Introduction

Habib Abdesslem

University of Manouba & King Khalid University

Arab Journal of Applied Linguistics proposes for its readers and potential contributors three papers in three different Applied Linguistics domains: (i) A Psycholinguistic investigation of the process of morphological segmentation of regular adjectives by native speakers and by learners of Arabic, (ii) A Contrastive Rhetoric analysis of discourse connectives in argumentative essays produced by students of Arabic and students of English, and (iii) A Pragmalinguistic study of the Speech Act of Refusal in English by students belonging to two different cultures.

Rebecca Foote and Eman Saadah investigated the lexical processing of regularly-inflected adjective forms for gender and number by native speakers, heritage speakers, and late learners of Arabic. In their Introduction and Review of the Literature, they provide a condensed description of the complexity and sophistication of Arabic morphology. They make reference to old and new issues, such as the Critical Period Hypothesis and the roles of Declarative Memory and Procedural Memory in language acquisition and in language processing speed and automaticity.

Foote and Saadah administered a questionnaire that asked the participants in their study to evaluate their experience in learning languages

and to rate their proficiency in English and Arabic. Then they engaged heritage speakers and late learners among the participants in the translation of the Swadesh 100 English Word List into Arabic to ensure that they shared a basic command of Arabic lexis. The authors adopted masked priming as an experimental technique to investigate speakers' mental lexicon, which they conceptualise as a network of connected nodes, or morphemes. In this technique, a prime (a word form) appears on the computer screen for less than sixty milliseconds, then it is masked. When the target (the same, related, or unrelated word form) appears, the participant reads the target word aloud or presses a button to indicate that it is a real word. The results of the study show that, aside from some differences among the three groups' decomposition speed, the three groups "segment adjectives in Arabic into their stems and agreement affixes and then access their roots" (p. 25).

Rebecca Foote and Eman Saadah's study is in line with research in neurolinguistics which has shown that the morphological processing of Semitic languages differs from the morphological processing of Indo-European languages (Marslen-Wilson *et al.*, 2014) and has suggested that the processing of these languages ought to be treated as a special domain of knowledge (Boudelaa & Marslen-Wilson, 2013, p. 1471).

Derivations that maintain transparent relationships with their roots and fall within well-established morphological patterns, as well as opaque morphological constructions, represent promising areas for research in the acquisition and teaching of Modern Standard Arabic, local varieties of Arabic, and languages having a rich non-concatenative morphology (Fullwood & O' Donnell, 2013). Foote and Saadah's study can also be considered an invitation

for applied linguists to be more attentive to neurolinguistics when conducting their research work.

Ons Abdi adopts an unprejudiced and unbiased stance towards languages, language users, and language learners. She expresses her dissatisfaction with research in Contrastive Rhetoric that inadvertently considers the language from which transfer emanates as being inferior to the language in which transfer takes place. Abdi did not opt for the customary practice in Contrastive Rhetoric which examines writers' transfer from their native language. She chose to contrast Discourse Connectives in English and Arabic in the persuasive writings of Tunisian university students majoring in English and of their peers majoring in Arabic.

Abdi reviews the literature on Discourse Connectives in English and in Arabic and considers them as a subset of Discourse Markers. She defines Connectives as "any word [...] or string of words [...] which serves to link clauses, T-units, or larger parts of discourse" (pp. 39-40). She proposes an analytical framework in which she classifies Connectives into five categories: Additives, Adversatives, Causals, Temporals and Continuatives. She identifies three levels where these five categories occur. The levels are: Intra-sentential, Inter-sentential, and Supra-sentential. She calls the latter Discourse connective, for ease of reference!

Abdi assigned to her informants an open-ended writing task. She did not impose on them a specific topic but asked them to write about a problem that affects life around them and to propose an adequate solution they think will persuade their readers of its worth. She conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data she had obtained.

The quantitative analysis revealed that overall the students of Arabic used Connectives more than the students of English. It also revealed that both groups used a limited range of Connectives. Abdi remarks that the Inter-sentential Connective *wa* (and) often stands for the full stop in English, and this explains the high frequency of occurrence of this Additive in the Arabic data. Her remark represents a critical allusion to a host of hasty conclusions reached by Arabic-English Contrastive Rhetoric researchers, who give the impression that they are accusing Arabic for the transfer of *and* into Arabs' writings in English, without acknowledging that *wa* often stands for the Inter-sentential punctuation mark in English.

Abdi's study indicated that the students of English in her corpus "adjusted to the English language's reliance on punctuation" (p. 48). This adjustment, which is not that conspicuous or successful among Middle Eastern students of English, may also be traceable to the influence of the reading and writing skills Tunisian students develop when learning French. Abdi's study also revealed that the students of English used more Discourse connectives than the students of Arabic. This may suggest a comparatively, yet still suboptimal (Figure 1, p. 47), higher organisational ability on the part of the students of English to manage their arguments into Discourse Phases (Abdesslem, 2020, p. 48) and relate those Phases via Discourse Connectives.

Abdi's qualitative analysis provides insightful discussions of instances of Connectives misuses. She attributes some of them to spoken Arabic rhetorical style and others to French rhetorical style. She also identifies a third category of misuses that does not take into consideration semantic and logical relationships between propositions. These misuses can be due to a transfer of training whereby cohesion is taught in a mechanical manner and

independently from coherence. They may also be ascribed to the little interest Metadiscourse Studies have given to propositional meaning development in discourse (Abdesslem, 2020; Larsson *et al.*, 2022, forthcoming) and the influence such studies have had on the training of teachers and on their teaching practices.

Abdi's Discourse Connectives framework represents an addition to the body of Metadiscourse research. It can be applied to text-type, genre, and register studies, within the same language or across languages. Her adoption of an unbiased and balanced position towards languages and their users together with her well-documented review of the literature on connectives in English and in Arabic make her recommendations apply not only to learners and teachers of English, but also to teachers and students of Arabic. Her recommendations can also be of great value for Arabic-English translation researchers, students, and teachers.

Hassen Khammari emphasises the importance of disagreeing in intercultural communication studies. For him disagreement can be direct, face-threatening, and impolite, but it can also be indirect, face-enhancing, and polite. He shows in his review of the literature that disagreement is produced and evaluated differently across cultures and communication encounters; it depends principally on the participants' evaluation of the social distance that stands between them and the social power relation that separates them.

Khammari made use of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) to elicit the Speech Act of Disagreement among Tunisian non-native students of English (NNSE) and American native speakers of English (NSE). He adopted Brown and Levinson's (1987) Super Strategies and concentrated on two of Brown and Levinson's three variables, namely Social Distance and Social

Power. Khammari's close reading of the data "revealed new categories [of strategies] along with categories available in the literature." (p. 67). His new categories represent an enrichment of Brown and Levinson's Politeness model and a welcome contribution to Speech Act Studies.

Khammari's quantitative and qualitative analyses showed that NNSE were on the whole more direct than their NSE counterparts. His discussion of Refusals at the Social Distance plane revealed that directness, which would be considered offensive by NSE, can be indicative of sincerity, cooperativeness, and closeness among Tunisians. His discussion of Refusals at the Power Distance plane revealed that the Tunisian society has been moving towards a small Power Distance culture.

In addition to its importance in helping Tunisian and Arab students develop a more adequate pragmatic competence in English and its importance in shedding light on the American and Tunisian cultures, Khammari's work may be extended to cover the teaching of Arabic as a second or foreign language and to gauge learners' reactions to native Arabic speakers' directness and indirectness.

As far as socio-cultural changes are concerned, it seems that when members of a community witness a rapid narrowing of their Social-Distance relations and a drastic decrease in their Power-Distance relations, as is the case in post 2011 Tunisia, the rate of face-threatening speech acts may rise. Such rise may contribute to a spread of what Goffman (1967, pp. 24-25) calls Aggressive Face-Work. Research is indeed needed to confirm these ideas and hypotheses.

I hope *AJAL* readers will find the papers in this Issue interesting and stimulating. I wish to thank my colleagues on the Editorial Board and the reviewers who took part in the evaluation of the many typescripts the journal had received and who chose to remain anonymous. I congratulate the authors of the papers published in this Issue and thank them for their patience and cooperation.

We all look forward to receiving your contributions.

Prof. Habib Abdesslem

References

Abdesslem, H. (2020). Writer-author presence and responsibility in attribution and averral: A model for the analysis of academic discourse. *Arab Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *5*(1), 25-62.

Boudelaa, S. & Marslen-Wilson, W.D. (2013). Morphological structure in the Arabic mental lexicon: Parallels between standard and dialectal Arabic. *Language and Cognitive Processes*, *28*(10), 1453-1473.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S.C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fullwood, M.A. & O'Donnell, T.J. (2013). Learning non-concatenative morphology. *Proceedings of the Workshop on Cognitive Modeling and Computational Linguistics, Sofia, Bulgaria.* Association for Computational Linguistics, pp. 21-27.

Goffman, E. (1967). On face work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Interactional Ritual*. Garden City: Doubleday, pp. 5-45.

Larsson, T., Egbert, J. D., & Biber, D. (2022, Forthcoming). On the status of statistical reporting versus linguistic description in corpus linguistics: A ten-year perspective. *Corpora*, 17 (1).

Marslen-Wilson, W.D., Bozic, M., & Komisarjevsky Tyler, L. (2014). Morphological systems in their neurobiological contexts. In M. Gazzaniga & G.R. Mangun (Eds.), *The cognitive neurosciences,* (5th edn.) (pp. 639-647). MIT Press.