Iraqi EFL Learners' Comprehension of Indirect Speech Acts in Literary Texts

فهم متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الواق لأفعال الكلام غير المباشر في النصوص الأدبية

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Abstract

EFL learners exhibit differences in their ability to communicate successfully in English language. More specifically, they may respond differently in their quest to determine the intended meaning of indirect speech acts in literary texts. Even though, EFL learners have knowledge in the grammar and word meaning of the L2 or the FL, they are assumed to suffer in identifying the intended meaning due to their lack of the necessary functional information. Accordingly, the current study is an endeavor to examine the pragmatic competence of Iraqi EFL learners at the university level, more specifically, their ability to identify intended meanings behind indirect speech acts in the novel "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Bronte (1847). Based on its objectives, the type of research methodology used is qualitative and quantative one as it analyzed the data numerically and the utterances qualitatively. The research design includes five parts: the introductory part,

the previous studies part the literature review part, the methodology part, and the analysis part. The study utilized a recognition test to be the study instrument applied to a sample of participants who were selected randomly including (20) EFL learners at fourth stage. The Relevance Based Approach to Speech Acts was followed with some modifications made to suit the study objectives. The study findings revealed that Iraqi EFL learners encountered difficulties when identifying the intended meaning of indirect acts. In addition, they tend to choose the direct and relevant information to represent the intended meaning. The unsatisfactory comprehending ability of indirect utterances can be ascribed to the learners' lack of pragmatic competence.

Keywords: Speech Act Theory, Relevance Theory, Direct and Indirect Speech Acts, Pragmatic Competence.

المستخلص

يظهر متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية اختلافات في قدرتهم على التواصل بها بنجاح وبشكل أكثر تحديدًا، قد يستجيبون بشكل مختلف في سعيهم لتحديد المعنى المقصود من الكلام غير المباشر في النصوص الأدبية. على الرغم من أن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لديهم المعرفة في النحو ومعاني الكلمات في اللغة الثانية أو اللغة الاجنبية، يبدو أنهم يعانون في تحديد المعنى المقصود بسبب افتقارهم إلى المعلومات الوظيفية اللازمة. تبعا لذلك، فإن الدراسة الحالية هي محاولة لدراسة الكفاءة البراغماتية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق على المستوى الجامعي، وعلى وجه التحديد، قدرتهم على تحديد المعاني المقصودة من وراء الكلام غير المباشر في رواية "جين آير" من تأليف تشارلوت برونتي (1847). استخدمت الدراسة اختبار الادراك ليكون أداة الدراسة المطبقة على عينة من المشاركين تتضمن (20) متعلما للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الانكليزية. يتم اتباع النهج القائم على نظرية التعلق مع بعض التعديلات التي أدخلت لتناسب أهداف الدراسة. كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية واجهوا صعوبات عند التعرف على المعنى المقصود للأفعال غير المباشرة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، فإنهم يميلون إلى اختيار الجانب المباشر والمعلومات ذات العلاقة لتمثيل المعنى المقصود. يمكن أن يُعزى القدرة غير المرضية على فهم الكلام غير المباشر إلى افتقار المتعلمين للكفاءة البراغماتية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية أفعال الكلام، نظرية الصلة، أفعال الكلام المباشرة وغير المباشرة، الكفاءة التداولية.

1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence is the ability to understand another speaker's intended meaning (Takimoto, 2008, pp. 369-386). Developing pragmatic competence is one of the aims of English department courses taught during the four years of BA study. In the same vain developing learners' pragmatic competence involves developing their ability to use speech acts successfully. Of these speech acts, indirect speech acts is the main focus of this research. Keyton (2011), cited in (Lunenburg, 2010, p. 1), defined communication as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another. Thus, comprehending and interpreting indirect speech acts is seen to be problematic for EFL learners especially within literary texts, which are bounded by the context in which the acts are uttered. The ability to recognize implicit speech acts (indirect acts) is an important component of pragmatic competence (Holtgraves, 2007, p.598).

Indirect speech acts ambiguity may cause problems when interacting in any communicational situation and this will result in interaction breakdown. For FL learners, this issue is so important because FL learners who do not have sufficient linguistic skills to efficiently interpret an utterance at surface level, the ability to comprehend pragmatic meaning can be problematic (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999). The basic concern of this study is to examine Iraqi EFL learners' pragmatic competence in dealing with indirect speech acts' meaning. This issue has been examined by the researcher through applying speech act theory and relevance theory. Indirect speech acts are used in this study as the main factor used by the learners in order to

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solve the ambiguous meaning of the indirect acts through choosing the relevant choice.

The current study main objective is to examine Iraqi EFL learners' pragmatic ability to identify intended meanings behind indirect speech acts. Achieving such a goal will surely cast the light on the nature of difficulties Iraqi EFL learners encounter in the interpretation of speech acts that are indirect and hence pose ambiguity. Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that Iraqi EFL learners encounter difficulties in the comprehension of indirect speech acts in literary texts. This study is hopefully of benefit to researchers, who are interested in interlanguage pragmatics as it contributes to the bulk of research related to interlanguage pragmatics. This study is hoped to be beneficial for teachers and test-makers in that it provides valuable pedagogical implications to assess FL knowledge. It offers a beneficial base for EFL learners to curb their weaknesses for any regenerative work.

2. Previous Studies

Kaburise (2012) presented an account that for learners in grade12 who are potential candidates for tertiary studies**.** Learners in most rural schools show a below-average versatility in the command of pragmatic manipulation of language usage. This has a negative impact on their academic success. The study hypothesizes that ESL learners have difficulty in interpreting indirect speech acts because of the divergence between sentence form and its pragmatic meaning. It aims to discover whether the tension between the form and the function of speech acts effect their interpretation. The results show that indirect speech acts in which the function is stated implicitly, the hearers have to rely on implicatures and inferences to obtain utterance meaning. Fatah et al. (2020) showed and explained the importance of pragmatics through offering some present

studies on the effect of pragmatic use in class and the importance of pragmatics in literary texts. Since this study investigated the problems faced by EFL learners when analyzing and interpreting texts (particularly literary texts), it led EFL learners to understand the notion of texts and to grasp the hidden meaning of texts. In addition, it shed light on demonstrating and clarifying the ambiguity surrounding the concept of meaning. As a result, EFL learners will be able to understand meanings to achieve the other meaning (the transferred meaning) which is the opposite of the primary meaning. Chokwiwatkul (2018) focused on two issues. Firstly, on determining the extent to which Thai ESP learners can comprehend indirect speech acts of requests and refusal. Secondly, on investigating whether different levels of L2 proficiency affect their pragmatic comprehension. A multiple choice test was developed to measure the participants' ability in comprehending implied meaning. The data were analyzed a descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that, although the overall pragmatic competence of Thai ESP learners was at a moderate level, the comprehension accuracy was affected by different levels of indirectness an their L2 language proficiency.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory with its impact on human communication is described as a "functional approach to language which focuses on speaker meaning rather than linguistic constructs and which regards peoples cognitive ability to use context to make inferences as the basis to communication" (Alberts, 2011, p.39). Austin was the one who gave an analysis of how meaning is analyzed. Austin presented his view about meaning and explained that "meaning is described in relation among

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linguistic conventions correlated with words and sentences, the situation where the speaker actually says something to the hearer, and associated intentions of the speaker" (Oishi, 2006, p.1).

Austin's idea reflects the notion of acts; a speaker (writer) with an associated intention tends to perform a linguistic act to the hearer (receiver). A speech act is conveyed by the performance of some acts like acts of promising, advising, requesting, commanding, advising, stating, etc. Accordingly, a performative sentence is seen as an act of conveying the meaning behind its form which the speaker (writer) communicates or fails to communicate with the hearer (reader). So, the meaning of a speech act is not seen as an isolate factor in the communicational situation, but it is actually determined with reference to the context in which it occurred and within the area of interaction between the speaker and the hearer. Austin takes great account in talking about the use of speech acts. He explains that "a speech act is dependent upon the listener securing uptake" (Austin, 1968, pp.115-116). This is to say that a speech act which is performed by a speaker or a writer depends on an understanding of the meaning and force of an utterance in order for a speech act to be evident.

For Grice, participants in a conversation can converse with each other since they are able to recognize the common goals and the different ways of achieving these goals. As inference theories were proposed in order to predict what is actually exchanged between speakers and hearers, these theories stated that "in any conversation only certain kinds of moves are possible at any particular time because of the constrains that operate to govern exchanges" (Wardhaugh, 1986, p. 290). What must be clear is that these constraints limit speakers to what they can say and listeners to what they can infer.

Grice proposed four maxims to be followed by the participants in the production of conversation: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. These maxims characterize ideal exchanges, these maxims or rules are described as follows (Huang, 2014, pp.29-30):

(1) Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true.

    (i)   Do not say what you believe to be false.

    (ii)   Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

(2) Quantity

    (i)   Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

    (ii)   Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

(3) Relation: Be relevant.

(4) Manner: Be perspicuous

    (i)   Avoid obscurity of expression.

    (ii)   Avoid ambiguity.

    (iii)   Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

    (iv)   Be orderly

Searle, for example, in a specific way intended to generalize these conditions to describe a number of ways in which indirect requests might be made (Couteur, 1996, p.19):

(1) by asking whether or stating that a preparatory condition (H is able to perform act A) obtains.

(2) by asking whether or stating that the propositional content condition (S predicts the future act A of H) obtains .

(3) by stating that sincerity condition (S wants H to do A) obtains .

(4) by stating that or asking whether there are any good or overriding reasons for doing A (except where the reason is that H wants or wishes to do A).

Thus, Searle has suggested that stating or questioning the felicity condition of a direct act will give an indirect version. Accordingly, instead of using the Sentence "Please come home!" one can predict indirect act by the following Strategies (Saeed, 2003, p. 233):

A. Question the preparatory condition: can you please come home?

B. State the sincerity condition: I want you to please come home.

C. Question the propositional content condition: will you please come home?

He assures this belief since his observation of the responses to the literal meaning of the indirect speech acts gained the conclusion that such responses were appropriate to the conveyed meaning as well. The comprehension of indirect speech acts based on this perspective became the basic focus for many researches and is referred to by Levinson as "literal force hypothesis" (Levinson, 1980, pp. 2-24).

3.2 Direct and Indirect Speech Acts

The relationship between linguistic form and communicative function is of central interest in the area of pragmatics (Paltridge, 2012, p. 38). Utterances are said to have multiple meanings which lie beyond their literal meaning. So it is very important to understand "the relationship between or propositional content, of what someone says and what the person intends by what he or says" (ibid, 40).

Austin assumes that speech acts are of three kinds. The first is locutionary acts, which refer to the literal meaning of the utterance, the second is illocutionary acts, which refer to the intended meaning on the part of the speaker, and the third one is the perillocutionary acts, which refer to the influence of certain utterance on the other person .When there is a mismatch between the illocutionary or speech act force attributed to an utterance and its literal form (indirect speech acts), some explanation of the hearer's ability to comprehend is required (Couteur, 1996, p.17).

Levinson (1983) states that indirect speech acts can be better understood if they are not compositionally analyzed, but merely recorded whole the lexicon with the appropriate semantic equivalence. The Literal force hypothesis refers to the fact that there is one to one relation between clause types and what is so called illocutionary forces. There is an assumption that indirect speech acts are based on literal force hypothesis, that is, the illocutionary force is built into the sentence form. This assumption indicates the fact that the major sentence types found in English namely (imperatives, declaratives and interrogatives) have their respectively associated forces: ordering, requesting and stating. Indirect speech acts involve performing two distinct speech acts and each one has a different illocutionary point, that is, what is so called the literal illocutionary point. In addition, an intended illocutionary point is conveyed by means of the former (the literal illocutionary point). Thus, indirectness of speech acts involves uttering utterances by speakers these utterances means not only what they is said but something more.

Levinson, on his part, tried to give an explanation of the understanding of indirect speech acts by saying that indirect speech acts have an additional meaning, which can be proposed by giving an account of the

contextual conditions that demand the application of inference theory. Flowerdew (2013, p. 79) points that there are aspects of non-literal meaning, which are dealt with under designations such as: speech acts; conversational implicature; the Cooperative Principle, politeness and relevance. Thus, the problem of the Speech Act Theory is relating the form of the utterances to the acts which are performed by uttering them. As it was stated by Flowerdew, the function of an utterance may be performed by different forms or, conversely, one form may be used to express various functions. So the utterance "Can you help me?" which is actually in an interrogative form, can be understood ,under certain circumstances, either as a request for help or as it may be a question about the ability to help the speaker.

3.3 Pragmatic Competence

The importance of pragmatic competence increases since it is a key factor in acquiring language competence in general. Pragmatic knowledge is regarded as a basic component for a successful understanding of the interlocutors' meanings and intentions (Takkac Tulgar, 2016, p.11). Pragmatic competence is defined by Chomsky as "the knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use in conformity with various purposes" (1980, p. 224). Kasper and Rose, cited in (Mao & He, 2021, p. 4) view pragmatic competence as having the ability to produce and comprehend utterances or discourse in a sociocultural interaction. Barron (2003, p. 10) believes pragmatic competence as the knowledge of linguistic resources which is found in a particular language for the realization of certain illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and the knowledge of an appropriate contextual use of a particular language's linguistic resources. As pragmatics takes a cognitive perspective, there has been much work of predictable models of communication. Of them is

Relevance Theory, whose contribution led to emphasize the idea of pragmatic competence.

More specifically, pragmatic competence is defined as "the creation or interpretation of the intended meaning in discourse by an individual or as the dynamic or interactive negotiation of intended meanings between two or more individuals in a particular situation" (Timpe et al., 2015, p. 14). Thus, pragmatic competence reflects speakers' ability of using language to achieve better understanding of language in context in an effective way.

3.4 Second Language Experience and Pragmatic Competence

The role of pragmatic competence in L2 learning has its impact on students' ability to communicate, comprehend, and interpret what is said or written. Language learning is considered as being a slow process. The level of proficiency in L2 has a great effect on the pragmatic competence. As Bardovi-Harlig et al. (2008) work explains the influence of language proficiency on the development and use of a particular aspect of pragmatic competence. The findings of their study indicate "that language proficiency is associated with pragmatic competence" (Rafieyan & Rozycki, 2019, p.11). Also Taguchi (2013) investigated the effect of language proficiency and the exposure to target language. The findings of the study show that both language proficiency and target language exposure can contribute to the development of pragmatic competence. Thus, there is an overall positive proficiency effect on pragmatic competence, and higher proficiency learners have higher pragmatic competence (Xiao, 2015, p.1).

Nevertheless, there may be learners who have certain knowledge of specific linguistic expressions but, pragmatically, they fail to predicate the illocutionary forces associated with those linguistic forms. Learners'

pragmatic ability differs according to their experience in practicing it. That is, "second language learners invariably receive more pragmatic input in their daily lives if they are motivated to interact with the TL community and have positive social interactions" (Wyner & Cohen, 2015, p.524).

3.5 Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory (henceforth: RT) is produced by Sperber and Wilson (1986) and it is one of the theories that have its great significance in the domain of pragmatics. Relevance can be identified as "the function of cognitive effects and processing efforts" (Wu, 2015, p. 2).The main focus of RT is concerned with how people get implications from an utterance by having the capability to infer it within a cognitive context. RT has its starting point in evaluating how the participants can fill the gap between the speaker's meaning and the sentence meaning.

This theory roots its view in claiming that "human cognition is geared towards the maximization of relevance" (Carston & Georgre, 2006, p.279). Relevance is the most essential thing for humans to communicate with each other. When they communicate, speakers and hearers are seeking maximum relevance and optimal relevance. By this, communication is regarded as being a cognitive process its success is dependent on a shared cognitive environment. The successful understanding of the intended meaning involves a pragmatic reasoning which has a great focus on the hidden meaning of the utterances. Relevance theory pays attention to the understanding of indirect speech (Ma & Li, 2016, p. 135). It gives a satisfactory explanatory account of the different types of illocutionary force.

3.6 Relevance Based Approach to Speech Acts

The selection of the most relevant choice to indirect utterance depends on the learners' ability to maximize the relevant answer with more communicative effect and less processing effort. Searle's speech act theory characterizes indirect speech acts by the fact that there is no link between the linguistic form and the illocutionary meaning. Searle (1969) indicates that in indirect speech acts, the communicator conveys the non-literal and the literal meaning to the hearer. Via indirect speech acts, different communicative functions can be performed, it means that particular sentence form of a question may have different illocutionary forces including: request, suggestion, order, offer, etc. Searle (1979) states that for an indirect speech act to be understood:

> The speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shard background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer (Searle, 1979, p. 32).

Sperber and Wilson's (1986) point of view shows that saying interrogatives represent desirable thoughts, which equally share the claim that they represent certain answers as relevant. They tend to suggest that the second part (the hearer) has the ability to distinguish certain utterance as a request when he/she recognizes the intention conveyed by the speaker. Thus, speech acts need a process of recognition from the part of the hearer and this is considered as a pragmatic inferential process. This inferential process demands a preliminary decoding phase of the semantic import of the sentence mood.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The samples selected for this study cannot be randomly assigned as they are selected based on the attribute of L2 experience. Thus, the sample includes undergraduate Iraqi EFL learners at fourth stage. The method utilized in this study is a mixed mode one as it makes use of quantitative procedures that process data numerically. Moreover, the study processes data qualitatively as it analyzes utterances quoted from the literary text "Jane Eyre" for Charlotte Bronte employing a content analysis technique.

4.2 The Participants

The number of participants examined in this study is twenty Iraqi female learners majoring in English Language at the College of Education for Women, University of Anbar. The participants are fourth year students for the academic year (2020-2021/morning study). The selection of those participants is done employing a purposive sampling method where only Iraqi speakers, who are majoring in English and at their fourth year of study, were selected to participate in this study.

4.3 Instruments and Data Collection

A test was designed to be the main instrument in this study. The technique that is followed in structuring the test of the current study is the form of multiple choice test that examines participants' recognition ability, as well as their knowledge in the foreign language. The test was introduced to a jury of specialists and they ensured its validity and applicability according the research objectives. It includes a question that aims to identify whether learners are able to identify the intended meaning behind the indirect speech acts given to them in the test. The participants were asked to predict the intended meaning and interpret what is said according to the given

alternatives for each item. To reiterate, the test was designed to test Iraqi EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge and awareness in interpreting the intended meaning of indirect utterances. For the full form of the test used in this study, please refer to Appendix 1.

4.4 Sampling Technique

The sampling techniques used to elect the participants' responses, is the Multiple Choice Question (MCQ) test form.

is applied to a number of EFL female learners to examine their pragmatic knowledge in English language. Twenty students were selected randomly from the fourth stage. According to their performance in this test, the researcher analyzes and discusses the study's main concern. The utterances are selected from literary text "Jane Eyre" novel as indirect speech acts to discover how the learners' analysis, interpretation, and reasoning will constitute the main results of this study.

5. Analysis, Results and Discussion

5.1 Items Analysis and Results

i.   Item No.1

It is an indirect speech act introduced by the speaker in the form of a declarative sentence. Structurally, the speaker declares something but, pragmatically, it bears a function which has to be transmitted to the readers. The learners have to decide which one of these three possibilities is the exact intended meaning that the speaker wants to convey. The first choice is considered relevant and direct, the second choice is unrelated to the context and the last one is ambiguous although it is relevant. Thus, (1a) is the appropriate one.

<<**question**; indirect and unclear>>- a <<**answer**; direct and relevant >>, b <**answer**; indirect and irrelevant>, c <**answer**; ambiguous and relevant>.

Table (1): The Fourth Year Students' responses to item No. 1

Item 1		
Alternatives	**Fourth-Year Students**	
	Frequency	**Percent**
Direct &Relevant	11	55.0%
Indirect & Irrelevant	4	20.0%
Ambiguous & Relevant	5	25.0%
Total	20	100%

The above table shows that the vast majority of the learners chose the direct relevant alternative choice. The appropriate choice is of frequency (11) making a percentage (55.%0). This indicates that the intended meaning is clear for most of the learners.

ii.   Item No.2

Since the learners' search for relevance is regarded as a basic feature in any communicational situation in general, they tend to deal those utterances which are relevant. For this item, the indirect utterance is a declarative sentence in its form functions as rejection. For (2a), it is a direct and optimal answer in relation with the indirect utterance spoken by Jane. It is optimal because the addressee may not process an extra effort and time in understanding it. For (2b), this choice cannot be considered as relevant and direct meaning because it does not directly state what Jane wants. The last one (2c) is relevant and ambiguous and it demands some considerable effort from the part of the learner.

<<**question**; indirect and unclear>>- a <<**answer**; direct and relevant>>, b <**answer**; indirect and irrelevant>, c <**answer**; ambiguous and relevant>.

<center>Table (2) Fourth Year Students' responses to item No. 2</center>

Item 2		
Alternatives	Fourth-Year Students	
	Frequency	Percent
Direct & Relevant	6	30.0%
Indirect & irrelevant	7	35.0%
Ambiguous& Relevant	7	35.0%
Total	20	100%

Table (2) reveals that the indirect utterance is not clear for the learners since only (30._%0) out of (100%) chose the direct relevant alternative. This indicates that the declarative form and the comprehension of the hidden meaning is not clear for the EFL learners.

iii. Item No.3

Generally, when learners deal with the communicated intention behind what is written or spoken, they tend to use the kind of information that is relevant for them. The first alternative (3a) is direct and highly relevant because it contains sufficient information which is related directly to the indirect act by the speaker. (3b) gives irrelevant information which does not match with the stated utterance since "fine places are not suitable for her" is not related to the meaning of the indirect utterance. Although (3c) have relevant information, it is not considered as the optimal one because the word "feelings" does not specify the kind of feelings that the speaker wants to explain.

<<**question**; indirect and unclear>>- a <<**answer**; direct and relevant>>, b <**answer**; indirect and irrelevant>, c <**answer**; ambiguous and relevant>.

Table (3) Fourth Year Students' responses to item No. 3

Item 3		
Alternatives		
	Frequency	Percent
Direct & relevant	8	40,0%
Indirect & Irrelevant	8	40.0%
Ambiguous & Relevant	4	20.0%
Total	20	100%

It is clear from the table above that the EFL learners failed to comprehend the intended meaning since only (40.0%) tend to select the direct and relevant choice. In this table, the percentages of the first and the second alternative are equal in spite of that the second one is far away to represent the intended meaning.

iv. Item No.4

The context of any utterance will require the needed effort which seems to be different according different contexts. In this item, Jane displays what she feels towards Mr. Rochester using a declarative sentence. According (4a) is the best choice from the three alternatives as it is direct and relevant so it is optimal. As for (4b), it has a direct relatedness to the speaker's indirect utterance and irrelevant information which need more effort from the reader side. Finally, (4c) needs more cognitive effort as ambiguity is established in.

<<**question**; indirect and unclear>>- a <<**answer**; direct and relevant>>, b <**answer**; direct and irrelevant>, c <**answer**; ambiguous and relevant>.

Table (4) Fourth Year Students' responses to item No, 4

Item 4		
Alternatives	Fourth-Year Students	
	Frequency	Percent
Direct & relevant	8	40.0%
Direct & Irrelevant	10	47.6%
Ambiguous & relevant	2	10.0%
Total	20	100%

It is obvious from the data presented in the table (4) that the direct and irrelevant alternative is determined by the majority of the learners as the appropriate choice where the percentage is (47.6%). On the other hand, the correct answer gained only (40.0%) percentage. Thus, the indirect utterance is unclear and incomprehensible by the learners.

v.   Item No.5

At certain situation, there are utterances which are understandable to some learners and are not so to the other. This problem is due to the learners' knowledge in the SL. The first alternative (5a) is seen to be direct and relevant and this is in accordance with the stated information which is adequate and brief. So, the learners may understand it is the intended meaning from the description of the context and situation given with the utterance. For the second alternative (5b), there is an indirect reference to Jane's state or her feelings of being ill and there is relevant information to the indirect utterance of the speaker but it cannot be the speaker's intended meaning. In the case of (5c), there is ambiguity in stating it. It negates that Jane is being   ill. In addition, there is a playing in the words because the word "out" is not intended by Jane since Jane does not want to go out. Also the words "see the nursery" does not refer to a place and what Jane wants is going into the nursery.

<<**question**; indirect and unclear>>- a <<**answer**; direct and relevant>>, b <**answer**; indirect and relevant>, c <**answer**; ambiguous and relevant >.

Table (5) Fourth Year Students' responses to item No. 5

Item 5		
Alternatives	Fourth-Year Students	
	Frequency	Percent
Direct & relevant	4	20.0%
Indirect & relevant	13	65.0%
Ambiguous & Relevant	3	15.0%
Total	20	100%

This table shows that most learners have determined the indirect and relevant alternative as the most suitable one whereas the correct alternative is chosen by (4) learners only making a percentage of (20.0%).

5.2 Discussion

The study results indicate that the EFL learners do not know how to interpret the intended meaning of indirect utterances when they communicate by using English language. Most of the learners at the fourth stage tend to choose the wrong alternative as the intended meaning. For example, in item no. (5), it is found that the percentage of choosing the indirect and irrelevant alternative is (65.0%). This percentage is higher than the correct alternative (5a). May be the learners tend to give more attention to the more information stated as in (5b), and this refers to their inability to identify the intended meaning which is stated directly and briefly. Along all the items stated above, no one of the correct answers gain a percentage of (50.0%) except for item no. (1). In this item the first, alternative (1a) gain a percentage of (55.0%) for the direct and relevant answer, and this is the only correct choice which earns an acceptable percentage.

Moreover, the results indicate that the direct and relevant alternative is higher than the other incorrect ones where the percentage is (37.0%) which is still lower than the desired percentage. The other remaining alternatives are varying in the percentage where they are unequal, as indicated in table (6) below:

Table (6):Total correct and incorrect learners' responses

Alternatives	Counts	Percent
Direct & Relevant	37	37.0%
Direct & Irrelevant	10	10.0%
Ambiguous & Relevant	21	21.0%
Indirect & Irrelevant	19	19.0%
Indirect & Relevant	13	13.0%
Total	100	100%

The table indicates that the irrelevant use is less than the relevant. This improves that most of the learners have the ability to match the relevant information to the surface structure of indirect utterance. But, actually, they failed to understand the implied meaning.

This is due to their lack of the pragmatic competence which influences their comprehending abilities. In addition, the stated results indicate the learners were not able to use the relevant information to the indirect utterance and its context in order to convey meaning correctly. It is important for them to know how to match what is relevant and clear to comprehend, pragmatically, what is not clear when communicating in the second language. Furthermore, the research hypothesis is validated because the applied test proved that they do not have the needed pragmatic competence to comprehend and interpret the indirect

speech acts. It is insured, through the stated results, that understanding the situation and the form of the indirect utterance is essential in communication. Being relevant means that learners have to exert less mental effort when comprehending meaning. So, the search for relevance is an important part that learners have to be aware of when dealing with pragmatic issues such as the intended meaning of indirect speech acts.

Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the comprehension of EFL learners at the university level of intended meanings behind indirect speech acts. As the learners are dealing with indirect speech acts' meaning through searching for relevance, they are demanded to choose the relevant answer to determine the intended meaning. So, their comprehension ability appears to be limited. Relevance is defined as an important factor in human. Notably, the main results showed that the learners' comprehension ability has an impact in determining the intended meaning of indirect utterances. In addition, it was revealed that if the learners have to identify the intended meaning of indirect acts, it is better for them to activate their cognitive abilities to search for the relevant answer.

Actually, the pragmatic ability of Iraqi EFL learners in comprehending indirect speech acts was not satisfactory and at a low level as appeared through their responses. The results also indicated that an inability to search for the relevant information can affect how well the learners can comprehend the intended meanings implied in the surface forms. Although there are learners who performed well in the comprehension test, but the large number of them have to enrich their pragmatic and comprehension ability. Thus, learners' pragmatic competence has an impact on their comprehending abilities in the second language in giving the correct

answers. So, learners' understanding of the pragmatic meaning is bounded by improving their pragmatic and comprehending abilities. Additionally, it was revealed the results, that they encounter difficulties in interpreting the intended meaning may be due to the form of indirect utterances or to the role of the context of situation of the indirect acts. For the learners, it is revealed that they cannot determine the intended meaning of indirect speech acts as comprehensible as possible and this indicates their lack or poor pragmatic competence.

As a result, teachers of the second language should supply their learners with the main pragmatic concepts particularly indirect speech acts as these acts are communicatively peculiar and related to the context in which they are used. Teachers should also enrich the EFL learners' awareness of the kinds of speech acts and how to interpret them at the recognition and production level. In order to do that, more pragmatic instruction should be given for learners. This will enrich their pragmatic abilities in order to become proficient language communicators. Teachers should also locate the focus on the overall interpretation of both the linguistic and pragmatic features, so that learners will find it feasible to infer the implied meaning in indirect expressions.

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Appendix 1

The Test

You are kindly requested to read the following texts and answer as required:

1) Mr. Lloyd asked Jane about her illness. The doorbell was ringing for the dinner. He said: **"That's for you, nurse."**

His answer has three possibilities, choose the correct relevant one:

  a- The dinner was already prepared and he asked her to go and have it.
  b- The bell was ringing for dinner while there was someone making a noise in the street.
  c- There was something prepared for dinner, and he wanted the nurse to see if everything was ok.

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2) Jane is talking to herself about the important of her position and her existence in the world. She said: **"From every enjoyment I was, of course, excluded"**

What does she really feel?

a- She was sad because she was unwelcomed person.
b- She was rejected for a reason by people, and she had a uncomfortable feeling about this.
c- She was weeping herself because she did not have enough money to share in the world's enjoyment.

3) Mr. Lloyd and Jane are being involved in a conversation. Jane talked about the bad treatment and how she was held in a dark room. So, Mr. Lloyd asked her**: "Are you not very thankful to have such a fine place?"**

He intended to say that:

a- Jane needs to be grateful to Gateshead for such a fine place.
b- The dark room in Gateshead is a fine place to a poor girl, but fine places are not suitable for her, and she has no right to live in.
c- The place that she spent her time in is suitable for her, and she has to have feelings for that.

4) Jane is talking about her emotional state towards her lover Mr. Rochester, she was thinking while saying: **"and yet, while I breathe and think, I must love him."**

Her speech has one of the following meanings:

a- She makes an obligation to love him as long as she is still alive.
b- She obliges herself not to stop loving him while she is drinking and taking breath; breathing and drinking are the main sources to still alive.
c- She makes a promise to have a feeling for someone included in the conversation.

5) Jane was confined to the red-room which was so bleak that makes her feel oppressed and suffocated. Miss Bessie, her aunt, asked her if she is ill and she answered: **"Take me out! Let me go into the nursery!"**

What does she want to convey to Miss Bessie?

a- She feels ill and wants to go to the nursery.
b- She has been confined to the red-room and this reflects the unfair treatments that Jane is suffered from.

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c- She does not feel ill and merely wants to go out and see the nursery.