INVESTIGATING THE USE OF THE TWO SPEECH ACTS OF INVITATION AND OFFER AMONG IRAQI EFL UNIVERSITY LEARNERS

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MENGKAJI PENGGUNAAN DUA TINDAKAN PERTUTURAN BAGI JEMPUTAN DAN TAWARAN DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR IRAQ YANG MENGIKUTI KURSUS EFL DI UNIVERSIITI

ABSTRAK

Matlamat utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kebolehan pelajar EFL di Iraq mengecam serta menghasilkan sebutan yang berkaitan dengan dua tindakan pertuturan bagi 'jemputan' dan 'tawaran'. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga mengkaji strategi berbeza (*sama ada secara langsung / tidak langsung*) yang digunakan oleh para pelajar EFL Iraq apabila melakuan dua tindakan pertuturan bagi "jemputan' dan 'tawaran' pada tahap pengecaman dan penghasilan berserta dengan jenis strategi tersebut (*Pengejaan/ afirmatif, Pertanyaan/ interogatif, Imperatif, atau Seruan (exclamatory)*). Akhir sekali, matlamat kajian ini ada untuk menentukan sama ada dua factor demografi, iaitu gender dan tahun pengajian memberi kesan terhadap kebolehan pelajar untuk mengecam dan menghasiikan dua tindakan pertuturan. Sampel kajian ini terdiri daripada 160 orang pelajar dari Jabatan Pengajian Bahasa Inggeris, di Universiti Tikrit, berserta 8 orang pensyarah yang terlibat dalam pengajaran kursus ini. Pendekatan metodologi bercampur digunakan, iaitu soal selidik dalam bentuk ujian untuk mengukur kebolehan pelajar mengecam dan menghasilkan dua tindakan pertuturan bagi "jemputan" dan 'Tawaran' Di samping itu, temu bual separa-struktur dengan pelajar dan pensyarah diadakan untuk mentriangulasi dapatan daripada bahagian kuantitatif kajian ini. Secara amnya, dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar EFL Iraq mengalami cabaran dan kesukaran yang ketara dalam menghasilkan dan mengecam dua tindakan pertuturan bagi jemputan dan tawaran. Secara khususnya, 30.6% daripada pelajar menunjukkan

kebolehan dalam pengecaman dua tindakan pertuturan bagi jemputan dan tawaran, sebaliknya kebanyakan pelajar (69.4%) tidak menunjukkan kebolehan yang sedemikian. Berdasarkan tahap pengeluaran, 33.2% pelajar menunjukkan kebolehan menghasilkan dua tindakan pertuturan bagi jembutan dan tawaran, sebaliknya 66.8% tidak menunjukan kebolehan yang sedemikian. Selanjutnya, dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar EFL Iraq di Universiti Tikrit menggunakan strategi langsung semasa menghasilkan sebutan yang berkaitan dengan tindakan pertuturan bagi jemputan dan tawaran. Secara lebih khusus, pelajar lebih cenderung menggunakan strategi imperatif dan interogatif, sebaliknya strategi seruan tidak begitu diminati. Berdasarkan faktor demografi bagi gender dan tahun pengajian, dapatan kajian mendapati bahawa pelajar tiada perbezaan gender dilaporkan pada tahap pengecaman. Akhir sekali, dapatan menunjukkan terdapatnya perkaitan positif yang signifikan di antara faktor demografi bagi tahun pengajian dan kebolehan pelajar untuk mengecam dan menghasilkan dua tindakan pertururan bagi jemputan dan tawaran, iaitu lebih lama pelajar berada di universiti, maka lebih baik kebolehan mereka untuk mengecam dan menghasilkan dua tindakan pertururan bagi jemputan dan tawaran. Kajian ini disimpulkan dengan beberapa cadangan dan saranan penyelidikan pada masa depan.

INVESTIGATING THE USE OF THE TWO SPEECH ACTS OF INVITATION AND OFFER AMONG IRAQI EFL UNIVERSITY LEARNERS

ABSTRACT

The primary goal of the current study is to investigate the ability of Iraqi EFL learners to recognize and produce utterances related to the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer'. Another goal of the current study is to investigate the different strategies (*Affirmative, Interrogative, Imperative, or Exclamatory*) Iraqi EFL learners adopt when performing the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer' at the recognition and production levels. Finally, the study aims at examining whether significant differences exist among gender and year of study in their relationship with students' ability to recognise and produce the two speech acts of invitation and offer. The sample included 160 students from the department of English Language Studies in Tikrit University and 8 lecturers teaching these students. Mixed methodology approaches were employed in which a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were utilised to triangulate the findings. The findings revealed that Iraqi EFL students experience noticeable challenges and difficulties in producing and recognising the two speech acts. Specifically, while 30.6% of the students showed ability in recognising the two speech acts of invitation and offer, the overwhelming majority of the students, 69.4%, did not possess such ability. As far as the production level is concerned, 33.2% of the students showed ability in producing the two speech acts of invitation and offer while 66.8% of the students did not possess such ability. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the students tended to use imperative and interrogative types of strategies while the exclamatory strategy was not favoured by the students. As far as the demographic factors of gender and

the year of study are concerned, no significant differences between males and females were reported at the recognition and production levels. Finally, the findings showed significant positive relationship between the demographic factor of the year of study and the students' ability to recognise and produce the two speech acts. The study concluded with a number of recommendations and future research suggestions.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the concept of communicative competence has made a significant contribution to the area of second language acquisition, as L2 learners should not only be able to produce grammatically correct sentences but also appropriate ones for particular interactions (Al-Khatib, 2006). As Anderson (1990); Olshtain and Cohen (1983) and Wolfson (1981) stress, language learners need to master not only linguistic rules of the language but also its communicative rules because the production of utterances is determined by contextual factors, that vary across countries and cultures, rather than by mere linguistic and grammatical factors. In other words, pragmatic ability or competence is an important part of language learning, and pragmatics is the study of how language is used (Levinson, 1983). As Wolfson (1989) puts it, pragmatic competence refers to linguistic knowledge as well as the ability to understand and produce appropriate utterances in particular contexts. Similarly, Robert, Davies and Jupp (1992), stress that the focus in pragmatics is the intended meaning of the speaker and the hearer's ability to interpret. Or as Lightbown and Spada (1999) put it, pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use a variety of utterances which are appropriate for particular socio-cultural contexts and interactions. Given the emphasis on the socio-cultural and contextual aspects of communication, Kasper and Rose (2001) went on to define pragmatics as the study of language use in sociocultural contexts.

According to Leech (1983), pragmatics is made up of two components, namely, prag-malinguistics and socio-pragmatics. The former refers to appropriateness of form while the latter refers to appropriateness of meaning in social context. Thus pragmatic competence refers to the ability of a speaker to understand and compose appropriate utterances based on knowledge and use of rules of appropriateness and politeness. According to Fraser (1983, p.30), pragmatic competence is "the knowledge of how an addressee determines what a speaker is saying and recognizes intended illocutionary force conveyed through subtle attitudes". Similarly, Rintell (1997, p. 98) in pointing out that "pragmatics is the study of speech acts", argues that the pragmatic ability of a L2 learner is revealed firstly in the production of utterances for specific purposes and secondly, the interpretation of the intended meaning of their utterance. Speech acts, for example, apology, complaint, compliment, refusal, request, invitation, offer and suggestion are an important aspect of linguistic pragmatics.

It is instructive to note that research findings have revealed that generally, even proficient non-native speakers usually do not have the pragmatic competence of native speakers (Bardovi et al., 1991). Thus, proficient L2 speakers may still lack pragmatic competence. Research in interlanguage pragmatics has identified the ability to use appropriate utterances, in terms of communicative and linguistic aspects, as an important aspect of pragmatic competence. In addition, it is also instructive to note that research in pragmatics have revealed that while the typology of speech acts is universal, it is the case that the ability to use them appropriately varies across cultures and communities. In other words, while L2 learners have

access to the universal typology of speech acts, in reality their choice of strategies and utterances may differ from that of native speakers.

It is apparent, therefore, that for L2 learners to be pragmatically competent they need to be aware of the L2 socio-cultural rules that govern speech acts. Thus it is the case that often non-native speakers encounter problems when interacting with native speakers because they are not aware of the socio-cultural rules of the target language. When this happens, non-native speakers run the risk of using inappropriate strategies and utterances which result in their hearers being offended. As a consequence, as Kasper (1990, p. 203) points out, these non-native speakers are not treated as equals in the interaction. Another reason for this failure on the part of non-native speakers is because "non-native speakers, when conversing, often transfer the conversational rules of their first language into the second" (Scarcella, 1990, p. 338).

It is precisely to explain and understand language use and overcome the problems as discussed above, that Austin (1962) proposed his Speech Act Theory which was later refined by Searle (1969). Speech Act Theory is premised on the assumption that an utterance not only conveys an intended meaning but also an action. Thus when someone utters "it is rather hot in here" the speaker not only conveys how he/she feels but also implies that some action be taken, like opening the window. Apart from informing much research in language use, Speech Act Theory has also had a significant impact in the areas of philosophy, literary theory and many other scholarly fields (Green, 2007; Bowe & Martin, 2007; Gass & Neu, 1995; Thomas, 2006; Vanderveken, 2009).

One of the salient findings of research on EFL instruction reveals that focus is

on developing linguistic rather than pragmatic competence (Cortazzi & Jin, 2008; Goh & Kwah, 1997; Harvey, 1985; Rao, 2002). Consequently, while many EFL learners may be linguistically competent, they are not very successful in communicating with native speakers because they lack the appropriate communicative strategies (Cortazzi & Jin, 2008; Goh & Kwah, 1997; Rao, 1996, 2002). This is compounded by the fact that socio-cultural differences pose problems in interethnic communication (Fielding, 2006) as meanings in utterances often have to be inferred according to culturally specific conventions. Thus, as Leung (2005) stresses, to be communicatively competent, L2 learners need to acquire linguistic as well as pragmatic competence. L2 learners should also learn the culture specific ways of offering greetings, making requests, apologizing, expressing thanks and agreeing or disagreeing with others (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). In addition L2 learners should be aware that patterns of speech which are acceptable in their own cultures may not be acceptable in other cultures. Thus when L2 learners are equipped with pragmatic competence they would be able to communicate successfully using the appropriate speech acts or strategies in relation to particular contexts of utterance (Porter & Samovar, 1991).

Bearing the above points in mind, it is imperative, therefore, that EFL instructors should equip L2 learners with linguistic and pragmatic competence (Gass & Neu, 1996) since as Kramsch and Thorne (2002) stress linguistic competence does not equate to communicative competence in the target language as pragmatic competence is an integral component needed to communicate successfully in different communicative interactions (Zhao & Throssell, 2011).

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1.2 Background of the Study

Native speakers of English are able to differentiate between the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer' because these two speech acts are used in distinctly different contexts (Tsui, 1994). In contrast, in Arabic, these two speech acts are interrelated and native speakers of Arabic do not make a clear distinction between them particularly in oral interaction (Al-Hindawy, 1999; Al-Khatib, 2006). In this context, Fahad (2012) argues that while the two speech acts of invitation and offer are clearly understood and uttered by native speakers of English, these two acts are not clearly understood and they are even confusing in many cases for Arab learners of English. When we say Arabs do not make clear distinction between invitation and offer, we here talk about this process in Arabic language and not in English. In other words, Arabic language does not have a clear distinction between invitation and offer as the two speech acts are impeded as one act or understood as one act (Thomas, 1983; Al-Khatib, 2006). However, this is not the case in English language where these two speech acts are distinct and regarded as separate acts. Consequently, this influences Arab learners' ability to understand or recognise these two speech acts and also their ability in using or producing them which would in turn lead to breakdown in communication particularly when Arab learners are communicating with English native speakers. In other words, when English native speakers engage in a communicative situation with Iraqi Arab learners and while at the same time the two speech acts of invitation and offer are used in this communicative situation, Iraqis might not be able to understand the meaning English native speakers intend to convey due to the lack of distinction between the two speech acts of invitation and offer in the Arabic language. Similarly, while responding to native speakers of English, Iraqi learners might not be able to convey the intended meaning successfully

when using the two speech acts and this is also attributed to the idea that these two speech acts are not used distinctly in their native Arabic language.

To elaborate more on the differences between English and Arabic in relation to Speech Act Theory, Al-Hindawi, Al-Masu'di and Mirza (2014) state that Arabic has five classes of speech acts: imperative, negative imperative, interrogative, wish, and vocative while English, on the other hand, has only four, namely declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamative. More importantly, native English speakers tend to use indirect strategies such as the use of Exclamative to express invitation for example while Arabic use Exclamative to utter a constative statement rather than expressing invitation. This is one of the examples in which Speech Acts Theory is viewed and understood differently in Arabic and English and this is one of the reasons why confusion might take place once a conversation is exchanged between native speakers of English and Arabic learners of English. This makes it necessary to examine Iraqi learners' ability to understand and use the two speech acts of invitation and offer so that proper recommendations are generated in case these learners do encounter problems in these two speech acts especially that little research is conducted on these two speech acts in the Iraqi EFL context. Thus, this study attempts to find out whether Iraqi Arab learners are able to understand (recognise) and use (produce) the two speech acts of invitation and offer.

In addition, the differences in socio-cultural norms and conventions act as impediments to communication. In this context, Al-Khatib (2006) argues that native speakers of English encode invitation and offer using different strategies from those encoded by Arabic speakers due to the cultural differences between the two groups.

An example about this would be the way Arab speakers express invitation by insisting a number of times on the invited person to accept the invitation until the invited person feels forced to accept this invitation (imperative way). Al-Khatib (2001: 190) has reported that "to invite without insistence means that the concerned person is not serious about the invitation, and offers it as a mere remark of courtesy; and to accept the offer without reluctance means that the recipient is gluttonous, and may be described as an ill- behaved person." This imperative way of invitation is perceived to be normal and even welcome in the Arabic culture as it shows that the person inviting is sincere about the invitation (Al-Khatib, 2006). While it is polite to use imperatives in expressing invitation and offer in the Arabic context, it is less polite to do so in the English context. Last but not least, language use in the Arab context operates in relation to the traditions and customs of Islam unlike the Western/English context. Islam influences and determines the language use of Muslims (Bataineh, 2004). An example about the interference of the religion in the way Arabic learners of English express their invitations and offers is in the use of the imperative strategy through swearing to God by saying "Wallah" which means I swear to God that you accept my invitation or offer. In this way, the hearer will have no excuse in refusing the invitation or offer especially when God's name is used as it would be considered as a sin to refuse it. Now when Arab learners attempt to converse with native speakers of English using such imperative 'religious' strategies, it might create confusion and probably no comfort in the conversation which would in turn lead to communication breakdown (Al-Khatib, 2006). Thus, these ways of expressing invitation and offer are known to us in Arabic language but it cannot be confirmed that same strategies are used when Arabic speakers converse in English language. Do they transfer these strategies with them when they converse in English?

This question does not seem easy to answer as scarce research seems to have been conducted on the two speech acts of invitation and offer in the Arabic context. This study attempts to provide some answers for this question by examining the two speech acts of invitation and offer in the Iraqi Arabic context.

Just like their Arabic counterparts, Iraqi learners of English often transfer their cultural and religious norms and conventions of their native to the second language when communicating in English. As far as pragmatics is concerned, this process of transferring the native cultural norms of the first language into the target language use is addressed by a number of researchers. Specifically, this process is referred to as the negative pragmatic transfer (Kasper & BlumKulka, 1993). In addition, according to Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) the problem arises out of the superimposition of one act over the other whereby on the one hand the two speech acts of invitation and offer are considered 'directives' but sometimes function as "commissives" which implies that the action to be taken is deferred to the future rather than the present which might create confusion among the listeners. Apart from that, when expressing the two speech acts of invitation and offer, native speakers of English utilise indirect strategies where these two speech acts are expressed implicitly. However, this is not the case in the way Arab learners of English express the two speech acts where these acts are expressed explicitly (directly) due to the explicit ways they are expressed in their native language (Arabic) (Al-Khatib, 2006). Al-Khatib (2006) reported that 77% of invitations done by Jordanian learners are expressed explicitly while only 23% were expressed implicitly. This difference in the way the two speech acts of invitation and offer are used and understood creates

confusion when a conversation is being done between Arabic learners of English and native speakers of English.

In their daily interactions, native speakers of any language rely on their communicative competence to understand each other. In other words, they possess the appropriate communicative skills that enable them to communicate successfully at the level of recognition and production (Kasper & BlumKulka, 1993; Al-Khatib, 2006; Morkus, 2009). These communicative skills are categorized as pragmatic skills in language study and use. They enable speakers and hearers to produce, understand and comprehend utterances in different social contexts (Searle, 1979; Al-Sha'baan, 1999). In pragmatics, the focus is largely on speech acts or "performatives" since all utterances are contextually based and their meanings are tied to these contexts. As Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980) point out, in order to communicate effectively, native speakers manipulate a number of strategies to suit the context of utterance. As an example, in the case of the speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer', which forms the focus of this study, they are uttered implicitly. Hence, from a pragmatic point of view, it is necessary to invoke the contextual characteristics of the context of utterance in order to determine the level and nature of politeness of the speaker in terms of intentionality (Gass & Neu, 1995; Morkus, 2009).

However, despite the research findings that stress the need to teach pragmatic competence in EFL instruction, it is still the case that the focus tends to be on linguistic competence in which the teaching process in the Iraqi universities relies heavily on teaching grammatical rules while the pragmatic side of the language is side-lined (Abdulrahman, 2012). Consequently, when pragmatics is side-lined, there

is little room for developing the pragmatic competence EFL learners need to express the two speech acts of invitation and offer correctly (Kasper, 2000). More pertinently, research findings have also revealed that particular aspects of pragmatics are not automatically acquired by EFL learners (Edmondson et al., 1984). This explains why many learners who have studied English for years have difficulty communicating effectively because of differences in socio-cultural conventions and mother tongue interference, where the learner's language conventions are used in the L2 context which naturally results in communication failure (James, 1983). A common failure results from the hearer understanding and interpreting an utterance from the speaker differently. Thus EFL learners should be competent not only in terms of linguistic aspect of the target language, but also the pragmatic aspect of the target language which is culturally influenced and determined (Goddard et al., 2004). However, EFL learners usually do not have access to or sufficient exposure to the culture of the target language to enable them to develop their pragmatic skills. Usually their only contact with the target language is in the classroom and in addition their instructors are usually non-native speakers.

In addition as Cook (2001) points out, the EFL learning context is further problematized because often the target language is seen as an academic subject, rather than a medium for socialization and communication. Thus it is normal to decontextualize EFL classroom activities and in the process deny learners the socio-cultural information that will help them develop communicative competence. Hence learning the linguistic rules and conventions without knowledge of the socio-cultural norms and conventions that inform the target language is of little benefit to learners which in turn leads to communication failure. In this context, for foreign language

learners to master the target language and understand it very well, they need to understand the cultural and the pragmatic elements of the target language because with a language comes a culture (Goddard et al., 2004). To elaborate more about the cultural and the pragmatic elements of the target language, the following section presents a sociocultural overview about speech acts in the Iraqi context.

1.2.1 Sociocultural Overview about Speech Acts in Iraq

There seems to be a consensus among linguists and researchers that speech acts are culture-based in nature in which cultural differences between people from different countries influence the ways speech acts are uttered and understood as suggested by Al-Hindawi, Al-Masu'di and Mirza (2014). An example about how speech acts are influenced by the sociolinguistic culture of the language is found in Arabic where imperative for example, which is an act that refers to an order to do something from a position of superiority and compulsion has two types of meanings in Arabic language. The first type is referred to as primary (direct) and the other one is referred to as secondary (indirect). The direct type refers to the demand of the execution of an action from a superior to an inferior, as in a mother commanding her son to eat: e.g. 'Eat your food'. The indirect, on the other hand, communicates a number of meanings such as 'advice' and 'guidance'. Examples about these two types can be found in the Holy Quran "O my son! Keep up prayer and enjoin the good and forbid the evil" (Advice), and 13 Prayer and Supplication and guidance "My Lord, make me keep up prayer and from my offspring (too)". Thus, it could be seen from the examples that expressing imperative in Arabic communicates and serves different meanings that are different from those intended in English.

Another example about how culture influences speech acts in general and the two speech acts of invitation and offer, being the focus of the current study, is also related to the use of exclamative and imperative to express invitation or offer. While in English, exclamative is used excessively in understanding and producing invitation and offer, imperative is used excessively by Arab Iraqi learners to express the two speech acts of invitation and offer. In other words, while in English for example, it is considered rude to use imperative to express invitation, the use of imperatives for invitation purposes is perceived positively and is highly encouraged too. Thus, such cultural differences between the different ways speech acts are understood and uttered is one of the motives upon which the current study is grounded considering that such differences might create confusion and in turn breakdown in communication between people from different cultures. To link this to education in the context of this study, the following section addresses higher education in Iraq and its objectives.

1.2.2 Higher Education in Iraq

Like most developing countries, Iraq places a lot of importance on educating its citizens so that they can collectively contributed to the development and modernization of the country. As Shlash et al. (2008) point out, education is a priority in developed countries in terms of developing a modern, civil and humanitarian society. In this regard, it is worth noting that Iraqi in the 1960s and 1970s Iraqi universities were at the forefront of development in the Middle East and the country's free education system was a good model of Arab education which fostered a robust liberal educational system in the region (Ihsanoglu, 2007; Jawad, 2007; Harb, 2008). The pace of development in Iraq then was evident in the

establishment of two hundred colleges with about eight hundred departments and twenty-eight specialized institutions or research centres.

Consequently, Iraq had a well-developed human capital consisting of professionals, a high literacy rate and the active participation of women in all aspects of professional life educational sector (Ihsanoglu, 2007). However, the entire education system began to decline and deteriorate r Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 (Harb, 2008). Consequently, because of international trade sanctions and internal instability, the previously vibrant education system began to deteriorate and many professionals and academics left the country (Al Samaraie, 2007, Watenpaugh, 2003; Harb, 2008). Despite such constraints, it is also worth noting that the education system did manage to function and in fact the situation stimulated a lot of creativity in academia (Watenpaugh, 2003). In addition, gender equality continued to be maintained and encouraged in all spheres (Dakkak, 2007). However, this does not detract from the fact that as a consequence of the strife and turmoil Iraq has undergone and continues to experience, the state of public education leaves much to be desires. In short the basic infrastructure has been seriously damaged and efforts to repair and develop the system are proving to be extremely difficult (Harb, 2008; Al Samaraie, 2007).

Currently, the public universities in Iraq are Dahuk, Irbil, Sulaimaniyya, Koya, Mosul, Kirkuk, Tikrit, Diyala, Anbar, Baghdad, al-Mustansiriyya, Islamic Studies, al-Nahrain, Technology, Qadisiyya, Kufa, Karbala, Thi Qar, Babil, Wasit, and Basra. In addition, there are seven private universities in Baghdad and two in Kurdistan.

Given the dire state of affairs in the education system in Iraq, the authorities have made it imperative that EFL instruction in higher education institutions should play a role in helping to resolve the seemingly insurmountable problems facing the country today. It is believed that through education, the country can hopefully establish once again the infrastructure for a civil society. By equipping university students with the necessary English language skills, the country can once again make efforts to access all the resources available in technology, education, business and management training and public administration in order to develop the country (Sikhi, 2008).

Bearing in mind the current situation and needs of Iraq as discussed above, this study attempts in a small way to readdress the situation by improving the communicative competence of Iraqi EFL learners, especially in terms of pragmatic competence. In doing so this study will focus on the problems Iraqi EFL students have with the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer' and hopefully the findings will provide possible solutions to the problem.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education has specified that the objectives of teaching English language in government schools and universities is to equip students with the necessary basic language skills so that they can successfully communicate with the average educated native English speaker. In addition, they should be able to read and understand English texts. Finally, they should also develop an interest in the aesthetic aspects of the English language (Issac & Jamil, 2010). These objectives are important in the context of this study considering that

among the objectives is to equip students with the necessary basic language skills so that they can successfully communicate with the average educated native English speaker.

Communication with native speakers came as one of the objectives of EFL learning in Iraq following the year 2003 in which tens of thousands of foreign troops were present in the country after the war and almost daily encounter of communication began to take place between native Iraqis and these foreign troops who were mainly American and British. This daily encounter created numerous jobs that were not available before such as translators from English to Arabic and vice versa and other jobs that were the results of the presence of many foreign companies in Iraq, particularly foreign infrastructure companies. Such communication requires linguistic knowledge side-by-side with pragmatic knowledge in which speech acts is regarded as an important element. This means that examining Iraqi EFL learners' ability to recognise and produce speech acts in general and the two speech acts of invitation and offer in particular, is of paramount importance to achieve the objectives of EFL education in Iraq and this is the primary goal of this study. More importantly, teaching English is introduced very early in Iraqi public and private schools, specifically from Grade 1 and this means that Iraqi learners should be able to understand pragmatic competence by the time they reach university education considering that they had been learning English for many years before. The following section presents an overview about Tikrit University, which is the focus of the current study.

Generally, the status of education in Iraq deteriorated after the first Gulf War in 1990 because of the lack of government support for the sector as well as a decreasing percentage of eligible students participating in the education considering that many students left schools for work. This affected the level of education in general for many following years and the level of English in particular as English was seen as a secondary language that was not needed at that time. However and after the second Iraqi war in 2003, Iraqis started paying attention to the importance of English language in their daily life as they came into daily contact with the tens of thousands of foreign troops in the country. That being said, neglecting the language for more than a decade, the comeback was rather slow and Iraqi EFL learners' English proficiency level was still seen as poor as compared to other EFL learners in the neighbouring Arabic countries.

1.2.3 Profile of Tikrit University, Iraq

The University of Tikrit, one of the largest universities in Iraq with over 12,000 students, was established in 1987 in Tikrit. Despite the effects of the turmoil, the university has maintained a reputable standing in Iraq. It has 16 different schools and about 1,000 graduates every year and has a workforce of about 1,600 consisting of professors, administrators and maintenance workers. In a move to develop, the university actively promotes collaboration with foreign universities in order to be part of the global academic scene (Tikrit University's Official Website, 2012).

The university acknowledges the role of English as a global language and consequently, emphasizes the effective acquisition of English language skills amongst the students, more so since the teaching and learning material in many of

the university courses are in English. Thus all students regardless of their majors must take and pass a subject in English, which is a requirement for graduation for the Bachelor Degree in any major. The subject in English introduces students to the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Tikrit University's Official Website, 2012). The following section presents an overview about the Department of English in Tikrit University, which is the setting of the current research.

1.2.4 Department of English Language at Tikrit University

The Department of English was created after the establishment of the College of Languages. Unlike the College of Arts, it was established to focus on the EFL instruction in line with the needs of various government departments in terms of language, literature and translation. The department uses two types of teaching material, namely the commonly used texts in most universities of the world and texts written by experts and authorities in the area of language acquisition. The department also keeps itself updated with new teaching material. According to the website of the university, the mission of the Department of English is to enable Iraqi EFL learners to possess a set of important skills. Among these skills is to help these learners think logically, reflect critically and creatively. Among other skills is to help learners establish patterns of life-long learning in preparation for further professional development, conduct research and investigation with impartially and empiricism, communicate competently. Other skills include helping learner to develop professional skills that contribute to better and more productive learners which would in turn affect the society positively (Tikrit University's Official Website, 2012).

The department has successfully produced many graduates with a Bachelor's as well as a Master's degree in English who contribute their language skills to the scientific community in Iraq. The department is also looking into the idea of offering a doctorate program in English language.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Fahad (2012) points out that while attempts have been made in Iraq to enhance EFL instruction, it is still the case that many learners failed to learn to "really use the language" even though they have had a lot of oral practice in the classroom. Thus as Fahad (2012) observes, Iraqi EFL learners possess reasonable linguistic competence but lack the pragmatic competence which tends to hinder possessing good communicative skills and this in turn negatively influences the communicative interactions between Iraqi Arab learners and native speakers of English. Fahad adds that this lack of communicative competence among Iraqi EFL learners is attributed to the lack of exposure to the culture of the target language especially that pragmatic issues, which are culturally determined, are not focused on inside Iraqi EFL classrooms and this could be the reason why Iraqi EFL learners do encounter difficulties in recognising and producing the socio-pragmatic use of speech acts in general (Abdulrahman, 2012). However, little is known about Iraqi EFL learners' ability to understand (recognise) and use (produce) the two speech acts of invitation and offer taking into account that little research seems to have been conducted on these two speech acts in the Arabic context in general and in the Iraqi context in particular. Thus, one of the objectives of the present study is to investigate the Iraqi EFL learners' ability to recognise and produce the two speech acts of invitation and offer. By achieving this objective, an important gap in the literature on the speech acts in general and the two speech acts of invitation and offer in particular is filled.

Another objective the present study attempts to achieve is investigating the various direct and indirect strategies used by Iraq EFL learners when performing the two speech acts of invitation and offer. The rationale behind this objective is that it has been mentioned earlier that native speakers of English tend to adopt indirect strategies while performing the two speech acts of invitation and offer but this is not the case when Arabic learners of English performing these two speech acts in which these acts are performed explicitly using direct strategies. Iraqi EFL learners face many challenges when communicating with native speakers of English (Kettani, 2006; Fahad, 2012). So it is the aim of this study is to find out which strategies Iraqi EFL learners use when performing the two speech acts of invitation and offer. By knowing the types of strategies used, the researcher could provide accurate recommendations to be taken into account by the Iraqi educators and educational policy makers which would in turn lead to less communication breakdown between Iraqi EFL learners and native speakers of English. These recommendations would be provided later on in the final chapter.

Another problem is that the findings of the previous research on speech acts might not be applicable in the Iraqi context. This is because much of the research on speech acts such as request, invitation, offer, promise, compliment and complaints have been conducted in Asian EFL context, particularly in China and Japan or in other ESL context (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Gumperz, 1982; Mey, 1993; Grundy, 2000; Kaburise, 2005). However and according to Kettani (2006) and Abdulrahman (2012), limited research has been conducted in the Middle Eastern countries, especially in Iraq in terms of the speech acts of "invitation" and "offer". The

researchers further state that that information is not available regarding the ability of Iraqi EFL learners to recognise and produce these two acts efficiently. Furthermore, not much is known about the types of strategies these learners use to express 'invitation' and 'offer' (Kettani, 2006). Even this scarce research focused on other speech acts like request (Al-Hindawy, 1999); apology with a mild presentation of the speech act of invitation (Al-Khatib, 2006) and advice (Fahad, 2012). Unlike the two speech acts of invitation and offer, the other speech acts are not confusing for Arabs simply because they are distinctly comprehended in the Arabic language. All these researchers recommended that further research should be conducted particularly on the other speech acts that have not been explored in the Iraqi context. This is because the available research is, first of all, relatively old and also little (few studies). Thus, the present study attempts to respond to such recommendations by examining the two speech acts of invitation and offer in the Iraqi EFL context.

The study also attempts to examine whether significant differences exist among gender and year of study in their relationship with students' ability to recognise and produce the two speech acts of invitation and offer. Taking into account that the literature on speech acts in general reported gender differences among EFL learners of speech acts, these gender differences are believed to vary according to the speech acts. For example, speech acts like refusal and apology involved significant gender differences keeping in mind the different ways males and females express themselves (Morkus, 2009). Apart from that, even these gender differences vary across different cultures and countries. In this context, Bataineh (2004) looked at the speech act of apology in Jordanian Arabic and American English. The findings of Bataineh's (2004) study revealed gender-based differences

in the data. For example, Jordanian Arabic males tended to used more statements of remorse while Jordanian females tended to assign the blame to themselves more than others. American females, on the other hand, tended to apologise using statements of remorse more than their American male counterparts. Thus, the present study attempts to test such views of gender differences in the ability to recognise the two speech acts of invitation and offer taking into account that these two acts have not been investigated in terms of gender difference when the previous studies focused on other speech acts like apology and refusal. In this context, Bataineh (2004) recommended that future research should examine gender differences in other speech acts.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The primary goal of the current study is to investigate the ability of Iraqi EFL learners to recognize and produce utterances related to the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer' at the levels of recognition and production. Another goal of the current study is to investigate the different strategies Iraqi EFL learners adopt when performing the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer' at the recognition and production (*Affirmative, Interrogative, Imperative, or Exclamatory*). Finally, the study aims at examining whether significant differences exist among gender and year of study in their relationship with students' ability to recognise and produce the two speech acts of invitation and offer. Thus the following study attempts to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the extent to which Iraqi EFL university learners (English language major students) are able to recognise the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer'.

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2. To examine the extent to which Iraqi EFL university learners (English language major students) are able to produce the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer'.

3. To examine the types of strategies Iraqi EFL university learners use when performing the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer' at the recognition and production levels in communication.

4. To find out whether there is significant relationships between the demographic factors of gender and the number of the years of study and the ability of Iraqi EFL university learners to recognise and produce the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer'.

1.5 Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are Iraqi EFL university learners (English language major students) able to recognise the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer'?

2. To what extent are Iraqi EFL university learners (English language major students) able to produce the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer'?

3. What type of strategies do Iraqi EFL university learners use when performing the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer' at the recognition and production levels in communication?

4. Are there significant relationships between the demographic factors of gender and the number of the years of study and the ability of Iraqi EFL university

learners to recognise and produce the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer'?

1.6 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study would benefit Iraqi EFL learners in that it would make them aware that to be proficient in English they need not only to be linguistically competent but also pragmatically competent especially in terms of the use of the two speech acts of 'invitation' and 'offer'. Through this awareness they will be able to identify areas of weaknesses and hence address them. Secondly, the findings of this study would hopefully benefit stake holders in the Iraqi education scene as they would be able to take the relevant steps to enhance the teaching of EFL so that the education system would be able to produce graduates who are communicatively competent. This is an asset because; given the role of English as the global language, Iraqi citizens who are communicatively competent in English would be able to contribute to developing and enhancing the economic and technological relations and collaborations with the global community.

Thirdly, the findings of this study would hopefully benefit Iraqi teachers of EFL as it would make them aware of the idea that linguistic and pragmatic competences go hand in hand to promote communicative competence in L2. As a start the teachers might want to revamp their teaching methodology and even the materials used so that they are in line with promoting both competencies in their students. Fourthly, the findings of this study would hopefully benefit curriculum designers as well as those engaged in material development. Given the importance of interactional discourse in our daily lives, the curricula and teaching materials should give more emphasis on pragmatic elements of EFL instruction. For example, curriculum designers could ensure that the curricula and materials include sections

that would help students improve their pragmatic competence in general and the use of speech acts in particular. Thus the findings would be of some pedagogic significance for syllabus designers and teachers.

1.7 Limitations of Study

This study focuses on English language programme students in Tikrit University, Iraq. In the current study, the researcher feels that the study's findings can be generalised to all Iraqi EFL universities of similar background and context. While, the findings of the current study are limited due to one university under study, however, they can be used as a basis to conduct a similar research with different variables of speech acts such as congratulation, refusal and apologies in a different context with different sample population.

1.8 Definitions of Related Terms

1.8.1 Speech Act: "the minimal unit of speech that has rules in terms both of where and when they may occur and of what their specific features such as offering, invitation and so on" (Hymes, 1972).

1.8.2 Speech Act Theory: A theory introduced by Austin (1962) and later developed by Searle (1969) to understand the way utterances are and should be understood in second/foreign language context. Austin and Searle argue that when people attempt to convey an intended meaning, they do not only create utterances involving grammatical structures and words, they also carry out actions via those utterances.