On Realising the Expressive Speech Act Through the Use of Exclamatory Sentences in Written Discourse

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Abstract :

In the present study, 60 third-year undergraduate students in the Department of Letters and English Language t the University of Med Seddik Ben Yahia, Jijel took part in a written discourse completion test in order to assess their knowledge about the different exclamatory forms existing in English and investigate their ability to effectively employ these forms for performing the expressive speech act in written discourse. As the the analysis of the data revealed that the majority of students lacked the adequate knowledge pertaining to the English exclamatory forms and failed to use them to convey the intended meaning, it is recommended that EFL teachers should give importance to teaching exclamatory sentences from a pragmatic perspective when teaching writing.

Keywords: Exclamatory sentences, pragmatics, expressive speech act, written discourse

ملخص:

من خلال هذه الدراسة تم تقييم معارف عينة من طلاب السنة الثالثة بقسم الآداب واللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة محمد الصديق بن يحي بجيجل حول أشكال الجملة التعجبية في اللغة الإنجليزية، وكذلك التحقيق في قدرتهم على توظيف هذه الأشكال في إدراك الفعل القولي التعبيري في الخطاب الكتابي بعد إجابتهم على اختبار استكمال الخطاب الكتابي. ولقد أظهرت النتائج أن غالبية الطلاب يفتقرون إلى المعرفة الكافية فيما يخص أشكال الجملة التعجبية كما أنهم لم يوفقوا في إستعمال هذه الجمل لنقل المعنى المقصود. ولهذا فإن على أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية إعطاء أهمية كبيرة لتعليم الجملة التعجبية من منظور تداولي عند تدريس التعبير الكتابي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجمل التعجبية، التداوليات، الفعل القولي التعبيري، الخطاب الكتابي

Introduction

Teaching vocabulary and grammar to make EFL students attain successful writing is said to be insufficient. In addition to gaining knowledge about the grammatical system, students should evenly learn how to reach their intended meaning through the use of proper grammatical constructions (Nunan, 1989). In fact, they are expected to make an association between form and meaning and to be fully aware that certain "language forms" have certain "communicative functions" (Hyland, 2003).

Of these language forms, this research paper sheds light on exclamatory sentences since (as far as I know) there is little, *if any,* research about them in the Algerian context and students rarely use them in their written discourse, even when they are a requisite in certain situations. Through this paper, we attempt to gain

a detailed understanding of the students' knowledge pertaining to these linguistic structures. The primary aims of this research study are to:

1. Determine the exclamatory forms that these students are cognizant of and are able to effectively employ in written discourse.

2. Investigate whether these students successfully use the appropriate exclamatory forms to fulfil given communicative functions in particular situations when realising the expressive speech act.

1. Literature Review

People communicate for different purposes. They pass on a piece of information, receive one, perform an action, and expose their feelings about something. These communicative functions and adjacent ones are reflected according to purpose and manner in the types of sentences as the declarative, the interrogative, the imperative and the exclamatory (Verspoor & Sauter, 2000, p. 16-17).

Of all these types, exclamatory sentences had been given a little attention in language studies until Elliot (1971) raised the issue of their classification in grammar. In sentence classification, exclamatory sentences are either considered independent types on their own (Lyons, 1968; Elliot, 1971, Quirk et al, 1985; Radford, 1997) or minor sentence types (Sadock & Zwicky, 1985), provided that by minor here it is not meant to be less important because "the term minor relates only to the grammatical structures of sentences. It has nothing to do with the 'importance' of what is said. Minor sentences have an important role, and often perform a more effective job than their major counterparts." (Crystal, 2004, p. 33).

The definition of the term "exclamatory sentences" varies among researchers and therefore it is particularly important to clarify how this term is used in this study. In the broadest sense, exclamatory sentences are language forms that are ended with an exclamation point (Bolinger, 1989). They are sentences "which express the speaker's affective response to a situation" (Michaelis, 2001, p.1039). With this intention, it is generally agreed upon the fact that exclamatory sentences are used for expressing strong emotions (Baker, 1995; Leech, 2006; Crystal, 2008; Fasano, 2014) and are represented in English through various forms and constructions (Michaelis, 2001; Hargis, 2008). These forms "can vary from single exclamatory words such as Oh! (called an interjection) to sentences with a full clause structure, including a verb phrase, as in It's so absurd!" (Leech, 2006, p. 39). The list of exclamatory forms examined in this paper, though not exhaustive, encompasses constructions similar to the following:

(1) I can't believe you did it! (declarative exclamatory sentence)
(2) What a nice story she wrote! (wh-exclamative)
(3) How amazing his performance was! (wh-exclamative)
(4) Isn't it pretty! (inverted exclamative)
(5) The design of that house! (nominal exclamative)
(6) A party! (elliptical exclamative)
(7) I cannot believe how awful it was. (embedded exclamative)
(8) Oh! (Interjection) (My examples)

By stressing the significance of associating form with meaning, it is the pragmatic perspective of exclamatory sentences which should be brought to the fore as pertaining to the speech act theory. This theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) revolves around the notion that in producing an utterance, the locutionary, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary acts are automatically created. The locutionary act is the making of a meaningful linguistically encoded expression. The illocutionary act is the communicative purpose we have in mind when forming the utterance and it is performed through the illocutionary force .The effect that the hearer/reader gets is the perlocutionary act. Speech acts are classified according to their functions into declarations, representatives, expressives, commissives and directives (Yule, 1996). Although there are relatively a few research studies that were specifically devoted to analysing exclamatory sentences pragmatically (Beijer, 2002; Merin & Nikolaeva, 2008; Rett, 2011), most of scholars agreed upon the fact that these sentences are expressives (Vandervenken, 1998; Miro, 2008, Plag et al, 2009; Rett, 2011). Expressives are said to be "those kinds of speech acts that express psychological attitude or state of the

speaker such as joy, sorrow, and likes/dislikes" (Huang, 2014, p. 134). In writing, the expressive speech act is important because besides being used for communicating ideas, writing does express different feelings such as joy, anger, fear, etc. (Hughey, 1983). Vandervenken (1990) advocates that the primitive expressive illocutionary force is syntactically realised in English through the use of exclamatory sentences. Accordingly, EFL learners should be aware of the importance of producing the expressive speech act through the use of different forms of exclamatory sentences in writing. The present study, therefore, comes to investigate their performance in so far as expressiveness is concerned.

3. Methodology
3.1. Participants

This study targeted sixty third-year undergraduate students in the Department of Letters and English Language at the University of Med Seddik Ben Yahia, Jijel. The main reason for such a choice is that the researcher believes that EFL students, at this level, are supposed to have already known about all the English structures of exclamatory sentences and also have acquired the know-how about these sentences in written discourse.

3.2. Data Collection Method

To answer the question of whether or not our EFL learners recognise the structures of exclamatory sentences in English and equally importantly are able to appropriately connect these sentences to their communicative functions and to the realisation of the expressive speech act, this study was based on a written discourse completion test (henceforth WDCT). Written discourse completion tests are deployed for testing informants on their pragmatic competence and particularly for testing their success or failure when performing speech acts. They run in the form of "questionnaires including a number of brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialogue with an empty slot for the speech act under study. Participants are asked to provide a response that they think is appropriate in the given context" (Liu, 2006, p. 4). This elicitation design of the test was first used to study the lexical simplification by Levenston and Blum (1978) and then used for testing speech acts by Blum-Kulka (1982). Having strong and weak points, the pitfall of such tests is that written answers are devoid of many paralinguistic features that are generally existent in speaking (Aufa, 2013, p. 114). However, as the researcher's interest is in the written exclamatory sentences-bound speech acts, the WDCT is thought to be a suitable one especially that the exclamatory sentences tend to replace, in a way, the non-occurrence of paralinguistic features in written communication.

Not based on dialogues but rather on descriptive situations, the WDCT used in this study was tailored by the researcher with the aim of arousing the participants' strong emotions. The students were required to imagine themselves in ten different positive and negative situations and write what they would utter in reaction to each situation.

3.3. Data Analysis and Discussion
Situation 1

In the first situation, the participants were asked to read the following statement and write the appropriate sentence that they think it can be stated as a reaction to it:

You are in front of Burj Khalifa for the first time. Although you have already heard that it is the highest building in the world, its height exceeded your imagination.

This situation was set up particularly to make the participants imagine themselves in a positive surprising state. Although surprise is a feeling that is generally linked to the use of exclamatory sentences, unexpectedly only 30 of the respondents (N=60) used exclamatory sentences in response to this task. The forms of the exclamatory sentences employed are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. *Exclamatory Forms Used in Students' Response to Situation 1*

	N	%
Declarative exclamatory sentences	13	43.33
Wh-exclamatives	03	10
Inverted exclamatives	00	00
Nominal exclamatives	01	3.33
Elliptical exclamatory sentences	00	00
Embedded exclamatory sentences	00	00
Interjections	13	43.33
Total	30	100

As it is patently emanated in Table 1, the higher percentage of the exclamatory forms used in this situation equally goes to decalarative exclamatory sentences and interjections. The answers, however, were unjustifiably devoid of any inverted, elliptical or embedded forms. Interestingly, the use of interjections was restricted to "Oh" which logically reflects the respondents' lack of adequate knowledge pertaining to the possible interjections that can be employed to express surprise. Despite the fact that wh-exclamatives are most suitably employed in similar cases; when something exceeds what somebody expects, only 3 of the subjects used wh-exclamatives. A wh-exclamative utterance has two contents: a descriptive content and an expressive one (Miro, 2008; Chernilovskaya et al, 2012). As a way of example, in uttering "How high the building is!" when reacting to the surprising stimulus in situation 1, the descriptive content is that the building is high and the expressive content is that the speaker is surprised by this height. Taken together, these results suggest that the respondents do not show any adequate knowledge with regard to all the appropriate forms that should be used to express surprise in English and how these forms should be effectively employed to fulfil particular language functions.

Situation 2

For expressing strong emotions upon hearing bad news; for the second situation, the participants were asked to imagine their reaction to the following:
You heard about the death of your best friend. (Express your deep sadness towards that)
Of the 60 students who answered this task, only 12 used exclamatory sentences whose forms are exhibited in Table 2.
Table 2. *Exclamatory Forms Used in Students' Response to Situation 2*

	N	%
Declarative exclamatory sentences	06	50
Wh-exclamatives	02	16.66
Inverted exclamatives	00	00
Nominal exclamatives	01	08.33
Elliptical exclamatory sentences	00	00
Embedded exclamatory sentences	00	00
Interjections	03	25
Total	12	100

Expressing sadness can be achieved through different exclamatory sentences structures in English. However, the use of the forms should be linked to the speaker's intention in communicating a given message because the communicative function excludes the use of many forms. For instance, as the intention in this case is communicating sadness, interjections such as "Ouch" or "Aha" cannot be employed because they express pain and recognition respectively (See the non-exhaustive list of English interjections in English in Leech & Svartick, 2013). Using exclamatory sentences, when reacting to this situation, does not reflect that the students were able to successfully express their feelings. The use of 6 declarative exclamatory sentences (See Table 2), for example, was for communicating shock rather than sadness. As in situation 1, the participants

did not employ any inverted, elliptical or embedded exclamatory sentences, even incorrectly, which posits the premise that our subjects might not be cognizant of the existence of these forms!

Situation 3

Irritation is another strong emotion that the participants were tested on. In the third statement, they were asked to imagine themselves in the following situation:
You went to the mall for shopping with your family and you were irritated by the large crowds there.
Interestingly, of all the participants who answered this task (N=60), only 12 of them employed exclamatory sentences (See Table 3).

Table 3. *Exclamatory Forms Used in Students' Response to Situation 3*

	N	%
Declarative exclamatory sentences	03	25
Wh-exclamatives	03	25
Inverted exclamatives	00	00
Nominal exclamatives	01	8.33
Elliptical exclamatory sentences	00	00
Embedded exclamatory sentences	00	00
Interjections	05	41.66
Total	12	100

One interesting fact about the analysis of the respondents' answers to this situation is that the participants who used wh-exclamatives committed mistakes at the level of the syntax of these forms. This confirms that some of the students are even ignorant about the syntactic rules governing the use of wh-exclamatives. The analysis also showed that inverted exclamatives, elliptical exclamatory sentences and embedded exclamatory sentences were totally absent in the students' responses despite the fact that such forms are acceptable for showing irritation and, therefore, it is appropriate to utter "Isn't it too crowded!", "Too Crowded!" or "It is irritating how crowded it is!" Another striking result to be perceptibly elicited from the sifted data is that the participants' use of interjections was, again, limited to "Oh!"

Situation 4

In situation four, the respondents were tested on their reaction to pain as if they were in the following situation:
You dropped a glass and it broke into pieces. While collecting the bits from the floor, you cut your finger.
28 students (N=60) used exclamatory sentences when answering this task and the exclamatory forms, they employed, are displayed in Table 4:

Table 4. *Exclamatory Forms Used in Students' Response to Situation 4*

	N	%
Declarative exclamatory sentences	00	00
Wh-exclamatives	03	10.71
Inverted exclamatives	00	00
Nominal exclamatives	02	7.14
Elliptical exclamatory sentences	00	00
Embedded exclamatory sentences	00	00
Interjections	23	82.14
Total	28	100

It is a matter of fact that the use of exclamatory sentences while reacting to this situation does not necessarily imply that the respondents successfully communicated their intended emotion, which is that of pain. First, the 3 wh-exclamatives used were to curse one's bad day as in 'What a bad day! And this was also applicable

to the use of nominal exclamatives as in "Silly me!" Of the 23 interjections employed, only 6 of the subjects employed "Ouch" as it is the most appropriate interjection to express physical pain. Native speakers do use interjections because they are conventional forms that are uttered with a communicative purpose in mind. By uttering 'Ow', for example, the purpose is to demonstrate the pain felt by the speaker in a way that is demonstrated by other English speakers (Wilkins, 1992). The remainder used "Oh" which is not directly linked to expressing physical pain, "Oh, my God" which is, as Wierzbicka (2003) states , related to feeling bad rather or "Ah" which is basically used to express recognition, satisfaction, etc. (Quirk et al, 1972; Leech & Svartvik, 2013). It is deduced from this that the students, who employed exclamatory sentences, actually used these sentences' forms at random and more precisely with no particular purpose in mind.

Situation 5

In the fifth situation, only 6 of the total respondents (N=60) employed exclamatory sentences although the situation was about imagining themselves showing affection while bidding farewell to a close person and thus being emotionally moved. The situation was as follows:
You accompanied your brother to the airport who is going to live in another country and you find it the right time to state your affection for him.
Table 5 shows the forms of exclamatory sentences that were used by these 6 students.
Table 5. *Exclamatory Forms Used in Students' Response to Situation 5*

	N	%
Declarative exclamatory sentences	03	50
Wh-exclamatives	00	00
Inverted exclamatives	00	00
Nominal exclamatives	01	16.66
Elliptical exclamatory sentences	00	00
Embedded exclamatory sentences	00	00
Interjections	02	33.33
Total	06	100

The only 6 students who used exclamatory sentences when reacting to this situation selected three exclamatory forms represented in 3 declarative exclamatory sentences, a single nominal exclamative and 2 interjections. Expressing strong love to somebody is generally represented by declarative exclamatory sentences as the exclamation mark added at the end of the statement places emphasis upon the feeling because unlike declarative sentences which are informative, exclamatory sentences are expressive (Sadock & Zwicky, 1985). Only two exclamatory sentences successfully expressed strong love as in "Brother, I love you!" The remaining students rather focused on the feeling of farewell or used "Oh" and "Oh, my God" to show that. Additionally and not surprisingly, as it seen in Table 5 the students' responses were devoid of wh-exclamatives, inverted exclamatives, elliptical exclamatory sentences and embedded exclamatory sentences which supports our previous assumption that these respondents are destitute of knowledge with regard to certain exclamatory forms and their functions.

Situation 6

In the sixth situation, the participants were tested on whether they use exclamatory sentences in another negative state, that of anger.
Your sister has just broken your expensive iPhone and you are furious with her.
To express their anger, there were no exclamatory sentences in the responses of 51 of the participants. Table 6 exhibits the forms of the only 9 exclamatory sentences employed.

Table 6. *Exclamatory Forms Used in Students' Response to Situation 6*

	N	%
Declarative exclamatory sentences	06	66.66
Wh-exclamatives	00	00
Inverted exclamatives	00	00
Nominal exclamatives	00	00
Elliptical exclamatory sentences	00	00
Embedded exclamatory sentences	00	00
Interjections	03	33.33
Total	09	100

Most of the exclamatory sentences used in this response were declarative exclamatory sentences, however, these sentences did not utterly express anger as in the use of "It is very expressive!" which can be interpreted as rather communicating surprise. Moreover, the students restricted their use of interjections, though only three, to "Oh" and "Oh, my God" which proves again that the respondents' knowledge about interjections is very limited.

Situation 7

Situation seven was about testing these EFL learners on how they might express a state of praise. The participants were asked to imagine themselves in the following situation:
You have been invited to dine in your aunt's house and the food was very delicious, hence you have decided to praise her cooking.
44 of the respondents used non exclamatory sentences, while only 6 did and their forms are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7. *Exclamatory Forms Used in Students' Response to Situation 7*

	N	%
Declarative exclamatory sentences	02	33.33
Wh-exclamatives	00	00
Inverted exclamatives	00	00
Nominal exclamatives	00	00
Elliptical exclamatory sentences	00	00
Embedded exclamatory sentences	00	00
Interjections	04	66.66
Total	06	100

Praise was expressed by the subjects by declarative exclamatory sentences or interjections. The answers were devoid of other forms as it is shown in Table 7. Attention should be drawn in this case to the fact that the use of wh-exclamative should not be confused with surprise. Uttering "What a delicious dinner you've made!" does not entail that the speaker did not expect the meal to be delicious and was surprised that it was, it is rather used for the sake of flattering for social purposes (See Rett, 2011).

Situation 8

The eighth situation was to test the students' performance in a state of disgust. The situation was as follows:
You have entered your friend's room in the dormitory, and you found it smelly, too dirty and dusty.
48 of the informants (N=60) did not employ exclamatory sentences for showing disgust, but rather employed declarative sentences. The forms of the 8 exclamatory sentences used are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8. *Exclamatory Forms Used in Students' Response to Situation 8*

	N	%
Declarative exclamatory sentences	03	25
Wh-exclamatives	04	33.33
Inverted exclamatives	00	00
Nominal exclamatives	00	00
Elliptical exclamatory sentences	00	00
Embedded exclamatory sentences	00	00
Interjections	05	41.66
Total	12	100

The exclamatory sentences used to respond to this situation were used by the participants to show surprise and not disgust such as in "You really live in this place" which comes to confirm that the students do not associate exclamatory sentences to their communicative functions. What is interesting is that the subjects keep using "Oh" as an interjection even to respond to this situation despite the fact that "Ugh" is the commonly used interjection to show disgust (Leech & Svartvik, 2013).

Situation 9

In the ninth situation, the students were invited to show the feeling of exhaustion and it was as follows:

You travelled for eight hours by bus. Your weariness is indescribable.

No participant used exclamatory sentences to show sheer exhaustion. This undoubtedly discloses the fact that the subjects do not really know when and when not to use exclamatory sentences.

Situation 10

The tenth situation was to entice the participants to show being overjoyed. In this task, these participants were expected to react to the following situation:

For the first time, you won a car in a prize draw.

Only 14 students used exclamatory sentences in their responses whose forms are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. *Exclamatory Forms Used in Students' Response to Situation 10*

	N	%
Declarative exclamatory sentences	06	42.85
Wh-exclamatives	01	7.14
Inverted exclamatives	00	00
Nominal exclamatives	00	00
Elliptical exclamatory sentences	00	00
Embedded exclamatory sentences	00	00
Interjections	07	50
Total	14	100

For expressing being overjoyed, the students employed only three forms of exclamatory sentences: 6 declarative exclamatory sentences, a wh-exclamative and 7 interjections. Their use was marked by a repeated use of the interjection "Oh" and the total absence of inverted, elliptical or embedded exclamatory sentences.

4. Conclusion

The student's written performance can lavishly provide us with a limitless array of insightful pieces of information about its writer (Witte & Cherry, 1986). The present study attempted to assess the students' knowledge with regard to the various forms of exclamatory sentences in English and the realisation of the expressive speech act through the use of these sentences. Evidently, the analysis of the results divulged that the bulk of participants did not employ exclamatory sentences for expressing strong emotions. From a pragmatic perspective, the few respondents who employed exclamatory sentences in their answers, did not

use these sentences' forms with a purpose in mind and thus failed to relate the suitable forms to the right functions. This actually was most remarkably seen in the excessive use of "Oh" and "Oh, my God" which occurred in almost all the participants' answers and the few occurrences or the total absence of some forms such as the inverted, the nominal and the embedded exclamatory sentences.

Overall, the results obtained from the test have shown that a large proportion of EFL learners at the Department of English at the University of Med Seddik Ben Yahia, Jijel are unable to use exclamatory sentences to perform the expressive speech act in their writings. Presumably the fact that the participants lack the necessary knowledge about the exclamatory sentences and are ignorant of these structures' communicative functions in several contexts can be ascribable to their teachers who might have taught them these structures superficially. For that, one of the teachers' responsibilities lies in showing their learners the pragmatic value of exclamatory sentences instead of focusing solely on these sentences' syntactic correctness. Doing so can be through training the students to analyse exclamatory sentences in different contexts and making them elicit the illocutionary meaning of these sentences and being aware of the perlocutionary effect on them as readers. This is how our students' writing skills can be enriched insofar as the expressive speech act formation is concerned and particularly the judicious use of exclamatory sentences in written discourse.

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