Assessing the Performance of Iraqi EFL College Students in Using Rhetorical Questions

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تِقويم أداء الطلبة الجامعيين العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة اجنبية في استخدام الأسئلة البلاغية

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الملخص:

الأسئلة البلاغية هي نوع من الأسئلة التي لا تحتاج الى اجابة ولها عدة أنواع ووظائف باللغة الإنجليزية. ان الطلبة الجامعيين العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية يواجهون صعوبة في استخدام الأسئلة البلاغية. للتحقق من هذه الفرضية تم اختيار عينة عشوائية تتألف من(60) طالب من المرحلة الرابعة/ قسم اللغة الإنكليزية/ كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية/ جامعة بابل ليخضعوا الى اختبار تشخيصي لغرض تقويم ادائهم في استخدام الأسئلة البلاغية بمختلف وظائفها. تبين من نتيجة الاختبار بشكل عام أن عدد ونسبة الإجابات الخاطئة (749,62.42%) هي اكثر من الاجابات الصحيحة والتي كانت (451, 37. 58%).

النتائج المذكورة تشير الى ان الطلبة يواجهون صعوبات في استخدام الأسئلة البلاغية بمختلف وظائفها وانواعها على مستوى التمييز والإنتاج التي بدورها تؤكد صحة فرضية الدراسة. تشتمل هذه الدراسة على الجانب النظري الذي يتمثل بدراسة نظرية شاملة عن الأسئلة البلاغية بأنواعها ومختلف وظائفها ويليه الجانب العملي المتمثل بالاختبار الذي تم تطبيقه على عينه عشوائية من الطلبة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية لتقويم ادائهم في استخدام الاسئلة البلاغية باللغة الانكليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أداء, استقصاء, الأسئلة البلاغية.

Abstract
Rhetorical questions are those which do not expect an answer. They are used simply as a way of drawing attention to something. Rhetorical questions are of different types having different functions. Students of English as a foreign language often find difficulty in using rhetorical questions in English because of their constituents and functions and here lies the problem of the study. It is hypothesized that Iraqi EFL college students encounter difficulty in using the topic under investigation.

A random sample of (60) students has been taken from the fourth year stage of the Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon to undergo a diagnostic test designed to assess the students' performance in using the rhetorical questions. The findings of the test show that the number and percentage of the incorrect answers in the whole test (749, 62.42%) are more than those of correct answers (451, 37.58%). These results show that the learners face difficulty in using the rhetorical questions at both the recognition and production levels and this, in turn, confirms the hypothesis of the study.

This study includes the theoretical comprehensive study of the rhetorical questions with their different types and functions followed by the practical part which encompasses a diagnostic test applied to a random sample of EFL college students to investigate their performance in using the topic under investigation.

Keywords: assessing – performance – rhetorical questions

1.Introduction

A rhetorical question appears in the form of a question asked to make a point rather than to elicit an answer. It might be a question that has an obvious answer but is asked to make a point, to persuade or for literary effect. (https: // www. Google. Iq/ search)

Iraqi EFL college students often face difficulty in using rhetorical questions in English because of their different types and functions and here lies the problem. The present study of rhetorical questions used in EFL contexts seems to have no due attention. Therefore, the study deals with this topic to clarify how Iraqi EFL college students face difficulty in using the rhetorical questions in English.

The study aims at:
1. Presenting materials about rhetorical questions in English.
2. Identifying the difficulties that Iraqi EFL college students encounter in using this topic.
3. Giving some suggestions that can help the foreign learners use rhetorical questions appropriately.

In the view of the preceding aims, it is hypothesized that Iraqi EFL college students often find difficulty in dealing with the topic under investigation.

To achieve the aims of the study, the following steps will be followed:
1. Presenting, as far as possible, a theoretical study of rhetorical questions in English.
2. Applying a diagnostic test to measure the students' performance in using rhetorical questions.
3. Analyzing the results of the test according to which conclusions can be drawn.

The present study limits itself to rhetorical questions in English and the test will be applied to a random sample of Iraqi EFL college students from the fourth year level of the Department of English, College of Education for Human sciences, University of Babylon.

2. Rhetorical questions
2.1 Definitions

A rhetorical question is a kind of questions which is not directed to be answered, rather it is used to make a point. It is also used to get information and usually does not expect an answer. It is a good way to encourage the audience to start thinking about an issue and present an idea that might be challenged if it is presented as a statement. (http:// www. grammar-master.com)

Rhetorical questions often have an implied meaning. They are making a statement that the listener obviously knows, for example:

1- Do you know what time it is?

It means that you are late. (https:// www. Englisgrammar.org/rhetorical-questions-2/)

Yule (2006:45) defines the rhetorical question as the question which has the form of a question but is used to assert something. Trask (1993:242) believes that a rhetorical question is the question in which the addressee expects no answer. Downing and Lock (1992:201) refer to them as the questions in which the response is not expected but is used to give comment or explanation. Biber et al. (1999:206) refer to the rhetorical question as that in which the speaker expresses opinions rather than asking for information and the listener is not asked to reply. Crystal (1999:218) on the other hand defines a rhetorical question as a sentence in its structure resembles a question but the speaker does not expect an answer:

2 - Who cares?

2.2 Types of Rhetorical questions
2.2.1 Positive and Negative Rhetorical Questions

These questions take two forms which are the wh- questions and yes/no- questions.
Leech and Svartivik (1975: 137) state that positive wh- questions convey negative attitudes:

2- What differences does it make?

This example gives the meaning of a negative answer that it makes no difference while positive attitudes:

3- Who doesn't know that?

This example means that everybody knows that.

Swan (1995: 465) states that rhetorical questions like other questions start with a wh word for not seeking an answer but indicating different functions. A rhetorical wh-question can be used to indicate

rejection, suggestion, request, and instruction which normally begins with why should or how should questions.

    4-   Ann is very unhappy, why should I care?

    5-   What time does the film start? How should I know?

Biber et al. (1999:206) mention that a rhetorical wh-question is expressed by placing the wh-word at the beginning of the sentence, followed by an operator. In this type of questions, the speaker expresses his feelings rather than asking for information. Positive and negative rhetorical questions take the form of yes/no question. The positive one conveys a strong negative assertion:

    6-   Is that a reason to despair?

It means "Surely that is not a reason for despair". Although the form is positive, there is a negative answer. In negative yes/no questions there is a strong positive assertion:

    7-   Is no one going to defend me?

The answer is positive although the example has a negative form, which means "Surely someone is going to defend me."

2.2.2 Tag Questions

A tag question is used to check whether something is true or not and to have the listener's agreement for something. The question often occurs at the end of the sentence and is usually a short one:

    9 - That is the school. Isn't it?

If the question begins as affirmative, it ends as negative and vice versa:

    10 - You are the new teacher. Aren't you?

    11 - You are not the new teacher. Are you?

The tag question can be used to make a request and ask for help or for information by using the negative statement and tag question:

    12- You couldn't give me your book. Could you?

The tag question is also used for making imperatives and asking people to do things by using will/ would and can/could:

    13 - Give me a pen. Will you? (Swan, 1995:465)

Quirk and Greenbaum (1990:179) denote that the tag question consists of an operator and a pronoun and the super ordinate which determines the choice and the tense of the operator. The tag question will be negative if the super ordinate clause is positive and vice versa:

    14-   She likes her mother. Doesn't she?

    15- She doesn't like her mother. Does she?

The example (14) can be rendered " I assume she likes her mother. Am I right?". The example (15) means the opposite " I assume she doesn't like her mother. Am I right?". The two sentences have a positive and negative orientation, respectively.

2.2.3 Nonsensical or Ironical Rhetorical Questions

This type of rhetorical questions contains a great deal of sarcasm. These questions are usually funny and are not used to get an answer but to add a sense of humor. How to react to such questions depends on someone's mood in a particular occasion:

    16-   If a cow laugh hard, would milk come out of her nose?

    17- If an African elephant comes to America, is it an African-

 American elephant?

    18- Do fish get thirsty? (ww,fun-stuff-to-do.Com)

2.3 Functions of Rhetorical Questions

The rhetorical questions have the following functions:

1. Opinion. Rhetorical questions are not used merely for seeking information by using the interrogative form. The speaker can use these questions to let the addressee give an opinion:

    19- You like the white dress but your friend gives another opinion. "Isn't that a nice red dress?"

2. **Rebuke.** A rhetorical question can show that you are not satisfied with one's manners and actions and you are complaining about him:

   20- A friend of yours talks to you in a very ill way. You are complaining and asking "How dare you?".

3. **Suggestion.** The speaker can make a suggestion by using a rhetorical question:

   21- Your friend says that Saturday will be suitable to go to the Zoo but you find Friday will be more suitable. " What's wrong with Friday?".

4. **Invitation.** A rhetorical question can give an invitation rather than seeking information:

   22- You are going to have lunch in a very expensive restaurant and you are inviting your brother to come with you. "Does lunch trouble you?".

5. **Religious Function.** Sometimes people use a rhetorical question to express a religious purpose. People call God in different matters and situations, or asking or praying:

   23- You think that you have all the problems in the world and you don't know their causes so you are asking God: "How should I know God?" (en. Wikipedia. Org)

4. The Test

Skehan (1999: 303) defines the test as a systematic method of eliciting performance used for some sort of decision making.

The test comprises two questions. The first question is designed to measure the students' recognition level. It consists of ten items in which students have to identify the functions of the given rhetorical questions. The second question measures the production level in which the learners are given ten rhetorical questions and their task is to make statements of them.

4.1 Item Analysis

4.1.1 Item Discrimination

The item of the test should discriminate between good and bad students. When the item is answered in the same way by both good and bad students it will have poor discrimination index. (Mousavi, 1997: 69)

The following two tables show the discrimination index (DI) of the two questions:

Q1/

Item	DI	Item	DI
1	0.26	6	0.36
2	0.23	7	0.48
3	0.41	8	0.37
4	0.22	9	0.31
5	0.33	10	0.35
Mean	0.44		

Q2/

Item	DI	Item	DI
1	0.18	6	0.47
2	0.38	7	0.42
3	0.17	8	0.35
4	0.28	9	0.38
5	0.24	10	0.32
Mean	o.33		

The two questions in the tables above have no negative discrimination index. The (DI) of the whole test ranges between (0.17) to (0.48) which shows the individual differences among the learners. The mean of (DI) of Q1 is (0.44) and that of Q2 is (0.33) which are acceptable.

4.1.2 Facility Value

It is the percentage of the students who answered the item correctly. It shows how the item easy or difficult is. (Ibid)

The following two tables show the facility value (FV) of both questions:

Q1

Item	FV	Item	FV
1	0.43	6	0.35
2	0.55	7	0.26
3	0.40	8	0.53
4	0.46	9	0.41
5	0.36	10	0.43
Mean	0.46		

Q2

Item	FV	Item	FV
1	0.31	6	0.30
2	0.36	7	0.53
3	0.28	8	0.33
4	0.18	9	0.55
5	0.13	10	0.30
Mean	0.32		

The facility value (FV) of the two questions according to the tables above ranges between (0.13) and (0.55) which are apart. The mean of (FV) of Q1 is (0.46) and that of Q2 is (0.32) which are also acceptable.

4.2 The Results of the Test

The following tables present the results of the test of both questions one and two:

Q1/

Item	No. Of Correct Responses	Percentage%	No. of Incorrect Responses	Percentage%
1	26	43.33	34	56.67
2	33	55	27	45
3	24	40	36	60
4	28	46.66	32	53.34
5	22	36.66	38	63.34
6	21	35	39	65
7	16	26.66	44	73.34
8	32	53.33	28	46.67
9	25	41.66	35	58.34
10	26	43.33	34	56.67
Total	253	42.16	347	57.84

Q2/

Item	No. of Correct Responses	Percentage%	No. of Incorrect Responses	Percentage%
1	19	31.66	41	68.34
2	22	36.66	38	63.34
3	17	28.33	43	71.67
4	11	18.33	49	81.67
5	8	13.33	52	86.67
6	18	30	42	70
7	32	53.33	28	46.67
8	20	33.33	40	66.67
9	33	55	27	45
10	18	30	42	70
Total	198	33	402	67

The results of the test of question one show the students' performance in recognizing the different functions of rhetorical questions. Items (2 and 8) have got the largest number of correct answers and percentages (33, 55%) and (32,53. 33%), respectively. Whereas, the items (5,6, and 7) have got the lowest number of correct responses and percentages (22,36. 66%), (21,35 %) and (16, 26. 66%), respectively.

The number and percentage of incorrect responses of question one (347, 57.84%) are more than those of correct responses (253, 42.16 %). These results indicate that the learners encounter difficulty in recognizing the functions of rhetorical questions which means that they face difficulty at the recognition level.

According to Richards (1978:176), students' errors often result from the effect of learning situations, the textbook writer, and the teacher's misleading explanation about the material. Most students' errors in question one are caused by these effects which can be seen in the students' answers to most items of this question as they failed to recognize the functions of the given rhetorical questions correctly.

As for question two, the results show the students' performance at the production level. Items (7 and 9) have got the largest number of correct responses and percentages (32, 53.33 %) and (33, 55%), respectively because most students are familiar with these items which are frequently used in the foreign language. While, the items (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10) have got low numbers and percentages of correct responses (19, 31.66%), (17, 28.33%), (11, 18.33%), (8, 13.33%), (20, 33.33%), and (18, 30%), respectively because students are not qualified enough to deal with these items and to change the rhetorical questions to normal statements.

The number and percentage of incorrect responses of question two (402, 67%) are more than those of correct responses (198, 33%). These results indicate that the students face difficulty in using rhetorical questions which means that they encounter difficulty at the production level as well.

Most students' errors in question two are related to the intralingual transfer which is related to the structure of the foreign language. Errors of such source in question two are often related to different factors such as overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesized.

The results of the whole test can be shown in the following table:

Question	N0.of Correct Responses	Percentage %	N0. of Incorrect Responses	Percentage %
One	253	42. 16	347	57. 84
Two	198	33	402	67
Total	451	37.58	749	62. 42

5. Conclusions

A rhetorical question is a figure of speech in the form of a question asked to make a point rather than to get an answer. In many cases it may be intended to a sort of discussion though the rhetorical question does not require a direct answer. A common example of rhetorical questions is the question "Can't you do anything right?" which is intended not to ask about the listener's ability, but to insinuate his lack of ability. A rhetorical question is a good way to encourage the audience to start thinking about an issue and to present an idea that might be challenged when presented as a statement. The rhetorical questions are of different types: positive and negative, tag questions, and nonsensical or ironical rhetorical questions. The rhetorical questions have different functions such as opinion, rebuke, suggestion, invitation, and religious function.

A random sample of Iraqi EFL college learners (60 students) taken from the fourth year level of the Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon to apply a diagnostic test to them in order to assess their performance in using the rhetorical questions in English. According to the results of the test, the number and percentage of the incorrect responses for the whole test (749, 62.42%) are more than those of correct responses (451, 37.58 %). These results

indicate that the learners face difficulty in using rhetorical questions and in turn verify the hypothesis of the study proposed in (1).

On the basis of the conclusions drawn above, the following recommendations can be suggested:

a. A great deal of attention is to be paid to teaching rhetorical questions in English to simplify the process of learning.
b. Due attention should be paid to use different types and functions of rhetorical questions through extensive training and more exercises.
c. For the alleviation of the difficulties, remedial work should be provided to enhance the students' mastery of the subject.
   d. More emphasis should be given to the topic under investigation at all levels of education.
   e, More syllabus activities should be given to shed the light on this topic.

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Appendix I: The test

Q1/ Identify the functions of the following rhetorical questions as giving (Opinion, Rebuke, Invitation, Suggestion, or Religious Function):

1. Your friend says that Saturday will be suitable to go to the Zoo but you find Friday more suitable:" What's wrong with Friday?"
2. A friends of yours talks to you in a very ill way and you are complaining and asking:" How dare you?"
3. Your wife asks if you love her. You say" is the pop catholic?"
4. You liked the white dress but your friend gives another opinion:" isn't that a nice red dress?"
5.Two men are having a disagreement in a restaurant. One says "Do you want me to punch you in the face?"

6. You are going to have lunch in a very expensive restaurant and you ask your brother to come with you:"Does lunch trouble you?"
7. Your guest has already drunk a cup of tea. An hour later you ask him to drink more: "Will another cup of tea bother you?"
8. Your friend suggests that you can travel this week but you find next week more suitable "Isn't next week more suitable?"
9. You think that you have many problems and you don't know their causes:" How should I know God?"
10. A teacher to a student who has been talkative: " Do you want to teach the class today?"

Q2/ Read the following rhetorical questions and make statements of them:
1. Is it wrong to love animals and plants?
2. Won't your cricketers come back as winners?
3. Corruption is getting rooted in social life. Is it fair?
4. Why do students bunk classes?
5. Excessive violence is being shown in modern cinemas. When will the government take notice of it?
6. Aren't children wiser than men?
7. Who cares?
8. Is no one going to defend me?
9. What difference does it make?
10. Who doesn't know that?

Appendix II: The answers of the test
Q1/
1. Suggestion
2. Rebuke
3. Suggestion
4. Opinion
5. Rebuke
6. Invitation
7. Invitation
8. Suggestion
9. Religious function
10. Rebuke

Q2/
1. It is not wrong to love animal and plant.
2. Our cricketers will come back as winners.
3. Corruption is getting rooted in social life. It is not fair.
4. Students should not bunk classes.
5. Excessive violence is being shown in modern cinema. The government will never take notice of it.
6. Children are wiser than men.
7. No body cares.
8. Surely someone is going to defend me.
9. It makes no difference.
10. Everybody knows that.