

Iraqi Parents' Instructions to Their Teens: A Pragma-Stylistic Approach

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Abstract

Parents are supposed to be responsible for the education of their children. However, other sources of information participate in this challenging mission. Technological advancements, media, friends, and schoolmates have a significant effect on how our sons think or behave. Hence, it becomes crucial for parents to consider how to approach or deal with them. The way parents give instructions to sons concerning their daily routines of educational, moral, and health care practices is of great importance. This paper aims to find out how educated Iraqi parents give instructions to their sons. The study identifies the pragma-stylistic devices that characterize Iraqi parental instructions. It attempts to specify which speech act is most dominant in parental instructions and if politeness strategies are adhered to or not. Twenty Iraqi parents who have a degree in the English language participated in this research work. A questionnaire of ten different scenarios concerning some basic daily instructions that are often likely to be given to sons or daughters who are between the age of 12 to 16 is delivered to those parents. The responses to this questionnaire are scrutinized in terms of the pragma-stylistic perspective following Black (2006) by activating three pragmatic theories, namely; Searle's (1969) theory of speech acts, Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness as well as Culpeper's (1996) theory of impoliteness. It is found that educated Iraqi parents prefer the indirect way of giving instructions to their teens concerning the daily practices regardless of the importance of these instructions in life. Analysis reveals that most Iraqi parents use the speech act of advising when giving daily instructions to their teens. Direct instructions are rare. If found, they are softened with polite expressions.

Keywords: Family discourse, Iraqi context, moral instructions, pragma-stylistics, teenagers

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Introduction

The language we use with our sons has crucial importance on their adherence to our instructions concerning their daily routines. Our teens are intelligent, technologically literate, independent, and sensitive youngsters. We need to understand their different abilities, personalities, needs, experience, and learning styles to deal with them effectively and teach them good deeds and habits. To successfully move to adulthood, teens need insightful caring, good interaction, guidance, and highly- promoted communicative styles. Parents' efforts and attempts to better know their teens are essential and intrinsic to their responsibility. To be effective, parents need to think well about how to deliver their messages and what language is effective in the different contexts of everyday communications. It is significant to distinguish the way we use to give instructions to our sons regarding their daily routines. This paper set for itself the task of discovering how Iraqi parents instruct their sons. This is achieved in light of the pragma-stylistic approach. Hence, it tries to answer these questions: What are the pragma-stylistic devices that characterize Iraqi parental instructions to their teens? Which speech act is most dominant in these instructions? Are politeness strategies adhered to in these instructions or not?

This paper surveys the different instructional styles used by twenty educated parents given to their teens whose age is from 12 to 16 years old. On the basis of a pilot study, a questionnaire has been created to collect responses of parents about the most common daily teens' practices in Iraqi context. The responses of those twenty parents have been analyzed pragma-stylistically. Most studies on families are achieved by the psychological or social fields. This paper, however, focuses on the linguistic field, which is to be psychologically and socially beneficial. Thus, it is didactically oriented in that its results can be circulated to other parents so that they may pay attention to the language they use with their young sons.

Literature Review

The field of pragma-stylistics is still fresh. However, some works have approached texts or discourses via the pragma-stylistic paradigm. For instance, Abuya (2012) carried out a study in which she analyzed the Inaugural Speech of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. She examined the meaning of the speech acts in his speech showing which speech act is the most dominant one. She observed that the language used by people who wish to gain and keep power is a subject of attraction. Doubtlessly, language is the vehicle for politicians to persuade, convince, promise or inform people. The result of the study showed the dominance of commissives over other speech acts. It concluded that commissives are a pragma-stylistic feature in the political context. Another study was conducted by Sihite (2019) to investigate the role of the pragma-stylistic devices in some oral texts selected from judge to witness. Sihite (2019) inspects the stylistic effect of employing the performative act in revealing the intended message. He observed that performatives are good tools to express some statements, or questions in court investigations to help lead to the final decision. The finding showed that entailment is one of the best pragmatic devices that can be used stylistically in the court to find the truth. Nkwain's (2011) study examined the appraisal complementation in Cameroon Pidgin English discourse by adopting a pragma-stylistic approach. The results show that complements are cultural- specific.

It is worthy to mention some studies that tackle family discourse. A survey carried out by Blum Kulka (1990) inspects the family discourse in middle-class Israeli, American and American

immigrant families. The study examines the speech acts of control in the discourse between parents and their children around the dinner table. Blum Kulka (1990) assumes that family discourse tends to be polite because it is characterized by being direct and highly mitigated. She emphasized the impact of the cultural differences on the style used in the parental comments to their children. The results show that American families avoid using nicknames and emotive expressions in their remarks for they believe that such style may affect a child's independency whereas, "Israeli parents draw heavily on the emotively colored language of mitigation, and nicknaming" (p.285). Johnson (2007) examines the family discourse from a different perspective, including the co-construction of roles, identity, interactional patterns, and gender. He states that gender is a crucial variable in terms of roles constructions in family interaction. The study concludes that family members have their distinctive way of interacting. These works analyze different kinds of discourse pragma-stylistically, or they study family discourse from different perspectives. To the researchers' best knowledge, no previous research has tackled discourse family from a pragma- stylistic perspective. Hence, the present study endeavors to examine the pragma-stylistic aspects used in Iraqi family discourse.

Family Discourse

The term *family* refers to those people with whom a person lives and grows up to receive and give care and love in the sense of connection and belonging. Through their everyday interactions, individuals shape the ties and bonds that can make a family. They shape as well individuals' personalities. The language used by family members is to create and maintain relationships, manage the household and negotiate or establish values and beliefs. Communication between family members is called family discourse which is distinct in each family, society, or culture. As such, family discourse needs to include some specific characteristics that are recognizable when compared to other types of discourse. It is polite, harmonious, supportive, and advocating (Blum-Kulka, 1987). Scholars, in this regard, analyze the forms and functions of interaction that takes place at home. This means that they consider what is said when family members talk to each other, how it is said, by whom and to whom, at what moment, for what purposes, and with what outcomes. Studies of family discourse intend to provide detailed and contextualized understandings of family conversations. The study of family discourse is concerned with all kinds of communication in family settings (Gordon, 2013).

Family interaction has been studied from different perspectives such as psychology, sociology, or anthropology. Recently, however, linguistic studies have begun to be concerned with familial discourse (Tannen, 2007). Linguistics investigates such kinds of discourse because the family is seen as the basic entity that shapes one's identity, and his role in society. Moreover, the family is the pillar of society. The way a person communicates with his family members has a significant effect on how he sees himself as a member in the family, and society. On the other hand, focusing on the family means understanding society since the family is a mirror of society and how it is being developed. Family discourse reveals information about the kinds of relationships and roles of its members. It presents individuals' personalities, psychological states, points of weakness or strength, tolerance, and so on. Educated parents are expected to raise up successful, and effective social human beings who are armed with knowledge, awareness, and understanding. Their mission is to provide society with qualified active people.

An Overview of Pragma-stylistics

Simply put, stylistics is the study of style. Style is the choice of one possibility rather than another. Primarily, stylistics focuses on 'literary language' to display the connection between language and artistic fiction. Thus, it deals with the aesthetic value of the text (Crystal & Davy, 1969). Pragmatics, on the other hand, focuses on how people use and interpret language in different contexts. It studies language in terms of context taking speakers and hearers into consideration (Mey, 2001). The pragmatic meaning is derived from the context in which a message is encoded. The need to understand meaning aesthetically and contextually leads to the emergence of a new approach in linguistic analysis which is pragma-stylistics.

Pragmatic-stylistics or pragma-stylistics is a branch of stylistics that goes back to the 1960s, but it became an essential approach in analyzing language written or spoken during the 1980s and 1990s (Ibrahim & Waheeb, 2017). It is the stylistic study of language with pragmatic components. This established discipline aims at applying pragmatic theories to explain the way language is used "in context or how powerful structures are created" (Mubarak & Abd-Aun, 2019, p. 2). Abuya (2012) averred that pragma-stylistic studies the meaning that is proposed by the speaker with a focus on the individual style that distinguishes this speaker from others. Hickey (1993) states that pragma-stylistics concentrates on the speaker's choice of some acceptable varieties within the same language. These varieties might be equivalent but accomplish different intentions. Hickey (1993) adds:

In studying the stylistic potential of a language or of a particular construction, or in analyzing a specific text, pragma-stylistics pays special attention to those features which a speaker may choose, or has chosen, from a range of acceptable forms in the same language that would be semantically equivalent, but might perform or achieve different objectives (p.578).

Pragma-stylistics offers a framework to show the relationship between the linguistic forms and the pragmatic explanation, let alone the speaker's choice (style) that helps the hearer interpret the meaning behind his utterance. As such, pragma-stylistics explains all that cannot be introduced by stylistics alone or pragmatics alone. Pragma-stylistics distinguishes between "stylistic effects (elegance, formality, aesthetics, etc.) and pragmatic effects (what is being done and whether it is done politely, clearly, effectively, etc.)" as Hickey (1993, p. 584) explicates. It is suggested that stylisticians are interested in asking "how a speaker says something," and pragmaticists are interested in "what a speaker does" and thus pragmastylisticians are concerned with "how does a speaker do what he does" (p.585). Similarly, Azuike (2006) states that stylistics as a linguistic study of style is a reference "to all the elements of language that aid a writer or speaker to achieve a pattern of writing or speaking identifiable as unique or peculiar to him" (p. 79). In this regard, this paper is concerned with the pragmatic perspectives that characterize the style of Iraqi parents in their instructions to their teens.

Speech Acts

Speech acts, used in any communication, shed light on the functional aspect of utterances. Different speech events and situations consist of various speech acts (Wales, 2011). To achieve their aims, interlocutors may advise, threaten, warn, or order. This theory of Austin (1962)

proposes that "saying is doing" (p. 101). Modifications of this theory are given by Searle (1969) suggesting four felicity conditions for the successful execution of an illocution: propositional, preparatory, sincerity, and essential conditions. Five macro -categories of speech acts are distinguished: declaratives (when the speaker's utterance causes an external change, as in declaring a war); commissives (when the speaker is committed to do something, as in promising); directives (when the speaker gets people to do something, as in requesting); expressives (when the speaker expresses his feelings and attitudes, as in criticizing), and representatives (when the speaker informs others about the truth as in affirming). These macro -classifications further constitute a host of some micro speech acts distinguished from each other by their specific felicity conditions (Searle, 1969).

The direct relationship between the structure of an utterance and its function yields a direct speech act (Saeed, 1997). "Open the door?" is an imperative sentence used to express a request. If the relationship is indirect, we have an indirect speech act. The utterance "Could you open the door?" is a question that functions as a request, not to ask about one's ability to open the door (Verschueren, 1999). Searle (1979) states that in indirect speech acts, speakers usually communicate more than they actually say. They rely on mutually -shared knowledge, background information, and the general powers of rationality, and inference with their interlocutors (Mey, 1993). According to Blum-Kulka (1987), direct strategies can be perceived as impolite because they indicate a lack of concern with face. Nonconventional indirect strategies (hints) can be perceived as impolite because they indicate a lack of concern for pragmatic clarity. The concept of face is the basic issue in politeness and impoliteness theories.

Im/politeness

Brown and Levinson's most famous theory of politeness (1987) tries to indicate the social reason behind speakers' and hearers' choices in their everyday interaction. In this theory, face has a crucial role in identifying these choices. Brown and Levinson (1987) aver that face is the "public self-image that a person wants for himself" (p. 61). The face is positive when the speaker wants to be liked or respected by the hearer, and negative when the speaker wants to "proceed without being impeded upon" (p. 62). The theory of impoliteness was built on these bases by Culpeper (1996). Impoliteness is realized when a speaker attacks the face of an interlocutor intentionally or/and the latter perceives it as such, or by the combination of both cases. According to Culpeper (2011), impoliteness is a "negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts" (p. 58). The argument is that verbal behaviour, aggressiveness, face attacks, and sometimes intentionality are incorporated to name behaviors, actions or communications as impolite.

Maintaining face is a reciprocal concept that is to be perceived by both: speakers and hearers on an equal base. In our context, the parents' positive face refers to their desire to get their teens to respond positively to their instructions. They want to be respected as parents. On the other hand, the positive face of the sons needs to be adhered to because teens love to be praised, and appreciated for their actions, and achievements. Their negative face refers to their desire to be left unimpeded or imposed upon, and any instruction given to them represents a kind of imposition. This is why caution is required in giving instructions to teens to make them respond without offending their desire of being left alone. Any instruction can be perceived as impolite by them if they are not ready to receive from parents. Any instruction means taking them away from their

comfort zone. For instance, if the son is engaged in his electronic game with his fellow mates and the mother interrupts by asking him to finish his school assignments, he will consider that impolite because it breaks his privacy of being engaged in playing.

Methodology

According to the above discussion, this research work follows Black's (2006) perspective of pragma-stylistics. Black (2006) argues that the pragmatic theories can be an excellent guide for understanding literary texts by distinguishing the styles of participants in them. This can be interpreted that any other kinds of discourse can be studied in terms of the pragma-stylistic approach. Three theories have been chosen to be activated in terms of the pragma-stylistic paradigm in this paper: Searle's (1969) theory of speech acts, Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness as well as Culpeper's (1996) theory of impoliteness. This paper claims that the pragmatic theories can reveal the stylistic perspective in distinguishing parents' instructions to their teens in the Iraqi context. The three pragmatic theories are chosen as they suit the purpose of this study so as to find out if these pragmatic theories represent the stylistic features of parents-children's interactions in the educated Iraqi families.

Participants

Twenty educated parents participated in this study. All of them have a high degree in English language, and they are staff members in the department of English in different Iraqi universities. They use the English language in their daily communications with their children. They have sons and daughters between the age of 12-16.

procedures

Those parents were delivered a questionnaire that has been developed according to a pilot study. The questionnaire has real instructions that those parents use daily with their sons. The responses to this questionnaire are the data of this study which have been analyzed according to the pragma-stylistic approach.

Data and Analysis

This section introduces the data description and analysis. It explains the questionnaire because it is the primary apparatus to get the data. Then, data analysis is presented.

Data Description

The data of analysis are written responses to a questionnaire which was constructed according to a pilot study. The questionnaire has ten items tackling some common daily instructions concerned with educational, moral, and health care aspects. These instructions are likely to be delivered by parents to their sons in the Iraqi context. The questionnaire survey and the calculation of frequencies are utilized to find out the various instructional styles of parents. These responses are the data of analysis that have been scrutinized in terms of the pragma-stylistic paradigm. The questionnaire is attached in Appendix (A).

It is worth to mention that the parents are educated Iraqi teachers who have degrees in English as a foreign language. They frequently use English talking to their sons at home. This has been realized by the researchers when discussing with those parents in personal communications.

Moreover, it is important to remember that the word 'son' in this research work refers to male and female teens or sons and daughters alike. The issue of gender is out of the realm of this study, whether in terms of the addressors or addressees.

Data Analysis

The data are analyzed on two levels. The first level concerns the choices that are provided by the questionnaire itself to the ten items as conceptualized by the researchers. It is a recognition level. Each question has three different choices where one is direct, and the other two are indirect, as the situation itself entails. These choices are put in various speech acts like advising, stating, requesting, criticizing, promising, threatening, or blaming. The aim is to find the kinds of pragma-stylistic devices used by Iraqi parents, and which of these devices is more operative in their instructions to their teens, according to the parents' experience.

Recognition Level

Here is an analysis of the ten scenarios which have been given three choices each. The first scenario concerns brushing the teeth. The indirect speech act of advising is higher in appearance (55%) than the direct speech act of ordering. Figure (1) shows this result.



Figure 1. Percentages of brushing the teeth

The second scenario relates to covering the face while coughing or sneezing. The highest percentage (65%) goes to the indirect speech act of advising. Figure two clarifies this result.

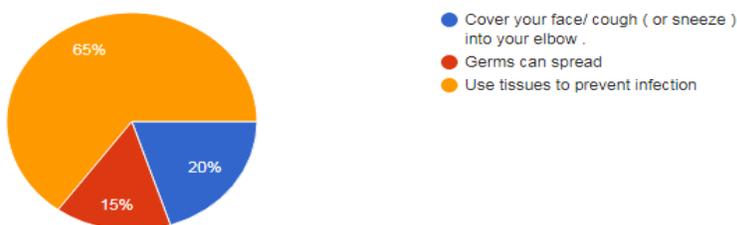


Figure 2. Percentages of covering the face in coughing/ sneezing

The third scenario concerns biting the nails. The indirect speech act of advising is higher in appearance (50%). Figure three displays this result.



Figure 3. Percentages of biting the nails

The fourth scenario is about asking for more allowance. The direct speech act of questioning is the higher in appearance (65%) than that of complaining. The result is displayed in Figure four.

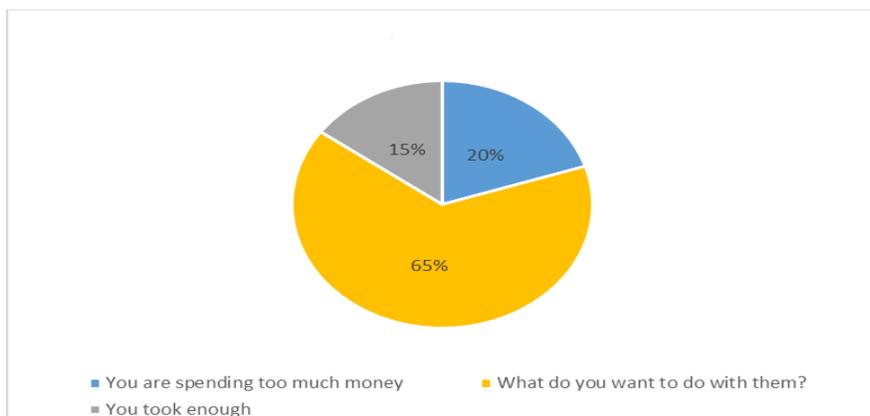


Figure 4. Percentages of asking for more allowance

The fifth scenario is about wearing a mask. The highest percentage goes to the speech act of advising (60%) rather than to that of ordering or warning. Figure five presents this result.

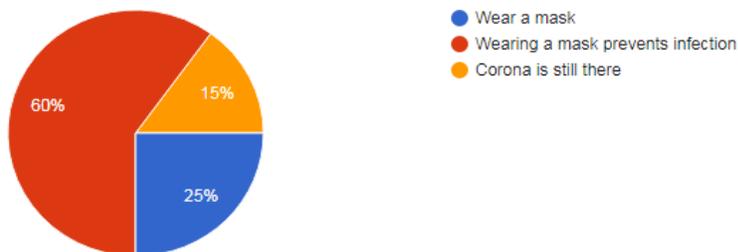


Figure 5. Percentages of wearing a mask

The sixth scenario talks about asking the son to study for the exams. The highest percentage goes to the speech act of questioning (55%), not the direct order or promise. This questioning speech act represents an indirect request from the son to study. Figure six shows the results.

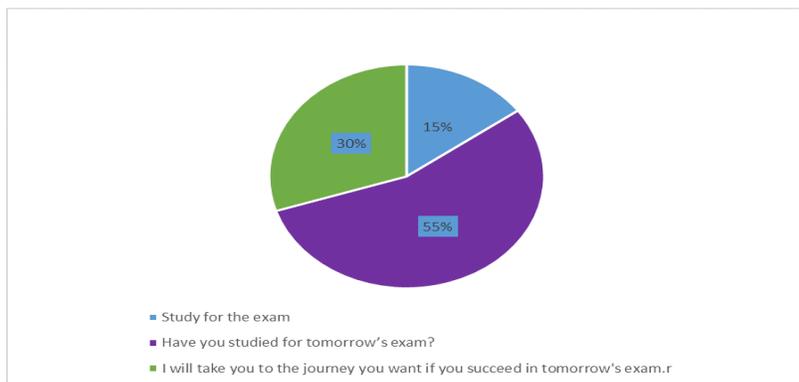


Figure 6. Percentages of studying for exams

The seventh scenario concerns helping in the house. The highest percentage goes to the indirect request (50%), not the ordering or complaining speech acts offered by the questionnaire itself. Figure seven shows this result.

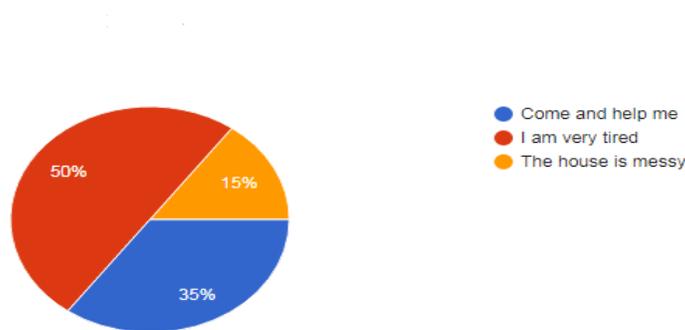


Figure 7. Percentages of helping in the house

The eighth scenario introduces the instruction of wearing clean clothes. The highest percentage is for the speech act of advising (40%), not the acts of ordering or prohibiting. Figure eight illustrates the results.



Figure 8. Percentages of wearing clean clothes

The ninth scenario talks about having a shower. The highest percentage goes to the speech act of advising (55%). Figure nine displays the results.



Figure 9. Percentages of having a shower

The final scenario is about taking care of school books. The highest percentage goes to the direct speech act of ordering (40%) rather than advising, or the indirect request of taking care of books. Figure ten exemplifies the results.

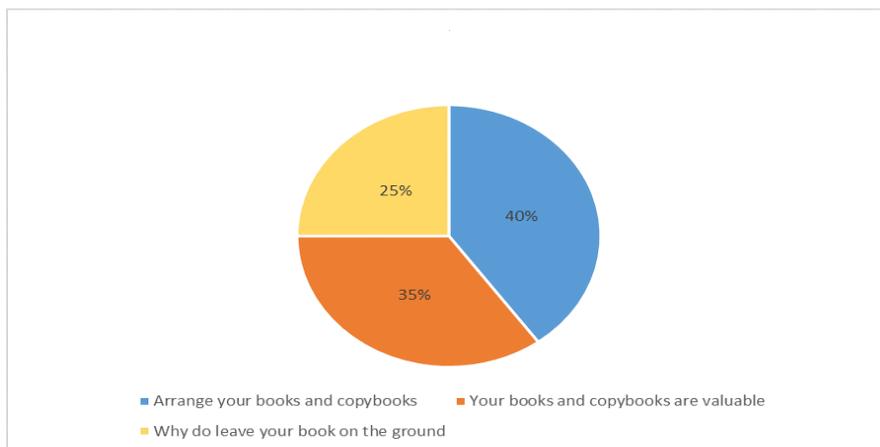


Figure 10. Percentages of taking care of school books

In terms of im/politeness strategies, all parents use polite expressions with their teens. Parents save their positive face which is the desire to be respected. They save their sons' negative face as well, which is the desire of not being imposed upon. By using words like 'please', or 'my dear son', parents minimize the load of their instructions. Using indirect speech act is an indication of politeness. Moreover, giving the instruction in the form of a question makes it more polite as it gives options to receivers and minimizes imposition on receivers.

Production Level

The second level of analysis concerns production. It relates to the analysis of the replies that are produced by the parents who participated in the questionnaire. This level has two parts. The first discusses the replies to the first question in the questionnaire which is read as follows: "What would you say in a similar situation?". The second one is devoted to analyzing responses when the son disobeys the instruction. The ten scenarios received various responses. However, they are not novel from the already prepared items supplied by the questionnaire. It has been noticed that when the instruction is a daily habit or a normal behavior, parents use direct

instructions. Thus, sons are expected to respond to such an instruction positively. In other scenarios (like wearing a mask, covering faces when sneezing, having a shower or wearing clean clothes), parents change the tone to be softer. In these scenarios, they use gentle imperative sentences to reduce the tense in their commands by adding 'please'. They may use verbs other than 'cover' like "use tissues". They may say "it is time to have a shower" instead of saying "have a shower". Some parents give results for not having a shower like "you will be uncomfortable", or "taking a shower makes you feel refreshed". In doing so, parents are aware of the sensitive personality of their sons who tend to object to direct instructions related to issues they consider as something private.

In responding to the fourth scenario of "asking for more allowance", most parents use a sharper tone either by refusing to give more allowance (like saying "I will not give you extra money", and "no more money for today"). They may ask for the reason or justification of why the son wants more money. They say "what do you want to do with them?", and "you should convince me of your need for more money". In reply to the seventh one, (helping in the house), parents try to stir up their teens' feelings by using an indirect way of asking for help either by referring to themselves like "I am tired", and "I need help", or by praising their sons like "you are old enough now to help in the house" or "you are a responsible person".

Results of Analysis

After reviewing responses to the survey, it was noted that most parents avoid instructing their sons directly. They tend to adopt an indirect way by using questioning, advising, or offering rewards. The indirect way of addressing those teens can be attributed to the fact that all the parents who replied to the survey are intellectual. They are aware enough of the critical age of their sons. By using gentle instructions, they try to minimize the impact of their instructions. Yet, this differs from one situation to another depending on the type of the instruction.

According to the responses in the questionnaire, when the sons disobey to respond to the instructions, parents change the tone to be sharper or softer. According to the researchers' opinions, this depends on the teen's personality. Each mother or father knows well which way is more effective to deal with her/ his son. For example, only a few parents resort to punishment, threatening, and scolding. Most of the others, however, prefer the opposite way, like encouraging, promising a reward, or repeating the instruction several times until it is obeyed. The results are nearly the same for all items except for the seventh one. Parents keep the same tone even when the sons disobey. They tend to use expressions like, "I think you don't love me enough", or "helping in the house makes me feel happy" and other similar sentimental statements. Housework is something unfavorable for most of our sons. That is why parents rely on the mutual love between them and their sons.

Discussion of Results

According to the results of analysis, the pragma-stylistic devices that characterize Iraqi parental instructions to their teens are speech acts and politeness strategies. Educated Iraqi parents use indirect speech acts with their sons when giving daily instructions concerning the educational, moral, or health care aspects. Many speech acts are utilized to instruct sons by parents, but the speech act of advising is the stylistic feature that characterizes these instructions. All direct instructions are softened by politeness strategies, and no impoliteness strategies appear in the data.

Conclusions

The analysis sums up the following conclusions:

Educated parents are aware of the sensitivity of teenagers. They keep this in mind when dealing with their teens. The indirect way of giving instructions to teens is the prevalent one in all the responses of parents. Direct instructions are devoted to crucial ones, and they are softened mainly by using polite expressions like 'please' or 'my dear son or daughter'. Politeness is the phenomenon that characterizes the parents- sons' communication in the Iraqi context. Saving teens' faces means saving parents' faces. This is why parents resort to politeness triggers.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Parents' Questionnaire

What would you say to get your kids/ teens?

Do what you want in the following situations?

Situation 1: Brushing teeth

To get your kids to brush their teeth, you say _____.

- Brush your teeth
- Tooth brushing prevents decay
- Your teeth are horrible

Write down what you may have said to your kids to get them to brush their teeth, and it worked.

When they disobey, i.e., they don't listen to you, you say _____.

Situation 2: Covering faces

What do you say when you tell your kids to cover their faces when they sneeze or cough?

- Cover your face/ cough (or sneeze) into your elbow
- Germs can Spread
- Use tissues to prevent infection

What did you say in a similar situation, and it worked?

If they disobey, or they don't listen, what do you say?

Situation 3: Biting fingernail

If your son bites his fingernails, you say _____.

- Don't bite your fingernails
- It is unfavorable
- Nails are always dirty

What did you say in a similar situation?

If they don't listen to you, you say _____.

Situation 4: Asking for more daily allowance

What would you say if your son asked for a more daily allowance?

- You are spending too much money
- What do you want to do with them?
- You took enough money

What did you say in a similar situation?

If they don't listen to you, what would you say?

Situation 5: Wearing a mask

To get your kids to wear a mask in crowded places, and keep a social distance, you say:

- Wear a mask
- Wearing a mask prevents infection
- Corona is still there

If they show disobedience, what do you say?

What did you say in a similar situation (if there's any)? Was it efficient?

Situation 6: Studying for exams

How do you tell your kids to study?

- Study for the exam
- Have you studied for tomorrow's exam?
- I will take you on a journey if you succeed

If you are disobeyed. What do you say?

What did you say in a similar situation, if there's any, and it worked?

Situation 7: Helping in the house

What would you say to make your son/ daughter help you in the house?

- Come and help me
- I am very tired
- The house is messy

If your son don't listen to you, what do you say?

What did you say in a similar situation, if there's any?

Situation 8: Keep clothes tidy and clean

How do you tell your kids to keep their clothes tidy and clean?

- Wear clean clothes
- Wearing the same clothes several times is unhealthy
- Don't wear the same clothes everywhere

If not obeyed, what do you say?

What did you say in a similar situation, and it worked?

Situation 9: Showering regularly

How do you tell your kids to shower regularly?

- You need a shower
- Having a shower is healthy.
- Your hair is oily

What did you say in a similar situation?

If they don't listen to you, what do you say?

Situation 10: Taking care of school books and copybooks

How do you tell your sons to take care of their books?

- Arrange your books and copybooks
- Your books and copybooks are valuable
- Why do you leave your book on the ground?

What did you say in a similar situation?

If disobeyed, what do you say?