

Boys Are Boys: A Contrastive Study of Nominal Tautology Between L1 English and L1 Arabic

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Abstract

This study aims to examine nominal tautology functioned as human nature based on the assumptions by Wierzbicka (1987). It compares English and Arabic tautology on construction like *Boys are boys*. This study integrates Miki's evocation function with two other core concepts namely *a macro-frame* and *a micro-frame*. In addition, the role of the context is closely investigated as it forms an essential component in the realization of nominal tautology as proposed by Gibbs and McCarrell (1990). All these notions are merged into one solid framework to comprehend the mechanism of tautology in the brain of the speakers/hearer in any given language. Acceptability Judgment Task is used as an instrument to elicit participants' acceptable judgments and interpretations on human nature tautology. The study includes two groups; English native speakers (51 participants) and Arabic native speakers (34 participants). According to the analyses, the results show no difference between the study groups, in the realization of nominal tautology related to human nature at the level of the acceptability and the interpretation.

Keywords: context, evocation frame, human nature, negative interpretation, nominal tautology, positive interpretation, macro-frame, micro-frame

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, a considerable debate emerged about tautology constructions from the Gricean radical pragmatic approach proposed by Grice (1975), Verschueren (2005), Yule (1996), Ward and Hirschberg (1991), Brown et al. (1987). This debate has its roots from the radical semantic approach of Wierzbicka (1987) to the recent approach of contrastive analysis tautological constructions from the perspective of Construction Grammar theory by Fang et al. (2018). A recent study by Igaab and Abdulhasan (2018) stated that there is existence of collocation in Arabic and English languages, similar to the linguistic phenomenon. The way of describing collocation linguistically is not same to another language; although, two languages study the term from its linguistic aspects.

Mikki (1996, p. 641) explains evocation as a reference to shared knowledge through which mutually held assumptions and beliefs about someone/something are re-identified. Therefore, the tautologies generated reaffirm these assumptions and beliefs, in the ongoing context of utterance. Likewise, Miki (1996), Fraser (1988, p.220) mentioned the account of English nominal tautologies that are provided as a part of the sentence meaning. These sentences signal that the speaker intends to evoke a viewpoint to the hearer concerning the objects referenced by the sentence, but leaves to hearer inference, what exact property the speaker has in mind.

Kwon (2009, p. 221) commented that the second nominal expression evokes a whole category where a prototype, a peripheral member, a stereotype, and the category itself determine the meaning. An example evocation frame is also mentioned by Rhodes (2009, p. 2). He examined the acceptance fame which is evoked with tautology associated with nominal tautologies (2) and conditional tautologies (3) as in:

- 1) A win is a win...Even if it's a weird one
- 2) People aren't gonna buy something that is slower than what they already have, I don't care how high they can fly or how well they can scout with it. if it's slow it's slow

The present study adopts the middle position between the two sides of the continuum, based on the previous arguments on tautology proposed by Grice (1975) and Wierzbicka (1987). It will follow the position proposed by

Farghal (1992), Miki (1996), Okamoto (1993), Fraser (1988), Gibbs and McCarrell (1990), Gibbs et al. (1994), and Bulhof and Gimbel (2001, 2004). However, this paper argues in favor of the realization of tautology in any given languages away from the systematic analyses of tautology constructions at the level of semantic representations or the syntactic formula. It analyzes the schema of nominal tautology in the brain of the speaker/hearer in any given language. Furthermore, it will shed light on an aspect proposed by Miki (1996) which has received a little attention in the literature.

1.1 The Macro-Frame and Micro-Frame

The present study has integrated the work of Miki (1996) in her assumption and proposes two additional concepts that link the evocation frame into one solid framework. The author believes that there are two perceptions that require to be implemented. These perceptions are the idea of existing *macro-frame* and *micro-frame* of tautology in any given language. To illustrate the proposed idea, it is important to clearly define the *macro-frame* and the *micro-frame* terms. The *macro-frame* is the realization of nominal tautology shared among languages and reflects parallel interpretations in these languages. For example, *Boys are boys* is a type of nominal tautology that denotes a similar meaning in English and Arabic as the data of this study will reveal in section (3). This assumption can be supported by the opinion of Wierzbicka (1987, p. 96) stating that some English ‘tautological constructions’ have no literal counterparts, which can be used or interpreted in many other languages. Some English tautological constructions do have literal counter parts in other languages. However, they are used in the latter with a different communicative import. In the similar, the results of present study are likely to prove that two languages may have similar literal counterparts with the same implications.

The *micro-frame* is the understanding of nominal tautology based on the cultural background of the speakers of a certain language. This is explained as speakers of a given language share a cultural perception of the specified nominal tautology that is difficult to be comprehended by other non-native speakers of that language (Rhodes, 2009). To illustrate the idea further, the author adapts the quotation presented by Miki (1996, p. 640) and explain the idea of the *macro-frame* and the *micro-frame* on the proper nouns. Miki narrated that the use of evocation is not restricted to an identification of a person or an object. It is still possible to use evocation to refer to attributes and properties of a person/an object that the speaker believes are known to the hearer; although, the identity of a person/an object is already established in the context of utterance. The noun “pharos” has the same connotations in many languages. Since it reflects the same interpretation, and can be considered to have its roots from the *macro-frame*. Another example for the *micro-frame* is the proper noun *Joħa* which is a comic figure in the literature of the Arab world and is related specifically to Arab culture. People who are non-native speakers of Arabic cannot understand the implicature of this proper noun. Therefore, the noun itself is considered the *micro-frame* since it belongs to specific culture. This claim is supported by Li (2004, p. 172) as it states that each language has its own language-specific tautological structures with particular culture-specific implications. Farghal (1992, p. 229) presents variety of good examples of this type in colloquial Jordanian Arabic, which are true for Saudi Arabic speakers and other Arabic dialects. For instance;

3) Ii-hmar ihmar
def-donkey donkey
‘He’s a stupid person.’

The above statement is clearly understood in Arabic words to reflect the meaning of “being stupid, troublesome, reckless, insensitive, uneducated, etc.” (Farghal, 1992, p.229); however, it is not clear what the word composition of the statement means. Similarly, the examples below address the same concept;

4) hilwah hilwah
pretty pretty
‘She’s extraordinarily pretty.’

5) hih hih
she she ‘She is she’
‘That’s her all over.’

Similarly, Li (2004, p. 172) addresses the cultural-specific interpretation of tautology which is as follows;

6) “nian zi shi nian zi, gang shi gang, die shi die lai, niang shi niang”
碾子是碾子, 缸是缸, 爹是爹来娘是娘
(roller is roller, crock is crock, father is father and mother is mother)

Li (2004, p. 176) explains that a person from another culture can hardly understand what this means. However, on hearing and saying this, a clear picture of Chinese country life will come to any Chinese person's mind. These lines also explain how Chinese country people accept life as it is. In addition, Wierzbicka (1987, p. 96) mentioned that in French, sentences like *Les garçons sont les (des?) garçons* '(The) boys are (the) boys', or *Les garçons seront les (des) garçons* 'The boys will be (the) boys', would be simply incomprehensible. Conceivably, it can be understood if one said *Les garçons seront toujours les (des) garçons* 'Boys will always be boys' (cf. Bally 1952:17). However, this would be puzzling. Similarly, in German one would not say *Knaben sind Knaben* 'Boys are boys', or *Knaben werden Knaben sein* 'Boys will be boys.' If foreigners use such sentences to convey the messages of their literal English counterparts, then they might not be understood".

Wierzbicka (1987, pp. 96-97) provides another example from Russian as;

Russian has three copula constructions—one with *eto*, one with *est'*, and one with *no*—but none of these would be used to translate the relevant English sentences:

?? *Mal'ciki etolest' mal'ciki.* 'Boys are boys.*

?? *Mal'ciki mal'ciki.* 'Boys (are) boys.'

?? *Mal'ciki budut mal'ciki (mal'cikami).* 'Boys will be boys.'

?? *Deti etolest' deti.* 'Kids are kids.'

However, 'tautological constructions' with action nouns do exist in Russian language. Thus, one does not say *Vojna est' vojna* 'War is war'; but one can say, as Bulat Okudzava does in a popular song, *Rabota est' rabota, rabota est' vseгда* 'Work is work, there is always work

In this variation, Miki (1996, p. 643) commented between languages as shared knowledge varies widely in individual cases. In some cases, understanding has been developed in preceding discourse between the interactants. In others words, it may be held in common among immediate family, close friends or colleagues, or in subcultural groups. It may include socioculturally accepted beliefs, expectations, and existing codes of conventions (linguistic, moral, or legal) that are assumed to be shared by most of the community. This considerable variation explains the broad range of possible interpretations of tautological utterances, contingent on what sort of knowledge is regarded as shared by a segment of a community. It also accounts for the peremptory quality of many tautologies. The speaker in effect claims to be the representative of the entire community, by endorsing beliefs and values which are held among community members widely. Fraser (1988, p. 218) also supports Miki (1996) as it stated that the interpretation of 'Wars are wars' may differ from that in 'War is war' for some people on certain occasions.

1.2 The Context

Rhodes (2009, p. 2) claimed that the meanings of tautologies are partially conventionalized (semantics) and partially context-dependent (pragmatics). The proper nouns "pharos" and *Joha Joħa* are repeated here to illustrate the role of the context in the tautology constructions. The meaning of noun "pharos" may evoke a negative interpretation in a certain *macro-frame* context as for *slavery* and *tyranny*. However, in other languages, it may reflect a positive interpretation where the noun reflects the meaning of *power* and *authority* in the *micro-frame* concept. On the other hand, the noun *Joha Joħa* can denote two interpretations depending on the utterance in the context. It may reflect the meaning of stupidity, humorous, foolish deeds, etc. In other incidents, it may denote the meaning of the sly, deceptive, or cunning.

Fraser (1988, p. 218) stated that a nominal tautology signals that the speaker intends to convey the belief that the participants share a view about objects referenced by the sentence noun phrase, and wishes to bring this belief to the hearer's awareness. The property is intended in the utterance of (li). For example, the main idea is that all business is the same, cutthroat, money-making, enjoyable, unenjoyable, time-consuming, or unpredictable, depending on the utterance context at a time.

Yamamoto (2012, pp. 14-15) explains the role of the context to denote a positive and a negative interpretation. She explains that *War is war* and one can obtain a different implicature from these examples if the context is properly established. For example, this nominal tautology may be written as "The president's utterance *War is war* indicates a profitable war, not a terrible war" in:

7) [The president of the arms-manufacturing company is pleased when he hears the news that a war will start.]
Employee: But I'm afraid that this war will not last long. President: War is war (Nishikawa, 2003, p. 48)

This argument is also supported by Gibbs and McCarrell (1990, p. 128). They affirm that in different circumstances a speaker might state that *Business is business* to convey either that business is competitive (a

negative attribution) or that business is financially rewarding (a positive attribution).

Another scholar argued that in many situations, contexts help to understand the meaning of tautological constructions (Li, 2004, p. 172). As the result, the context determines the interpretations of nominal tautology. Li (2004, p. 172) expressed the importance of the context, while comparing English and Chinese tautologies in terms of structure and interpretation. The study claimed that arguments are defended by tentatively making a contrastive study of English and Chinese tautologies, in terms of structure and interpretation, with an emphasis on Chinese culture specific tautological constructions. Chinese tautological expressions operate not only on truth conditions but also on contextual level, as the intended message is often heavily encoded in the context. It is common that in Chinese tautologies with the same logical forms and the same truth conditions may have different interpretations in different contexts. The role of the context also can be observed in Frghal's work (Frghal, 2009, pp. 226-227).

With regard to the concept of tautologies certain studies have been conducted. For instance; Fang (2018) conducted a contrastive analysis on Chinese and English tautology based on the structure and framework. Findings indicated several similarities between English and Chinese tautologies with regard to their skeletal structure and basic constructional meaning. The study further highlighted that, in contrast to the tautological construction of English language, Chinese language includes certain flexibilities in terms of its structure, constructional extensions, and pragmatic functions. Besides, Chinese language includes two or more than two structures in its language to express the required pragmatic function. Another important study was conducted by James-Huang (2016) and presented empirical evidences to identify the existence of the adjunct – complementary dichotomy in Chinese and other languages. Evidences gained through literature suggested that only in case where the structural position of adjuncts are higher than complements. With respect to the constructivists approach, the findings further suggested that in variety of languages, uniform deconstructions are heterogenous, and includes a higher form of analytical variability and are interpretive. Escandell-Vidal & Vilinbakhova (2018) on the other hand examined a special pattern of tautological constructions – *a is a* and *b is b* – in both Russian and Spanish. The concept of double tautologies is further associated with “irreducible differences”. The study further addressed the issue of compositionality in the interpretation and construction of conjoined tautologies. Data in the study were collected through corpora of Russian and Spanish, and a survey which was conducted with 91 native Spanish speakers. Findings of the study indicated that irreducible difference has never been a necessary aspect when interpreting and conjoined tautologies. This also implies to the argumentative point of view. The study also argued that this difference is not limited to the pattern only, and can also be implied to the conjunction *but*, or without any conjunction. The study, based on its findings concluded that the coordinated tautologies are not fixed form/function pairs, while the meaning they encode can be accounted for in regular compositional terms. However, the different interpretations of the coordinated tautologies result from pragmatic enrichment where the coded meaning is in combination with the contextual information. Vilinbakhova and Escandell-Vidal (2020) in their study explored the varieties of knowledge hearers and speakers may adopt to interpret the nominal tautologies. The study quoted different examples, following which it was identified that different dimensions of knowledge such as; common vs local, encyclopedic vs metalinguistic, normative vs descriptive when combined may contribute in interpretation of tautologies. It further stated that the above combinations fit well with the classification of tautologies in the above literature.

Another important concept with regard to tautologies was explored by Vilinbakhova and Escandell-Vidal (2019). The central focus was granted to the framed tautologies which occur with expressions that explicitly connect individuals to the asserted content to which it is related, universal quantifiers, spatiotemporal adjuncts. It further examined the contributions of frame setters and the strategies that are implemented to develop a consistent interpretation. Data in this study was attained from Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and other web-based sources. The study further distinguishes between phrases such as judge *for/to* which denotes the opinion holder and *for* phrases indicating the specific individual to whom the tautology is stated for. Findings of the study indicated that framed tautology is associated to the reconciliation of the semantics of an analytic proposition with an unidentical frame which is either too redundant or restricted. In contrast to the previous study, Meibauer (2008) in his study used Levinson's (2000) framework to analyze tautologies. Following the framework proposed by Levinson (2008), three pragmatic levels were developed, which include; Indexical Pragmatics, Gricean Pragmatics 1, and Gricean Pragmatics 2. With respect to the study findings, it was concluded that the tautologies are not as tautological as they are generally considered, as implicatures play an essential role in influencing their truth conditions.

The concept of tautological differences has been studied through various perspectives, as evident from the above literature. However, none of the study has focused on the nominal tautology between Arabic and English

language. Besides, as per the researcher's knowledge none of the study has focused on the nominal tautologies found in English and Arabic, hence this study serves as an important contribution in the existing literature. The study is further important as the overall explanation regarding the two tautologies is provided following the macro and micro framework; the concept integrated with Miki's evocation function. Another considerable factor is the inclusion of Acceptability Judgement Task which is an instrument used to make acceptable interpretations and judgements regarding human nature tautology.

1.3 The Present Study

Figure 1 shows the schema of nominal tautology in languages to illustrate the idea clearly. It shows that the evocation frame evokes into the mind the category or the stereotype of an object or person that is the central of topic of the nominal construction. The brain analyzes the construction either as the *macro-frame*, the *micro-frame* or both. Once the brain establishes the type of the frame for the specified nominal construction in relation to another language, it becomes the role of the context to determine the expected interpretation by the receiver.

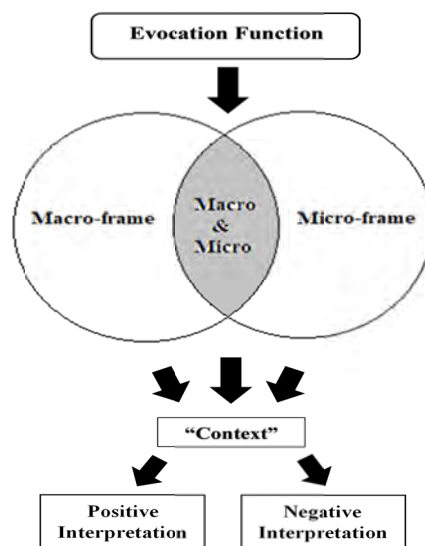


Figure 1. Schema of nominal tautology

The schema of the present study supports the *macro-frame* realization. Therefore, it is assumed that the diagram of the representation of the nominal tautology construction, in relation to human nature is similar to that shown in Figure 2. However, the validity of this assumption needs to be testified further for other functions of tautology such as admiring, condemning, showing tolerance, absolute generalization, and acceptance. These are different from human nature of nominal tautology as these functions are not the scope of this study. In addition, further studies are required to test the concept of the *macro-frame* and the *micro-frame* tautology in other languages.

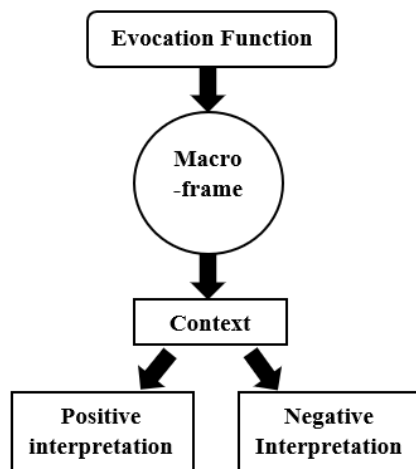


Figure 2. Representation of the nominal tautology

Considering the above discussion, several questions arise to establish whether the schema in the above diagram can be tested and applied to languages. Therefore, the study compares two languages in the *macro-frame* of nominal tautology related to human nature to answer the following research questions”.

Is there any difference between English native speakers and Arabic native speakers in their judgments on human nature tautology without context as in the phrase ‘Children are children’?

Is there a difference between English native speakers and Arabic native speakers in their interpretations on human nature tautology without context as follows?

Children are children positive negative both

Is there a difference between English native speakers and Arabic native speakers in their judgments (choices) on human nature tautology with a negative and a positive context?

(negative context)

A wife: The children came home covered in mud from head to foot!

A husband: Oh, God!

A wife: Children are children. The underline statement means _____

- This behavior is expected from children and is required to be tolerated
- Mothers need to clean the mess made by their children

(positive context)

Suzan: Look, Paul! Our child shared his cookies with an old man

Paul: (laughs).

Suzan: Children are children. The underline statement means _____

- This kind of behavior is expected from children and is needed to be tolerated
- Suzan thinks children are approaching strangers without thinking

Is there a difference between English native speakers and Arabic speakers in their interpretations on human nature tautology with a negative and positive context as follows?

(negative context)

A wife: The children came home covered in mud from head to foot!

A husband: Oh, God!

A wife: Children are children. The underline statement means _____

- This behavior is expected from children and is required to be tolerated
- Mothers need to clean the mess made by their children

What interpretation does the above underlined statement convey in the context?

Positive Negative Both

(positive context)

Suzan: Look, Paul! Our child shared his cookies with an old man

Paul: (laughs).

Suzan: Children are children. The underline statement means _____

- a. This kind of behavior is expected from children and is needed to be tolerated
- b. Suzan thinks children are approaching strangers without thinking

What interpretation does the above underlined statement convey in the context?

Positive Negative Both

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design and Participants

A cross-sectional study was conducted by recruiting 85 participants divided into two groups; Arabic native speakers (34 participants) and English native speakers (51 participants) from an anonymous institution in Saudi Arabia. The participants were recruited using a website tool known as Survey Monkey. The inclusion criteria for the study was participants aged between 25 and 45 years and the level of education should be university degree and higher. Any participant who did not meet these criteria was excluded from the study. The Arabic speakers were with Saudi, Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian Arabic dialects. Some of them were PhD and MA holders and others held a bachelor's degree. The Arabic speakers were female with mean age of 34.1; whereas, English native speakers included 34 females and 17 males, with mean age of 33.2.

2.2 Data Collection

An acceptability Judgment Task was devised to elicit participants' judgments and interpretations on the task items without a context. Participants were requested to mark their responses on the answer sheet or online, based on 3-point Likert scales. They selected *acceptable* if they thought it is an acceptable English statement and *unacceptable* if they thought otherwise. *Not sure* was chosen if they doubted if the statement was an inappropriate one. Following the acceptability task, there was a measure of participants' interpretations on the statement. They requested to choose *positive* if they thought the statement reflected a *positive interpretation*; while, they chose a *negative* if the statement denoted a *negative interpretation*. They asked to select *both* if they believed that the statement possibly reflected a *positive* and a *negative interpretation* at the same time as follows:

- 1) Boys are boys Acceptable Not sure Unacceptable
- 2) Does the above statement reflect _____interpretation?

Positive Negative Both

Regarding participants' judgments and interpretations on the nominal tautology of human nature type within a context, two choices followed the main statement. Participants were requested to choose the acceptable choice that reflected the meaning of the underlined words in the main statement. Then, they encouraged selecting the appropriate interpretation of the nominal tautology in the context as in the following example:

- 3) A mother: Our daughter is addicted to make-up. She is only14!
A father: What can we do? Girls are girls. The underline statement means ____

- a. It is a common thing that girls tend to do, and one must go along with it
- b. Mothers have to get along with girls' behavior

- 4) What interpretation does the above underlined statement convey in the context?

Positive Negative Both

There were 4 statements which served as distractors and were unrelated to the study. These distractors were excluded from the data analyses.

2.3 Study Procedure

The task was administered in a meeting room for Arabic speakers. The consent was obtained via ticking on the

front page of the questionnaire, prior to start the administration of the task. They were informed that they were entitled to withdraw from the questionnaire at any time during the administration. The consent for English native speakers was taken from the terms and conditions provided by Survey Monkey website.

2.4 Data Analysis

IBM SPSS version 21 was used to compute the data after administration. Descriptive statistics of both groups in the target items were calculated based on the acceptability judgments; positive interpretations in a positive context and negative interpretations in a negative context. The test of reliability gave the value of 0.601 and this was because the scale of items was too short. The test of normal distribution indicated that the $p < 0.05$. Therefore, a non-parametric test was conducted to determine the significance between the variables. The Mann-Whitney test was used to measure the performance of English native speakers with the performance of Arabic native speakers in nominal tautology related to human nature with and without context. Similarly, the same inferential statistic test was used to determine the difference between the two groups in relation to their interpretations of the given items.

3. Results

This section provides the results attained from the Acceptability Judgment Task of the nominal tautology without context e.g. *Boys are boys*. Table 1 shows the overall percentage scores of both groups in the given task. The responses are calculated based on the acceptability of the items. In addition, the interpretations are measured based on selecting “both” items to denote positive and negative interpretations, since the items in the task are without context and can give rise to two possible interpretations.

Table 1. Acceptability judgment task without a context

	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not sure	Positive	Negative	Both
English	75%	14%	12%	43%	19%	43%
Arabic	67%	17%	18%	22%	25%	54%

As per the preliminary results, both groups accepted the constructions without context (English = 75% and Arabic = 67%). In addition, the results show that both groups scored high responses in choosing “both” to denote two possible interpretations. However, English native speakers have a tendency to choose “positive interpretation” as well. Another interesting point is Arabic speakers rated the constructions, nearly the same in positive (22%) and a negative (25%) interpretations. This is almost balanced between the two interpretations to make a possible assumption that Arabic speakers judge the interpretations to give rise to two possible interpretations as “both”.

Table 2 represents the descriptive frequencies of the nominal tautology within a context. On one hand, the results are analyzed according the acceptable choice that reflects the meaning of the nominal tautology within a context. On the other hand, the context can be construed as twofold; it is either a context that denotes a positive interpretation or a context that gives rise to a negative interpretation. The results are computed according the acceptability of the choices, positive interpretations in positive contexts and negative interpretations in negative contexts are shown in table 2.

Table 2 also shows that both groups are providing similar acceptable judgments to reflect positive and negative meanings for nominal tautology in contexts (English = 72% and Arabic = 73%). However, Arabic native speakers rated the positive interpretation within a positive context higher, than the English native speakers (Arabic = 73% and English = 58%). Similarly, Arabic native speakers supply higher judgement to negative interpretation within a negative context, than English native speakers (Arabic = 58% and English = 44%).

Table 2. Acceptability judgment task with a context

		English	Arabic
Positive context	Acceptability	72%	73%
	Positive	58%	73%
Negative context	Acceptability	85%	89%
	Negative	44%	58%

3.1 Results of Nominal Tautology Without a Context and with Both Interpretations

According to the Mann-Whitney test for nominal tautology of human nature without context, there is a non-significant difference in the performance of both groups as ($U = 750.500$, $N_1 = 34$, $N_2 = 51$, $p = 0.262$, two-tailed). In the same vein, there is no significant difference in the acceptance of both interpretations between English native speakers and Arabic native speakers ($U = 669.500$, $N_1 = 34$, $N_2 = 51$, $p = .066$, two-tailed). Figure 3 provides the visual comparisons of the performance of both groups.

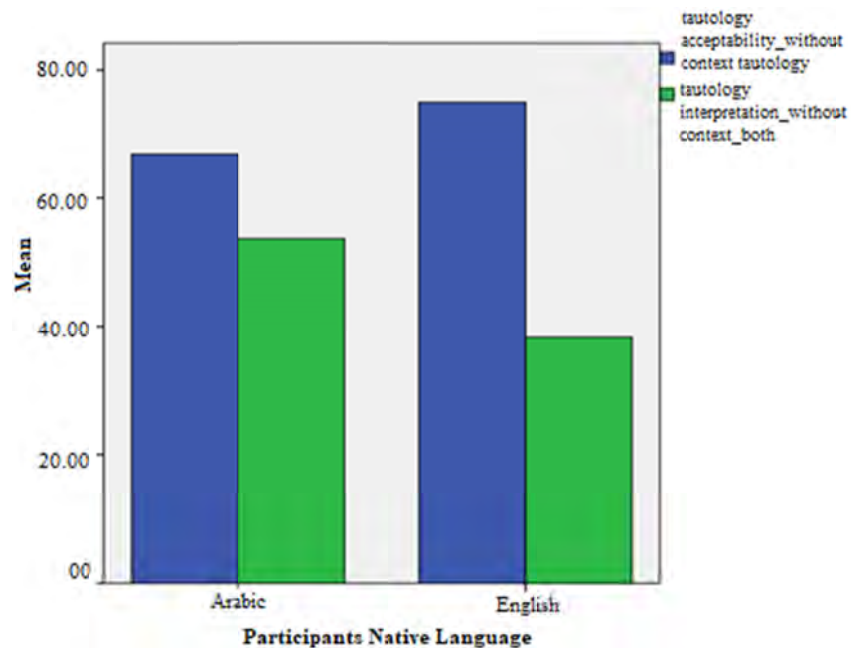


Figure 3. Visual comparisons of the performance

3.2 Results of Nominal Tautology in the Positive Context with the Positive Interpretation

The Mann-Whitney test was administrated to examine significance in the choice of English native speakers and Arabic native speakers to reflect the same meaning in the main statement within the context. The test shows that there is a non-significant difference in selecting the choice that reflects the meaning in the main statement between English native speakers and Arabic native speakers within a positive context as in ($U = 840.500$, $N_1 = 34$, $N_2 = 51$, $p = .804$, two-tailed). Likewise, the Mann-Whitney test revealed no significant difference between the two groups in choosing positive interpretation with a positive context as the $p > .05$. A visual comparison between English and Arabic group with respect choosing the same meaning in the main statement and the interpretation is illustrated in Figure 4.

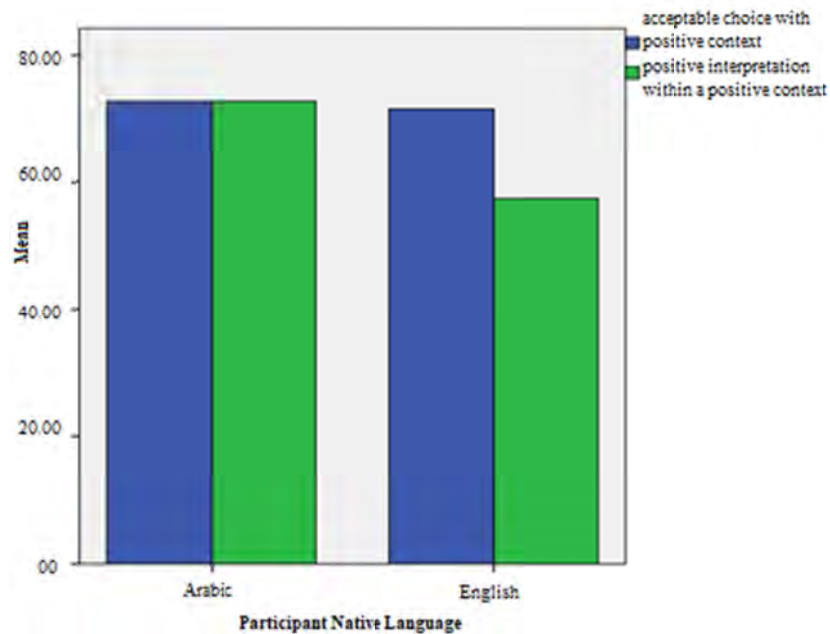


Figure 4. Visual comparison between English and Arabic group with respect choosing the same meaning

3.3 Results of Nominal Tautology in the Negative Context with the Negative Interpretation

The Mann-Whitney test was run to determine if there is a significant difference between both study groups in selecting the acceptable choice that reflect the meaning in the main statement in nominal tautology of human nature within a negative context. The test reveals that there is a non-significant difference in both group judgments as ($U = 784.500, N_1 = 34, N_2 = 51, p = .387$, two-tailed). Likewise, no significant difference is found in the negative interpretation between the two groups in the negative context as ($U = 701.500, N_1 = 34, N_2 = 51, p = .128$, two-tailed). A visual comparison between the two groups in the test items is presented in Figure 5.

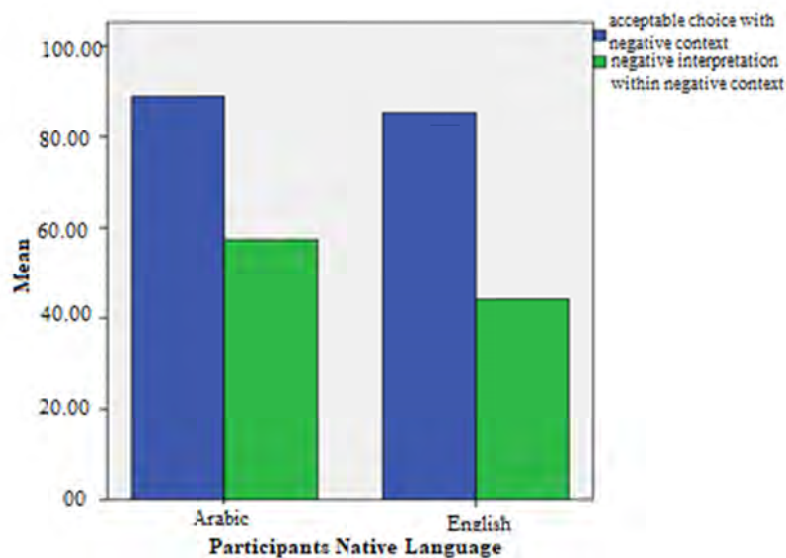


Figure 5. Visual comparison between two groups in the test items

4. Discussion

The first and second research questions of this study explored differences between English native speakers and

Arabic native speakers in their judgments and their interpretations on human nature tautology without context as in *Boys are Boy*. The inferential statistics showed no significance in the performance of the two groups in supplying acceptable judgments. Both groups accept nominal constructions without context and supply *both* interpretations concerning the idea that nominal tautology may denote positive and negative meanings. These results provide evidence that English and Arabic share the *macro-frame* knowledge of nominal tautology that functions as human nature through the evocation frame. In addition, it confirms the role of the context to determine the type of implicature the speaker intend for delivering it to the hearer that is in agreement with Li (2004), Nako (2013), and Fraser (1988). This finding is also supported by Gibbs and McCarrell (1990, p. 138) in their Experiment 1 as it was stated that subjects could readily understand the meanings of nominal tautologies without supporting contextual information.

The third research question examined if there is a difference between English native speakers and Arabic native speakers in their judgments (choices) on human nature tautology in a negative and a positive context. The inferential statistics showed no significant difference between both study groups, where they selected the same choice reflecting the same meaning in the main statement in a positive and a negative context. This result was not in agreement with the claim by Wierzbicka (1987) that English tautology has no literal counterparts and even if there is, they would denote a different meaning. Again, this proves the idea of the *macro-frame*, which evokes the same implicatures to the hearers with different language speakers.

The fourth research question examined if there is a difference between English native speakers and Arabic speakers in their interpretations on human nature tautology with a negative and a positive context. As the positive interpretation in a context conveys a positive meaning and a negative interpretation in a context denotes a negative meaning which shows equal performance between the two groups. The statistics support these findings and showed that there was no significant difference between both groups in their interpretation. Both groups supplied a comparable meaning of the constructions, whether they were within a positive context or a negative one. This confirms the role context of the context proposed in this study and other previous studies, such as Li (2004), Nako (2013), and Fraser (1988). Moreover, this result is in agreement with the experiment performed by Gibbs and McCarrell (1990, p. 139). The study found that the presence of positive and negative contextual information clearly influenced people's interpretations of tautological sentences. However, Gibbs and McCarrell (1990, p. 139) claimed that subjects generally found tautologies in negative contexts more comprehensible than in positive contexts. This argument is contrary to the finding of the present study, where participants of both groups understood the negative interpretation (English = 44%, Arabic = 58%) more than the positive interpretation (English = 58%, Arabic = 73%) within the context.

5. Conclusion

The study has highlighted the mental schema of nominal tautology in two different languages. It focuses specifically on the function of tautology as human nature, proposed by Wierzbicka (1987) while leaving other functions such as showing admiration, showing acceptance, showing absolute generalization, etc. for further investigation. The study embraces the intermediate position between the Gricean radical pragmatic approach and the radical semantic approach by assuming evocation frame introduced by Miki (1996). This assumption has been developed further to create the concept of the *macro-frame*, where nominal tautology gives rise to similar interpretation between languages. In addition, the *micro-frame* concept is presented to specify the reason that leads to variation in languages, as it deals with the cultural level. The role of the context is also confirmed to denote either a negative or positive interpretation.

The present study has certain limitations. First major limitation is that the study followed quantitative design, while qualitative data is important to gain much detailed analysis of the idea. Another important limitation is the sample size which was restricted to 85 participants only. Third important limitation is that the influence of education level was not considered in this study which might help in analyzing the difference in judgements and interpretations in the nominal tautology of the selected language. Finally, only few examples are quoted in this study due to space limitations. However, only examples which are crucial based on the elaborated concept are quoted. Considering the provided limitations of the study, the current framework opens doors to future studies on tautology to include other languages. It is also recommended to investigate the *micro-frame* concept between Arabic and English using data, presented by Farghal (1992). In addition, future studies are required at the level of the *macro-frame* to include other tautology functions in other languages.

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