

A Pragmatic Analysis of Ostensible Invitations among Moroccan Arabic Speakers

Imane Masmoudi*

Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Moulay Ismail University, Meknes, Morocco

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Abstract: Unlike genuine invitations, which are extended with a sincere intent to get the invitee to attend or participate in a specific event, ostensible invitations are insincere invitations that the speaker extends not to be taken seriously. Such invitations are characterized by a number of properties that set them apart from genuine ones, allowing the interlocutor to recognize their insincerity. The present paper aims to determine the functions of ostensible invitations in the Moroccan context, examine if Moroccan Arabic speakers use the same strategies suggested by Clark and Isaacs (1990) for extending ostensible invitations. Of further importance to this study is to assess whether such invitations draw on the same properties as outlined by Clark and Isaacs (1990). To this end, data for the current study were collected from 30 Moroccan Arabic speakers residing in Meknes city, comprising 18 females and 12 males, who have managed to participate in semi-structured interviews. Phenomenological and descriptive designs were used for the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. The collected data were analyzed on the basis of Clark and Isaacs' (1990) model. Accordingly, the present study came up with three primary conclusions. First, Moroccan Arabic speakers use ostensible invitations mainly to show politeness and maintain social ties. Second, invitations in the Moroccan context align with the five properties of ostensible speech acts suggested by Clark and Isaacs' (1990) model. Last but not least, Moroccan Arabic speakers draw on the same strategies of ostensible invitations proposed by Clark and Isaacs (1990).

Keywords: Moroccan Arabic Speakers, Speech Acts, Ostensible Invitations, Moroccan context, Pretense

1. Introduction

Since its inception, the groundbreaking theory of speech acts has revolutionized the realm of linguistics, inspiring scholars from diverse cultural backgrounds to employ it in examining the usage of speech acts across various societies and gauging their susceptibility to social norms. According to Clark and Isaacs (1990), traditional speech act theorists (e.g., Austin, 1962; Bach & Harnish, 1979; Searle, 1976) mainly focused on investigating genuine speech acts, neglecting the category of ostensible speech acts.

The term ostensible speech acts refers to a category of speech acts used for implicit motives, wherein the speaker's intended meaning diverges from his/her explicit utterance to achieve an off-record purpose (Clark & Isaacs, 1990). This divergence often results in the violation of the sincerity condition (Searle, 1969). Despite their prevalence in the Moroccan society, such invitations have been overlooked in the academic research.

Despite the substantial body of literature on genuine invitations, including the noteworthy contributions of (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023; Choraihi, 2022; Hussein et al., 2022; Jabber, 2020; Al-Marrani, 2019; Mao, 1992; Wolfson, 1981), there's a conspicuous dearth of studies addressing ostensible invitations. Among these are the studies conducted in the American context (i.e., Clark & Isaacs, 1990; Wolfson, 1981; Link & Kreuz, 2005), Chinese context (i.e., ChaiSi, 2009; Fung & Dandan, 2019; Yang, 2020), Persian context (i.e. Eslami, 2005; Noudoushan, 2006; Nehal, 2021),

* Corresponding Author: i.masmoudi@edu.umi.ac.ma

Jordanian context (i.e., Abdelhady, 2013; Abdelhady, 2015), Iraqi context (i.e., Al-Hindawi & Kadhim, 2017) and the Saudi context (i.e. Alzahrani, 2023). In the Moroccan context, the speech act of invitation has been studied from one aspect, that is, genuine invitations (e.g., Choraih, 2022); however, the speech act of ostensible invitation, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, remains disregarded in this context. This research, therefore, fills a gap by adding a Moroccan-based study to the cross-cultural literature on ostensible speech acts in general and ostensible invitations in particular.

The significance of this study, therefore, springs from many reasons. Firstly and most importantly, ostensible invitations are among the most common speech acts used in everyday conversations. Secondly, they play a crucial communicative role. Thirdly, this study holds significance in providing insights into how cultural norms influence language use. Last but not least, this study contributes to the broader field of socio-pragmatics, offering new perspectives and informing future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Ostensible Speech Acts

Clark and Gerik (1984) introduced a theory known as “pretense Theory” pertaining to the insincere use of language. They argue that language is used insincerely when the speaker's intended meaning diverges from his/her actual utterance.

Within the theory of pretense, Clark and Isaacs (1990) introduced the category of ostensible speech acts, which was overlooked by traditional speech act theorists (i.e., Austin, 1962; Bach & Harnish, 1979; Searle, 1976).

According to Clark and Isaacs (1990), ostensible speech acts are insincere, genuine-like speech acts that are not meant to be taken seriously. In the same vein, Nodoushan (2006) defined ostensible speech acts as utterances that resemble genuine speech acts in form but serve unstated purposes.

In such speech acts, the sincerity condition, which is crucial for the speech act to be felicitous, is pretended. Besides, the property of pretense is what chiefly but not solely distinguishes ostensible speech acts from genuine ones and it serves as the overarching property which encompasses the remainder of the properties.

2.2. The properties of Ostensible Speech Acts

Clark and Isaacs (1990) proposed five defining properties that differentiate ostensible speech acts from genuine ones, which include the following:

1. Pretense: The speaker pretends to issue a genuine speech act.
2. Mutual Recognition: Both the speaker and the addressee recognize that the issued speech act is pretended.
3. Collusion: After recognizing that the insincerity of the issued speech act, the addressee colludes with the speaker's pretense by reacting appropriately.
4. Ambivalence: This property is represented by the question “do you really mean it?” Which makes the speaker unable to answer either with a definite “yes” or “no” because he/she is neither sincere nor lying.
5. Off-record purpose: In ostensible speech acts, the speaker's primary intention remains implicit, allowing for various plausible interpretations.

2.3. Stages of ostensible Speech Acts

Al-Hindawi and Kadhim (2017) asserted that ostensible speech acts, including ostensible invitations, can be classified into three stages, according to the chronological order of their defining properties.

The first stage is called “the assurance stage” where the speaker pretends to issue a genuine speech act to be mutually recognized by the addresser and the addressee.

The second stage is referred to as “the collusive stage”, where the addressee colludes with the addresser after recognizing the insincerity of the issued speech act and the ambivalence of the addresser.

The third stage is called “the recognition stage”, where the off-record purpose is accomplished.

2.4. Ostensible Invitations

To better understand ostensible invitations and distinguish them from genuine ones, we should first and foremost have a comprehensive understanding of the latter.

Genuine invitations are normally preceded by what is known as pre-invitations (Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Levison, 1983; Yule, 1996) or leads (Wolfson, 1989). The function of these pre-invitations or leads is to build the ground prior to extending the invitation. Questions like “what are you going to do tonight?” and “Are you busy tomorrow evening?” are used as leads or pre-invitations (Clark & Isaacs, 1990). These pre-invitations rarely precede ostensible invitations.

Ostensible invitations, on the other hand, are based on the property of joint pretense, wherein the inviter pretends to extend a genuine-like invitation and the invitee is supposed to recognize it as insincere.

2.5. Layers of Ostensible Invitations

According to Clark and Isaacs (1990), ostensible invitations are composed of two layers: a top layer and a bottom layer.

1. At the top layer, the inviter pretends to extend an invitation, and the invitee responds to it accordingly.
2. At the bottom layer, the inviter and the invitee mutually recognize that the top layer is only a pretense.

2.6. Strategies of Ostensible Invitations

In order to make the pretense vivid, Clark and Isaacs (1990) proposed seven strategies that the inviter employs to signal the pretense. That is to say, to indicate to the invitee that the extended invitation is not genuine. Accordingly, when the inviter (A) insincerely invites the invitee (B) to an event (E), the inviter may use one of the following strategies:

1. A makes B’s presence at event E implausible. The inviter employs this strategy by violating the felicity condition.
2. A extends the invitation after it has been solicited by the invitee (B). the invitation can be solicited by the invitee (B) either directly or through the context
3. A doesn’t motivate the invitation beyond social courtesy.
4. A doesn’t persist or insist on the invitation. When the invitation is genuine, the inviter repeats or insists on the invitation; however, when it is insincere the inviter (A) gives up on the invitation upon B’s first refusal.
5. A doesn’t specify the arrangements of the event E. That is to say, the inviter doesn’t specify the time and location of the event.
6. A hedges the invitation. The pretense of the extended invitation can be exposed by hedging the invitation through the use of the expressions such as well, I guess, maybe, if you wish, if you like, etc.
7. A extends the invitation with inappropriate cues, such as pausing, avoiding direct eye contact, stuttering, speaking quickly and exhibiting other nonverbal cues which highlight the ostensibility of the invitation (Clark & Isaacs, 1990).

It bears emphasis that these strategies are not employed independently; instead, they are used simultaneously to signify that the inviter is not really extending a genuine invitation. At the same time, this provides the invitee with substantial grounds to doubt the sincerity of the invitation.

Furthermore, Clark and Isaacs (1990) asserted that both the inviter and the invitee should participate in the execution of the ostensible invitation in order to accomplish its intended purpose successfully.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method

To meet the study aims, a qualitative method was adopted, enabling an in-depth examination of the functions of ostensible invitations. This approach also facilitated genuine observation and detailed description of the properties and strategies associated with ostensible invitations.

3.2. Research Design

Phenomenological and descriptive designs were used to answer the research questions. The former was employed to get the participants' perspectives regarding the reasons behind the use of ostensible invitations. The latter, on the other hand, was used to examine the properties and strategies of ostensible invitations among Moroccan Arabic speakers.

3.3. Research Tools

In socio-pragmatic studies, the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) is the most commonly used data collection instrument. However, it is contended that the data collected through DCT do not fully represent naturally occurring data (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000, as cited in Ogiermann, 2018). Since DCT doesn't yield natural data, the researcher collected data through the use of interviews, which were also used by Clark and Isaacs (1990), Noudoushan (2005), Eslami (2005) and Abdel Hady (2013).

3.4. Research Procedures

During interviews, the participants were prompted to recall an instance of an ostensible invitation they have recently extended, observed or received. Consistent with Alzahrani (2023), they were mainly instructed to:

1. Describe the context to facilitate the comprehension of the interaction.
2. Quote the speech of the interlocutors.
3. Elaborate on the reasons that drove them to perceive the invitation as ostensible.
4. Elucidate the relationship between the inviter and the invitee.

3.5. Participants and Sampling

This study was addressed to Moroccan Arabic speakers from Meknes city. 30 participants were recruited for the investigation, comprising 18 females and 12 males. The age of participants ranged between 18 and 60 and they all belonged to the educated middle class. However, age, education and social class were not considered as variables in this study. Besides, the sample of this study was obtained randomly in order to insure the unbiased representation of data and enhance the generalizability of findings.

3.6. Data Analysis

The present study is conducted to explore the functions of ostensible invitations, investigate the properties of ostensible invitations among Moroccan Arabic speakers and examine the strategies used by Moroccan Arabic speakers to extend ostensible invitations. Thus, to analyze the first part of data, the researcher used content analysis, while the second and third parts of the data were analyzed by adopting Clark and Isaacs' model (1990) on the five properties and the seven strategies of ostensible invitation. The latter were organized in a checklist to assess their occurrence in each exchange. Besides, the data were transcribed and translated to ensure comprehensive understanding.

4. Results and Discussion

Findings of the study are presented in three sections. The first section encompasses the functions of ostensible invitations among Moroccan Arabic speakers; the second section presents the properties of these invitations while the last section involves the strategies used by Moroccan Arabic speakers to extend ostensible invitations.

4.1. Functions of Ostensible Invitations among Moroccan Arabic Speakers

Figure (1) illustrates the functions of ostensible invitations among Moroccan Arabic speakers and highlights the most prevalent ones within the Moroccan context.

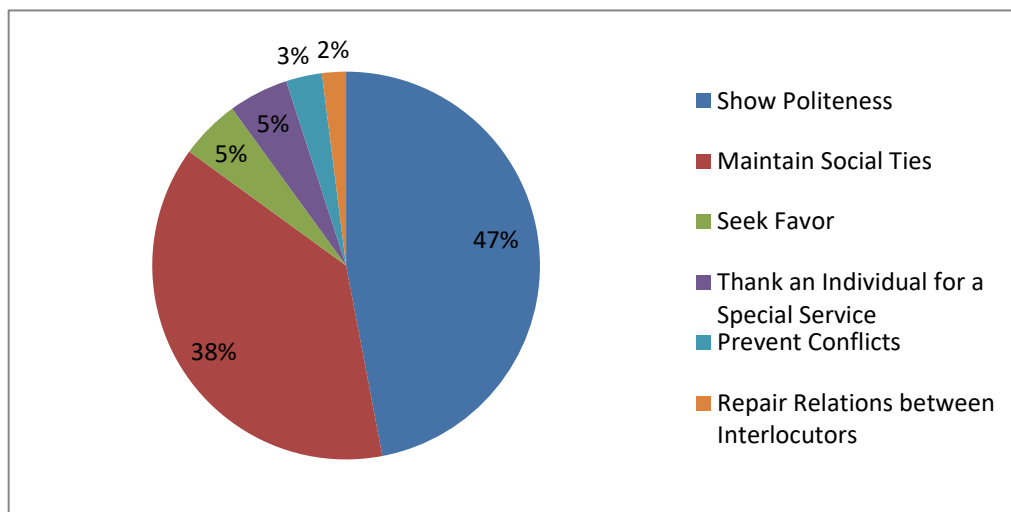


Fig. 1 Functions of Ostensible Invitations among Moroccan Arabic Speakers

As shown in figure (1), the study participants extend Ostensible invitations mostly to show politeness (47%) and maintain social ties (38%). This suggests that ostensible invitations in the Moroccan context serve a phatic function, which primarily aims to establish and maintain relationships. This can be explained by the fact that the Moroccan society is characterized by being a close-knit society that is centered on strong bonds between family members, friends and even neighbors. Therefore, one way through which Moroccans express their feelings towards each other is by inviting one another to particular events, either genuinely or ostensibly. This finding aligns with the conclusion drawn by Kadhim and Al-hindawi (2017), indicating that Iraqi Arabic speakers use ostensible invitations as a means to demonstrate generosity and politeness. They further assert that Iraq is characterized by a tribal society, which is centered on family and attitude towards it. This confirms that ostensible invitation is the most prevalent speech act among Arab societies, which is mainly used to show politeness and maintain social ties.

4.2. Properties of Ostensible Invitations in the Moroccan Context

In consonance with Clark and Isaacs' model (1990), ostensible invitations in the Moroccan context align with the five properties of ostensible speech acts. This can be substantiated by the following example:

Context: A took a couple of days off for his wedding party, but due to some personal reasons, he couldn't invite his colleague (B). When B asked about attending the party, A was compelled to issue an ostensible invitation.

B: Oh great! You have a wedding party and you didn't invite me! It's been a quite long time since I have been to party.

A: It would be my pleasure to have you as a guest, but the wedding invitation cards are personal and the wedding party is arranged by the groom's family, who are inviting the guests themselves. Nevertheless, for sure, I'll try to fetch an extra card for you.

B: Come on! I was just kidding.

- (1) Pretense: A, in the above example was merely pretending to invite his colleague (B) to his wedding party.
- (2) Both A and B recognized the pretense.
- (3) Collusion: After recognizing the pretense, B cooperated with A and responded appropriately to the invitation. Thus B declined the invitation in an appropriate way in an attempt to collude with A's pretense.
- (4) Ambivalence: If B asked A, "Do you really mean it?" A wouldn't be able to answer by yes or no.
- (5) Off-record Purpose: A invited B to show politeness and prevent conflicts.

4.3. Strategies of Ostensible Invitations among Moroccan Arabic Speakers

The study findings showed that Moroccan Arabic speakers draw on the same strategies of ostensible invitations proposed by Clark and Isaacs (1990). This assertion can be backed up by the following examples:

a) Implausibility Strategy- Absence of Motivation strategy- Absence of Persistence Strategy

Context: Last week X was out of essentials and she needed to go to the grocery store. As she was about to leave, her neighbor Y dropped by.

Y: Hi, Khawla, Are you heading somewhere?

X: Hi dear, just a quick trip to the grocery store. We're running out of essentials.

Y: Ah, I see.

X: Why don't you come in for a cup of tea?

Y: Oh thank you dear. Let's have it another day.

X: Okay dear, as you like.

This example clearly shows that the invitation is not a serious one because X makes it clear from the very beginning that she has other plans, which makes the invitation implausible. Besides, the inviter doesn't motivate and insist on the invitation, which highlight the absence of motivation and persistence strategies. These strategies make the pretense vivid and accordingly show that the inviter issued an ostensible invitation.

According to Clark and Isaacs (1990), in genuine invitations, the inviter extends the invitation various times, insisting on the invitee to accept his/her invitation. When the inviter doesn't insist on the invitee and accepts his/her first polite refusal, the invitee would have sufficient grounds to consider the invitation as insincere (Clark & Isaacs, 1990).

b) Soliciting Strategy- Hedging Strategy

Context: At a social gathering hosted by a group of friends, several guests were discussing their plans for an upcoming trip. Y, one of the attendees, overheard the conversation and realized that he hadn't been included.

X: Hey, everyone, just a reminder that our trip will take place next weekend. We've got everything planned out.

Y: What trip are you talking about?

X: Oh, didn't we mention it? We're going camping in the mountains for a couple of days

Y: Wow that sounds amazing! Mind if I tag along?

X: Well, we've already finalized the group, but you're welcome to come along if you wish.

Y: Oh! Thank you! I'd love to, but I'm swamped with commitments these days. Next time, inshaallah.

X: Next time, for sure.

This example shows that the invitation is insincere. This was backed up by the use of soliciting and hedging strategies, wherein X invited Y only after Y had solicited the invitation and here the invitee had solicited the invitation through the context by taking advantage of the fact that is considered impolite to exclude a member of a group in the Moroccan culture. Besides, X hedged the invitation to Y. When X hedged the invitation by saying "Well, we've already finalized the group, but you're welcome to come along if you wish", Y recognized that A's heart is not really in it. The use of these strategies makes the pretense clear, thus affirming the ostensibility of the invitation.

C) Vague Arrangement Strategy:

Context: A, B and C are friends. They were gathering in C's house. A puts on her shoes and got ready to leave.

X: (while preparing to leave), Honor me with your visit soon.

Y: Inshaallah, I will.

In this extract, X didn't fix the time of the invitation and uttered the word "soon" instead. The use of vague arrangement strategy makes the pretense apparent, which shows that the invitation was insincere.

5. Conclusions, Implications and Limitations

This study aimed to determine the functions of ostensible invitations, assess whether the ostensible invitations extended by Moroccan Arabic speakers draw on the properties proposed by Clark and Isaacs (1990) and examine whether Moroccan Arabic speakers use the same strategies suggested by Clark and Isaacs (1990) for extending ostensible invitations.

The study yielded three main findings. Firstly, Moroccan Arabic speakers use ostensible invitations mainly to show politeness and maintain social ties. Secondly, invitations in the Moroccan context align with the five properties of ostensible speech acts suggested by Clark and Isaacs' (1990) model. Lastly, Moroccan Arabic speakers draw on the same strategies of ostensible invitations proposed by Clark and Isaacs (1990).

From the overall results, it can be implied that ostensible invitations are among the most prevalent speech acts used in everyday conversations among Moroccan Arabic speakers with the aim of social courtesy; correspondingly, such invitations in the Moroccan context serve as face-saving devices.

The present study can be beneficial for both foreign language learners and translators. This study, on the one hand, can help foreign language learners to communicate efficiently, especially by being familiar and immersed in the Moroccan culture. On the other hand, Translators can gain considerable advantages from the study findings, assisting them to effectively choose culturally appropriate equivalents.

Despite the results attained, this study is subject to some limitations that are worth mentioning. One of the limitations of the present study is the inability to generalize data due to the small sample size and the restricted context. Therefore, future researchers may replicate this study with a larger sample size and within varied contexts. Another limitation has to do with the fact that the present study overlooked the impact of social variables and pragmatic parameters on the strategies of ostensible invitations. Henceforth, future researchers may approach the same study by taking into account the effect of social variable and pragmatic parameters on the strategies of ostensible invitations.

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Author's Bio

Imane Masmoudi is a PhD student in the Applied Linguistics research laboratory, English Studies at Moulay Ismail University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities-Meknes, Morocco. She obtained her MA degree in Linguistics and Advanced English Studies (LAES) from Cady Ayad University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities-Marrakech. She works as a part-time EFL teacher. Furthermore, she has recently published some articles in the field of Pragmatics. Her chief fields of interest include pragmatics, phonology, media, translation, strategic and intercultural competence, soft skills and critical discourse analysis.