

An Assessment of EFL Learners' Ability to Identify and Interpret Rhetorical Questions: A Pragmatic Perspective Study

Khalid Sabie Khamees

Department of English, College of Arts
Al-Iraqiya University, Iraq

Abstract

The concept of rhetorical questions and their role in conveying pragmatic meanings has been of interest to many researchers in the field of language learning as these questions form one of the pillars in language communication. The main purpose of this empirical study is to find out whether learners are able to recognize rhetorical questions as well as their pragmatic functions, i.e., their illocutionary force. A total of 30 junior students majoring in English, participated in this study. The data were collected via a 25-item test followed by post-performance. They listened to 19 dialogues, and were asked to identify and interpret the pragmatic meanings of the rhetorical questions contained. Data analysis showed that while it was relatively easy for the test-takers to recognize rhetorical questions, they encountered some problems when trying to interpret their pragmatic functions. Complexity of speech acts, availability of contextual clues, background knowledge, and natural reasoning seemed to be the main variables that affected the test-takers' inferencing. Making combinations between various ideas contained in a single dialogue in addition to lack of proper courses geared towards developing this skill, seemed to be responsible for learners satisfactory or unsatisfactory achievement.

Keywords: comprehension, context, identification, implied meaning, pragmatics, rhetorical questions

Cite as: Khamees, K.S. (2015). An Assessment of EFL Learners' Ability to Identify and Interpret Rhetorical Questions: A Pragmatic Perspective Study. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (3). DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol6no3.23>