- *Preparatory conditions*: state the real-world prerequisites for the speech act. These conditions differ accordingly to different speech acts, for examples, promise, request, *assertion*, etc. The conditions for *assertion* are that the speaker has evidence for the truth of what he says and that it is not obvious to either that the hearer knows the facts (Palmer, 1981: 165).

3- *Sincerity conditions*: These conditions for an *assertion* involve that the speaker believes what he says (ibid). That means the act must be performed sincerely.

4- *Essential conditions*: in making a *statement* (*assertion*), a speaker must intend it to be taken as true (Cruse, 2006: 62-3).   Besides, Horn and Warq (2004: 61) add that essential conditions for *assertion* count as undertaking that P (proposition) represents an actual state of affairs.

Searle (1979: 2-8) distinguishes between *illocutionary acts* which are a part of language and *illocutionary verbs* which are always part of a particular language: English, German, French, etc. In Searle's taxonomy of *illocutionary acts*, he identifies twelve dimensions of *illocutionary acts*, but he uses, as cited in Mey (1993:163), only four of them explained as follows:

1- Illocutionary point: is part of but not the same as *illocutionary force*. For instance, the *illocutionary point* of requests is the same as that of commands: both are attempts to get hearers to do something. But the *illocutionary forces* are clearly different in that they are resultant of several elements (felicity conditions) of which *illocutionary point* is only one. Then, the *illocutionary point* or *purpose* of a description is that it is a representation (true or false, accurate or inaccurate) of how something is. The differences between various illocutionary points, such as *order*, *promise*, *description*, correspond to the essential condition in the felicity conditions (Searle, 1979:2-3).

2- Direction of fit: some illocutions try to make the words (more strictly, their propositional content) to match the world. So, an *assertion* has *word-world* direction of fit, since an *assertion* is correct if what is said agrees with what the *world* is like (ibid: 3).

3- Psychological state: any performance of *illocutionary act* with a propositional content means the speaker expresses some attitude, state, etc., to that propositional content.

4- Propositional content: this criterion allows us to separate speech acts in accordance with what they are '*about* '. In the dimension of time, a report and a prediction involve the fact that a prediction must be about the future whereas a report can be about the past or present (ibid: 6).   Searle, as cited in Cruse (2000, 342-3), discusses another classification concerning the *illocutionary verbs* (especially the performative verbs) in which he tries to relate it to Austin's classification:

1- Directives: are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something: *order, command, request, beg, advice* (*to*), *etc.*

2-Commissives: commit the speaker to some future action: *promise, offer, undertake, threaten, etc.*

3- Expressives: express the speaker's psychological attitude to a presupposed state of affairs: *thank, congratulate, praise, blame, etc.*

4- Declaratives (Declarations): are said to make a change in a reality after uttering them: *resign, dismiss, divorce, sentence (in court), etc.*

5- Assertives: commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed *proposition*: *state, suggest, boast, complain, claim, report, warn, etc.*(ibid).

From what has been said above, we can conclude that assertion is realized both by the *illocutionary acts* and the *illocutionary verbs*. The illocutionary act of *assertion* is found in all languages in the world since it is part of language and not only part of a particular or a *special language. On other words, all languages in the world contain the concept of assertion.*

Table (1): The Summary of the Illocutionary Act of Assertion

Illocutionary Point	direction of fit	expressed psychological state	Propositional content
Assertive	words-to-world	belief (speaker)	any proposition expressed and referred to in the context of utterance

(adapted from Huang, 2007: 108)

3. **Methodology &**

Data Analysis

In our daily communication, assertion is a speech act used to influence peoples' decision in tactful way(s) for persuasive ends to show how sure a person is that an action or a situation is true. In that presenting the facts is in the hand of the speaker and the decision of believing (i.e. persuading) is in the hand of the hearer(s). Hence, this study touches briefly on the speech act of assertion as used by Iraqi EFL university students to understand their performance, experiences, comprehension and applying about the assertive verbs in assertive situation(s), when the concept of assertion recently becomes more interesting, especially after the speech act theory appeared within the study of linguistics. Therefore, the speech act of assertion must be known and examined linguistically for the sake of distinguishing assertion act (whether direct or indirect)

from other speech acts. The syntactic model considers the grammatical constructions and structures of what are mentioned in the syntactic view, are to be utilized to show the forms of the expression of assertion.

Pragmatically, the analysis depends mainly on Searle's theory of speech act, for direct and indirect speech act of assertion, supported by Leech (1983) speech situations especially the two points of (i) *addresser and addressee* and (ii) *the context of utterance*.

Based on the in-depth reading to subjects' responses and what has been discussed in the literature review, the model of analysis is basically mixed method of analysis. More specifically, the analysis integrates qualitative and quantitative method of analyses. In the field of linguistics, "the relation between the quantitative and qualitative research paradigms is not always one of contrasting poles but rather of continuum." (Miles & Huberman: 1994). Analytically, the adopted method of analysis is a useful strategy to answer a wide range of research question(s). (Angouri, 2010: 30; Page *et al* 2014: 53; Ivankova and Greer, 2015: 65).

In terms of the data collection, the analyzed data were collected from students in two English Departments of two different colleges in Thi-Qar University: College of Education for Humanities and College of Arts. Specifically, the data analyzed is captured from undergraduate learners in four stages of two departments of English/ College of Education/University of Thi-Qar. Arabic language is their mother tongue. It encompasses 50 Iraqi EFL college's students (fourth year) divided into two groups and each group consists of 25 students. Therefore, a test for recognizing and producing assertion is designed, and then administrated to a sample of Iraqi EFL college fourth-year students of Thi-Qar University, Colleges of Education and Arts, Department of English. The instrument of data collection is DCTs., it consists of "scripted dialogue representing various scenarios, preceded by a short prompt describing the setting and situation. The prompt usually includes information on social distance between participants and pre-event background to help the participant construct the scenarios." (Kasper, et al., 1989). The use of DCTs is methodologically useful in this study. It enables researcher(s) "to compare the performance of learners and native speakers or learners at different proficiency levels." (Ogiermann, 2018:5).

Accordingly, our DCTs consist of 7 written situations have been borrowed from American political speeches (i.e., Bush and Obama) in which the students are asked to express their recognizing as well as production of assertion. What makes this scenario of DCTs valuable for this investigation is that a "written task involves different cognitive processes than speaking" (Cohen and Olshtain 1994: 148). It requires participants to "recall pragmatic information from memory and report rather than use it" (Barron 2003: 85). Due to Covid-19 pandemic our DCT was designed as a Google form and then transferred online to suggested participants. That means, our analysis will not consider the prosodic features, "which can be crucial to the interpretation of the responses." (Golato 2003: 111). To state the results more accurately, the collected data then transferred to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) for statistical analysis. This software can be used for studying correlation, variation, similarity and difference between two or more datasets. Next, the results are shown in percentage and then visualized in tables and figures. .Based on an in-depth survey of the data and the empirical evidence from our qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study found certain results and findings (see sections 4 & 5).

4. Results & Discussion

This section presents in-depth analysis to the subjects' responses in which the analysis focused on students' recognizing and producing of assertion to show the structures and forms of assertive sentences used in given situations. Accordingly, the responses have been classified and then corrected in accordance with the literature.

In terms of the students' responses to the first situation in which they were asked to indicate assertive acts with reference to sentence types, the analysis found that 50 of the investigated students understood and recognized the speech act of assertion directly through the syntactic formula of declarative sentence type. While, 8 of them understood and recognized assertion in form of imperative sentence, only 2 of them go with interrogative syntactic formula. That means assertion expressions were realized by the use of the declarative, active, positive sentence to refer to the direct speech act of assertion which includes the main present tense verbs *'know, asserts, knowledge, believe'*. Pragmatically speaking, the use of these verbs carries strongly the illocutionary force of assertion.

This can be classified as a private factual verb of assertion that expresses the intellectual or rational state of the speaker, i.e. here/his knowledge of the fact that s/he focused on. Hence, it can be concluded that the speech act of assertion is typically recognized directly by the declarative sentence, and can be made indirectly by other sentence types such imperative and interrogative. However, the direct speech act of assertion can also be made by declarative, active, negative sentence containing the non-assertive adverb of time *'never'*. This is syntactically to affirm strictly that the proposition did not take place, does not take place, or will not take place (Jamal, 2009).

The second situation revealed that a large number of them, more specifically 44 students score 85% made the direct speech act of assertion through the use of the declarative, active, positive sentence which contains the primary, present assertive verb 'is' which functions as a main verb used to express a categorical or a plain assertion.

In the third situation, , the study found that all of the examined students made use of emphatic auxiliary verb *'do'* in a declarative, active, positive sentence to produce the direct speech act of emphasized assertion. It seems the student use the auxiliary *'do'* is utilized at a present tense to deny a previous attitude. On the other hand confirm that the primary auxiliary verb '*do*' expresses a strong belief in the participants' responses. Pragmatically, the use of emphatic auxiliary *'do'* before the main verb declare explicitly the emphasized assertion for the speaker's belief to deny the former ideas as well as to remove any doubt about the ex-situation.

The fourth situation was re-designed to show the degrees of assertion in which a high percentage of them utilize '*will'* and '*must'* to express the highest degree of assertion to score 90%. In the same discourse, the students also recognized and understood '*should*' and '*ought to*' as model verbs used to denote a medium degree of assertion, and the modal verbs of '*may, can, could, might*' to express the lowest degree of assertion.

From a pragmatic point of view, the use of epistemic modal verb *'must'* expresses a strong degree of assertion to indicate a logical necessity, which is less than non-modilized sentences, to mend the differences and to work with each other, without accepting any other possibility. Alongside, the participants also indicate that the weakest degree of assertion is expressed through the use of the explicit, hypothetical and assertive modal *'might'* for particular possibility. Syntactically, the hypothetical assertive modal verb *'might'* has the syntactic characteristics; active, past and positive to ensure the possibility.

In terms to the probability and possibility of assertion, the students' response to the fifth situation revealed equal use was made of probability and possibility to express assertion in the sense that they express the extent to which a speaker is to be sure that a proposition, action, or situation is true or false.

According to the subjects' responses, the sixth situation shown that 66% of them recognized assertion by the use of semi-modal *'has got to'*, like *'must'*, to reveal pragmatically a strong degree of assertion. Syntactically, assertion can be expressed by using the non-assertive pronoun *'anybody'* which has the meaning of assertion as opposed to the assertive pronoun *'somebody'*.

The seventh situation admitted that few participants were deployed the indirect strategy to express 15 students made use of the interrogative constructions to mark the percentage of 25% and 7 students used the imperative with "might and could" scoring 12%. All the other students resorted to the direct strategy: 39 students made use of the declarative with the percentage of 36%.

The eighth situation focused on the subjects' production of assertion with reference to gender whereby males, were unaware to the degrees of assertion as well as the type of sentences to make the speech act of assertion. They mostly used '*will'* and '*must'* to express the highest degree of assertion to show power and authority (rude). Unlike their male mates, females were more aware to the degrees of assertion. That was obvious through using the modal verbs of '*may, can, could, might*. These models according to our literature can be classified as a nicer and softer structure of assertion. This can be attributed to our cultural norms customs towards females as such they used appropriate degree of assertion to show their status, sensitive prestige.

5. Conclusion

Assertion is a speech act that is widely used in public and private discourse for persuasive ends. This is to influence others' attitudes, behaviors, or decisions in which a speaker presents facts, documents, and proofs to persuade a hearer(s). Politically, assertion is a tactful way of giving instructions to the side of the speaker. Assertion then can be classified under the category of "directive" speech acts in mitigated way for persuasive ends. However, the decision about the suggested change(s) is in the hands of the hearer(s). Understanding the act of assertion is related to hearer's illocutionary competence (i.e., understanding assertion). This can be attributed to the fact that the function of a sentence is not grasped form the surface structure of it. Syntactically, it is found that assertion can be practiced in the three basic sentence types: declarative, interrogative and imperative. However, assertion has been extensively applied and expressed in declarative structure. Besides, it has been noticed that assertion can be expressed and recognized in both negative and positive sentence. In terms of the degree of assertion, we also noticed that assertion can be expressed within three degree in which 'must' was the highest degree of assertion to show power and authority. Whereas,

'should' and 'ought to' denote a medium degree of assertion, and 'may, can, could, might express the lowest degree of assertion. Furthermore, the expressions of assertion are not limit itself to nouns and verbs, but it can be expressed by using the non-assertive pronoun *'anybody'* that has the meaning of assertion as opposed to the assertive pronoun *'somebody'*.

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