

## *Original Paper*

# The Iraqi EFL University Learners' Recognition of the Politeness Principle

Mohammed Jasim Betti<sup>1\*</sup> & Fatima Emad Yousif<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Thi-Qar, Nasiriya, Iraq

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education, General Directorate of Education, Thi-Qar, Iraq

\* Mohammed Jasim Betti, Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, Thi-Qar University, Nasiriya, Iraq

Received: July 15, 2022

Accepted: August 10, 2022

Online Published: September 2, 2022

doi:10.22158/elsr.v3n3p87

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v3n3p87>

### **Abstract**

*This study deals with the investigation of the Iraqi EFL university learners' recognition of Leech's politeness principle. The study aims at: determining whether the Iraqi EFL learners observe or flout the maxims of politeness principle, assessing the mastery of the maxims of politeness principle by the Iraqi EFL learners, and identifying which maxim(s) of politeness principle is/are usually observed and/or flouted. It is hypothesized that the modesty maxim is the most observed maxim and the generosity maxim is the most flouted one of the Iraqi EFL learners' recognition of politeness principle, and the Iraqi EFL learners' flouting of the maxims of politeness principle is more than their observance of such maxims at the recognition question. The sample of the current study is one hundred Iraqi EFL learners at the fourth year at University of Thi-Qar, College of Education for Humanities, Department of English. A test is the data elicitation tool that is designed to test the learners' ability to recognize which maxims of politeness principle which are observed depending on the context of conversation in which they are indulged. It arrives at some conclusions: the most observed maxim of the Iraqi EFL learners' recognition of politeness principle is the feeling-reticence maxim and the most flouted one is the modesty maxim. The Iraqi EFL university learners' flouting of those maxims in the recognition question is more than their observance.*

### **Keywords**

*politeness principle, politeness maxims, flouting, observing, Iraqi EFL university learners*

## 1. Introduction

Language is defined by McMohan (Haryanto, Weda, & Nashruddin, 2018, p. 99) as a system of symbolic sounds that are arbitrary and used by people of a society in order to interact, communicate and identify as well as express themselves. According to a large number of pragmatists, the use of the language by people in their communication and interaction is affected to a large extent by “pragmatic maxims” or pragmatic principles such as Leech’s politeness principle which includes six maxims and are considered as a complement to cooperative principle (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang, 2003, p. 1634). This is referred to by Crystal (1997, p. 301) when he defined pragmatics as “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effect their use of language has on the participants in the act of communication”.

In order to enable learners to use a language successfully, various factors must be taken into respect, some of which are internal and associated with the development of “linguistic competence” and others are external factors that are related to the development of “communicative competence”. This means that, in addition to the linguistic knowledge, learners should have the ability to use this knowledge appropriately taking into consideration the context (De Aquino, 2011, pp. 140-141; Betti & Yaseen, 2020, p. 52).

By Iraqi EFL Learners, it is meant those learners of English in non-English-speaking countries (Dingfang, 1994; as cited in Peng, 2019, p. 2). Similarly, Betti and Al-Jubouri (2015, p. 16) define foreign language as “one which has no internal function in the learner’s country”. Thus, the EFL learners learn the FL “in order to communicate with native speakers or interlanguage users of the foreign language” (Betti & Al-Jubouri, *Ibid*).

More specifically, Iraqi EFL learners are those nonnative learners of English whose mother tongue is Iraqi Arabic. “The language is learnt like other subjects in the school curriculum for operational purposes” (Betti & Al-Jubouri, *Ibid*). Hence, the abbreviation EFL is a shortened form of “English as a Foreign Language”, for example, an Iraqi learner of English in Iraq (Betti & Hasan, 2020, p. 43).

This study deals with an important pragmatic principle that is Leech’s politeness one. Politeness is considered as a social phenomenon, and it can be observed in all cultures (Leech & Tatiana, 2014, p. 10). During conversation and interaction, people try to preserve comity and maintain a good social relationship and a pleasant conversation, so that they adopt different politeness strategies, rules or maxims.

The Iraqi EFL university learners are aware of the concept of politeness as it is taught at the fourth year, Colleges of Education for Humanities in Iraq, as a part of students’ course in linguistics. Moreover, learners at the fourth year are trained and more advanced in the subjects of speaking courses, oral and aural ones and the study of literature, but it is assumed that they have difficulty in applying the various strategies of politeness. Their pragmatic competence is not fully learned. So, in the hope of closing the research gap, the following questions are addressed in this study:

- 1) Do Iraqi EFL university learners have the necessary pragmatic competence to use the maxims of Leech's politeness principle?
- 2) Do those learners master those maxims of politeness principle?
- 3) Which politeness maxim(s) is/are observed or flouted by the Iraqi EFL university learners?

The present study aims at:

- 1) Determining whether the Iraqi EFL university learners observe or flout the maxims of politeness principle.
- 2) Assessing the mastery of the maxims of politeness principle by the Iraqi EFL university learners.
- 3) Identifying which maxim(s) of politeness principle is/are usually observed and/or flouted.

Depending on the aims of the study, it is hypothesized that:

- 1) The modesty maxim is the most observed maxim of the Iraqi EFL university learners' recognition of politeness principle.
- 2) The generosity maxim is the most flouted maxim of the Iraqi EFL university learners' recognition of politeness principle.
- 3) The Iraqi EFL university learners' flouting of the maxims of politeness principle is more than their observance of such maxims.

The study is limited to one hundred Iraqi EFL learners at the fourth-year, Dept. of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Thi-Qar for the academic year (2021-2022) who are selected randomly to be the sample of the study. Leech's politeness principle (1983) and (2014) is adopted for this study to test the students' performance at the recognition level.

The following procedure is adopted in this study:

- 1) Providing a theoretical background knowledge about politeness theory and Leech's politeness principle.
- 2) For the purpose of data elicitation, a written test is constructed, taking into consideration the validity and reliability of the test.
- 3) Choosing randomly a sample of one hundred Iraqi EFL learners at the fourth-year, Dept. of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Thi-Qar, at the Academic Year (2021-2022).
- 4) The test is implemented on the selected participants.
- 5) The data is analyzed mathematically to provide the results and conclusions of the study.

It is hoped that this study will be beneficial for researchers and teachers, at the Colleges of Education for Humanities, to pay close attention to EFL learners in order to recognize their weaknesses and assign remedial work, and to all departments in which English as a foreign language is taught, Colleges of Education for Humanities, Colleges of Arts, Colleges of Basic Education in Iraq. This study can also aid textbooks and curriculum planners in emphasizing the importance of offering exercises that promote the use of politeness strategies, which play an important role in daily communication.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Pragmatics, Pragmatic Competence and Politeness

Speaking about language from a functional perspective, i.e., as a means of communication, means that we are talking about language with respect to pragmatics. According to Huang (2017, p. 155), pragmatics is “the study of language use in context”. So, pragmatics refers to the study of the communicative use of the language, giving much attention to the relationship between “**sentences** and the context and situations of **sentences** use” (Supri & Rahmatiany, 2021, p. 402).

*I have got a headache.*

This utterance, according to O’keeffe et al. (2011, pp. 1-2), has a number of meanings depending on when it is uttered, who uses it, who the speaker is conversing with, and so on.

-If it is said during medical examination by a patient to a doctor, it means; “*I need a prescription*”.

- It could mean; “*Turn down the music*”, if it is said by a mother to her teenage son.

-It could mean; “*I was partying last night*” (ibid), if two friends are talking.

So, this utterance is interpreted differently with respect to the context in which it is said. It may be considered as an order, a complaint (or a refusal). This refers to the fact that in all languages, the form (or what is said) is different from the content (or what is meant).

Frankel and Wood (2011, p. 90) define misunderstanding as the listener’s inaccurate interpretation of the utterance accompanied by a lack of knowledge of the interpretation, of the speaker’s intended utterance (Betti & Mahdi, 2020, p. 74).

Politeness comes to be considered as one of the most important and deep concepts in pragmatics that provides an explanation of the factors that cause the variation in what we are saying throughout communication and how our speech is interpreted by the H (hearer) (see appendix 1), influenced by different contextual factors. Throughout communication, people strive to achieve their personal goals and desires on the one hand, and try to keep and preserve comity and good relationships on the other hand. As a result, different speech acts are used with various illocutionary goals (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 754; Maharani, 2017, p. 1).

The study of speech acts and how learners of second/foreign language learn to perform various illocutionary functions or acts constitute important components of communicative competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 2005, p. 68). According to Koike (1989, p. 279), pragmatic competence is “the speaker’s knowledge and use of rules of appropriateness and politeness, which govern the way the speaker will understand and formulate speech acts”. Without pragmatic competence, interlocutors may be unable to comprehend each other, resulting in communication failure.

Politeness refers to a reciprocal respect and regard for the feelings or face wants of others and it is one significant reason for mitigating the “blatant imposition” of one’s desires on others (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015, p. 5). Crystal (2008, p. 373) provides a definition for politeness as “a term which characterizes linguistic features mediating norms of social behavior, in relation to such notions as courtesy, rapport, deference and distance”. According to this definition, politeness is considered as linguistic resources that

are employed for various social purposes. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), Lackoff (1973), and Leech (1983), linguistically, politeness comprises a number of different rules or strategies that are used to preserve comity and avoid interpersonal conflict. Those linguists depend on speech act theory and the cooperative principle and its maxims (Vine, 2018, p. 66). So politeness is a social judgment and context dependent to a large extent. Consequently, the knowledge of the language user is not only represented by the grammatical rules, but also it includes the knowledge of the appropriate use of the language in terms of what is said, how, to whom and other external factors, social, as well as psychological variables (Mey, 2009, pp. 92-93; and Betti & Al-Jubouri, 2015, p. 28).

### *2.2 Lakoff's Theory*

In 1973, Lakoff began the modern study of politeness from a pragmatic perspective, adapting Grice's cooperative principle (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 24): "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged". That regulates conversations and how people behave and interact with each other. Watts states that Lakoff was the first who suggests that maxims of Grice's CP are insufficient and should be reformulated in the form of pragmatic rules that determine or classify utterances as "well-formed" or "non-well formed" (Lakoff, 1973, p. 296; Dynel, 2009, p. 26). Lakoff limits Gracie's conversational maxims (quantity, quality, manner, relation) that she recalls "rules of conversation" into two rules of pragmatic competence which are: be clear and be polite. The first rule "Be clear" is formulated with respect to Grice's CP and the second one "Be polite" being formulated with respect to politeness principle (Culpeper & Haugh, 2014, p. 203). While the Grice's maxims represent the clarity requirement, rules of politeness that are suggested and formulated by Lakoff are viewed as the "rules of rapport" which are (Huang, 2017, p. 385):

- 1). Do not impose.
- 2). Give options.
- 3). Feel good, be friendly

These rules of politeness guide interaction. The observance of these rules of politeness represents the reason that underlies the choice of certain expression rather than another (Ibid).

### *2.3 Brown and Levinson's Strategies*

Brown and Levinson's theory shows a clear connection between CP and the notion of "face" that is adopted by Goffman (1969) as the starting point to the study of politeness (D'haut, Ostman, & verschaeren, 2009, p. 160). According to Brown and Levinson, "It is the mutual awareness of 'face' sensitivity, and the kind of means-ends reasoning, that together with the CP allow the inference of implicatures of politeness". "Face" is defined as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61; Geyer, 2008, p. 16). Spencer-Oatey (2008, pp. 12-13) states that according to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two dimensions for "face"; Negative Face and Positive Face. According to Brown and Levinson, a large amount of speech acts can be considered as, inveterately, face-threatening to the speakers' face such as; hearer's thanks, hearer's excuse,

acceptance of compliment, apologies. Or on the other hand, acts that threaten the hearers' face such as; suggestion, advice, promises, expression of compliment (Gotti, 2018, p. 32).

Brown and Levinson's theory is associated with two important notions: face threatening acts (FTAs) which are considered the kinds of speech acts that receive the most attention within politeness theory and politeness strategies (Jucker & Taavitsainen, 2008, p. 7). Moreover, they adopt what they have called "Model Person" that has two important characteristics; rationality and face. They define 'rationality' as "the application of a specific mode of reasoning...which guarantees inferences from ends or goals to means that will satisfy those ends" (Brown & Levinson, 1983, p. 58; Slman & Betti, 2020, p. 222).

In such a case "politeness strategies" are required in order to mitigate and lessen the threat by using the appropriate language. These strategies are:

1) Bald on-record strategy which is very direct as the speaker will focus on the propositional content of the interpersonal aspect of what is said for examples imperatives:

Wash your hands. (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 100)

When speakers are obliged to do the act "on-record", there will be two options. They may perform it with or without redressive action that seeks to stress the negative or positive face (Rasaler, 2016, p. 45). One of the most important factors that determines the use of bald on-record is the social distance and how well the speaker knows the hearer. As a result, it is usually used in family situation.

2). Positive politeness: The speaker tries to create a kind of solidarity and mitigates or lessens the threat to the hearer's positive face, making him/her feel comfortable about her/himself or their properties. Such strategies are used in situations where the participants know each other or in group of friends in order to demonstrate friendliness such as hedging, statement of friendship, and compliments (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 103).

How about shutting the door for us! (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990, p. 720)

3). Negative Politeness: Locastro (2012, p. 139) states that "negative politeness" does not mean that the speaker is impolite, but s/he adopts it in order to indicate that there is a social distance between speaker and hearer. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), these strategies are performed to avoid imposing on the hearer. This means the risk of face threat on the hearer is reduced:

You don't have any envelopes, do you? (Locastro, 2012, p. 14)

4) Off record: According to Brown and Levinson (1978, p. 216), by performing off record strategy, "the actor leaves it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret the act". This means the speaker is relying upon the hearer's ability to understand and interpret his/her intended meaning although it is indirectly suggested. In this case, the hearer's face is not threatened (Verschueren, 1999, p. 25).

A- Well, How do I look?

B- Your shoes are nice.....

5) Don't do the FTA: The speaker sometimes avoids performing FTA as it is very serious (Culpepre & Haugh, 2014, p. 211).

## 2.4 Leech's Theory

According to Leech (1983), politeness is considered very important in order to understand “why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean” (Leech, 1983, p. 80; and Dynel, 2009, p. 28). It can be represented by various strategies that are used to avoid conflict and it can be measured in terms of how much effort is made into avoiding a conflict situation and establishing and maintaining comity (Locher & Jucker, 2017, p. 427). Leech differentiates between “absolute politeness” which is a number of scales that have negative and positive poles, for example, order which is impolite and offer which is polite. According to this scale, utterances are ordered out of context. For example, an expression “can you help me?” is judged as more polite than “help me” because the request that takes the question form offers more options to the hearer (Leech, 2007, p. 7; Clupeper, 2011, p. 124). On the other hand, “relative politeness” scale is related or associated with contexts or situations. It is possible for the expression that is judged as polite according to the absolute politeness will be judged as less polite according to this scale, such as; “Could I possibly interrupt?” may be considered as too polite, but if it is said to members of a family that monopolizing the conversation, it will be judged as less polite or possibly ironic. Relative politeness is sensitive to context (Leech, 2007, p. 7).

## 2.5 Politeness Principle

### 2.5.1 Definition and Functions of Illocutionary Actions

Leech (1983) produces politeness principle as an independent pragmatic principle, “Coordinate Construct to the cooperative principle” (Leech, 1983, p. 79; and Kiesling & Bratt Paulston, 2005, p. 60). According to Leech, politeness principle is important to provide an account of why people sometimes do not observe the maxims of the cooperative principle which explain the way that people create implicature in conversation by non-observing one or more than one of those maxims to achieve different purposes (Leech, 1983, p. 81; Bousfield, 2008, p. 47). According to Leech, speakers frequently communicate more than what they say. For instance:

“Many of the delegates opposed the motion.”

By saying such a sentence, the speaker means that not all the delegates voted against the motion and at the same time not all of them with it (Leech, 1983, p. 9; and Wang, 2009, p. 296). Leech (2008, pp. 91-92) argues that, in order for the participants to be polite in communication or their interaction they are required to take over strategies of increasing “polite beliefs” and decreasing “impolite beliefs”. Politeness principle is represented in the negative imperative “Do not offend others” in addition to the positive imperative “Be nice to others” (Leech, 2008, p. 91; and Felemban, 2012). So, according to Leech (1983, p. 81), the general function of the politeness principle is to “minimize the expression of impolite beliefs” which is the negative version, and the positive version which is to “maximize the expression of polite beliefs”.

According to Leech, depending on the relationship between the illocutionary functions or the speaker's goals and the social goals of establishing and preserving civility, the functions of illocutionary actions may be classified into four types (Leech, 1983, p. 104; Supri & Rahmatiany, 2021, p. 403):

a- Competitive: The illocutionary goal and the social goal are in competition; “The illocutionary goal competes with the social goal” for instance ordering, demanding, asking.

b- Convivial: “The illocutionary goal is related to or coincides with the social goal”, for instance, inviting, offering, thanking and greeting.

c- Collaborative: “The illocutionary goal is irrelevant or indifferent to the social goal” like; reporting, asserting, announcing and instructing.

d- Conflictive: There is a conflict between the social goal and the illocutionary goal; “The illocutionary goal conflicts with the social goal” such as; threatening, cursing, accusing.

According to the model of politeness that is developed by Leech (1983, p. 132), politeness is a scalar phenomenon, it can be measured employing certain types of scales which are:

- 1) Cost-Benefit scale: illocutions are estimated depending on the cost or benefit of them to speaker or to hearer.
- 2) Optionality Scale: illocutions are ranked on this scale depending on how much options a speaker allows to hearer.
- 3) Indirectness scale: illocutions are sorted or arranged depending on the length of the path (means-ends analysis) linking the illocutionary act to its illocutionary goal. According to this scale, the more indirect the act is, the more polite it is (Felemban, 2012, p. 72).
- 4) Authority scale: Sometimes, authority scale is referred to as the power-solidarity scale that demonstrates the degree of distance between the speaker and hearer with respect to power over each other (Felemban, 2012, p. 72).
- 5) Social scale: Social scale gives information about the amount of solidarity between speakers and hearers (Marques, 2000, p. 9).

#### 2.5.2 Maxims of Politeness Principle

Leech (2008, p. 92) argues that polite conversation involves asymmetries that can be represented as follows: “*whatever is polite belief for the speaker is an impolite belief for the hearer*”. These asymmetries can be elaborated through the maxims of politeness principle that deal with polite behavior suggesting that politeness is associated with the relationship between self and other: two terms that are used to refer to participants in conversation. Self is usually associated or refers to speaker while other refers to hearer taking into consideration that speakers “show politeness to third parties, who may or may not be presented in the speech situation” (Leech, 1983, p. 132). Leech (2014, p. 90) proposes a superconstraint that comprehends all other maxims:

*“General strategy of politeness: in order to be polite, S expresses or implies meanings that associate a favorable value with O or what pertains to O or associates an unfavorable value with S or with what pertains to S”* (S = Self, Speaker and O = Other, hearer) (Orsini-Jones & Lee, 2018, p. 29).

General strategy of politeness is important in conversation as it helps S to avoid offense because both participants are “leaning over back words” to evade the disagreement that would emerge if each participant wants to achieve his/her goal regardless or without respect to others (Leech, 2014, p. 90). It

is also possible for the participant to “lean forward” in an opposite direction to conciliate O via politeness taking into consideration that Leech talks about communication of meaning because pragmatics is concerned with communicative behavior and according to Leech politeness, pragmatically speaking, is “a matter of conveying meanings in accord with the GSP” (Ibid). According to Leech (2014), the maxims of politeness principle: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy, consideration, S’s obligation to O, O’s obligation to S, feeling-reticence, opinion-reticence, can be considered as different manifestations of the GSP which is a super-strategy or supermaxim.

### **1) Tact maxim**

The tact maxim is represented as follows: “minimize the expression of beliefs which imply cost to other; Maximize the expression of beliefs which imply benefit to other” (Leech, 1983, p. 132; Thomas, 1995, p. 160).

“It is raining very hard and the driver(D), stops to offer a walker(W) a lift.” (situation)

D: Do you want a lift?

W: Well, if you’re going near the campsite, yes please. (Thomas, 1995, p. 132)

In this example, the walker reduces the degree of imposition or cost on the hearer by using an indirect way, which implies that he will accept a lift to the campsite if the driver goes to that place. In 2014, Leech reformulates this maxim to be called a constraint that “Gives a low value to S’s wants”. It can be represented by the requests that are usually formulated in indirect, tentative way, giving a chance to reject, in addition to lessen S’s force on H (Leech, 2014, p. 93):

A: I don’t want write the topic, will you write?

B: Well, I like, but I can’t

In this example, the speaker uses the tact maxim in order to give the H a chance to accept or refuse to write by using an indirect request.

### **2) Generosity Maxim**

The generosity maxim is stated as follows: “Minimize the expression of benefit to self: Maximize the expression of cost to self”. According to Leech, in practice, it is easy to distinguish ‘other-centered’ maxim of tact from the ‘self-centered’ maxim of generosity (Leech, 1983, p. 133; Thomas, 1995, p. 162), for instance;

You must come and have dinner with us.

This example is polite, because it involves benefit to the hearer on the one hand and cost to speaker on the other (less important). This maxim is reformulated by Leech (2014) as a constraint which “Gives a high value to Os’ wants”. It can be represented by, for instance, offering, inviting and promising someone to do something in a direct way or even impositioning way (Leech, 2014, p. 92).

Sit down, I will clean the room.

In this example, the speaker offers himself to clean the room. The speaker performs the generosity maxim as he maximizes cost to self and minimizes benefit to self (give high value to O’s wants).

### 3) *Approbation Maxim*

This maxim is stated as follows: “Minimize dispraise of other; Maximize praise of other.” The negative aspect of this maxim is more important, as it says “avoid saying unpleasant things about others, and more particularly about the H”. Sometimes, we violate one of the maxims of CP in order to preserve a maxim of PP for example, we do not want to say something bad about a third party as it is the case (Leech, 1983, p. 135);

A: Her performance was awesome, wasn't it?

B: Was it?

Here, B violates the maxim of quantity in order not to say something that may be rude about the third party, creating an implicature. This is an uncertain opinion. The impolite implicature is derived from the question which can be considered as if s/he is not sure about such a judgment. This maxim is reformulated by Leech in (2014) to be a constraint that “Gives a high value to Os' qualities”, for instance mutually paying complements, if it looks suitable to do so.

Your dress looks so lovely.

On the contrary, when O is criticized, this criticism must be hedged and reduced (Leech, 2014, p. 94).

you could have done better.

It was not terribly good.

### 4) *Modesty Maxim*

The modesty maxim is worded as follows: “Minimize praise to self; maximize dispraise of self”. According to this maxim, it is predictable that participants will be humble by decreasing the compliment of them (Leech, 1983, p. 136), for instance;

‘Well done! What a wonderful performance! I wish I could sing as well as that’

In this example, by saying, “I wish I could sing as well as that”, the speaker dispraises himself and increases commendation of other. The speaker underestimates his ability of performance for the purpose of highlighting the hearer's ability (Noviani, 2014, p. 23). Leech (2014) reformulates this maxim as a maxim or the constraint that “Gives a low value to Ss' qualities”. Usually, “self- deprecation” is considered to be polite (Leech, 2014, p. 94).

A: I am so stupid, I forget your pen.

B: Oh, no you aren't stupid. (Leech, 1983, p. 136)

In such case, the lowliness or humility in the S's utterances evolves refusal from H that is associated with approbation. This type of “self- deprecation” is usually referred to as “fishing for compliments” (Leech, 2014, p. 94).

### 5) *Agreement Maxim*

Agreement maxim can be represented by following the strategy of reducing the expression of disagreement between self and other, rising or maximizing the expression of agreement.

A: It was an interesting exhibition, wasn't it?

B: No, it was very uninteresting. (Leech, 1987, p. 138)

Such an answer is considered impolite as the student violates the maxim of agreement and directly disagrees, or rejects A's opinion.

A: Tom and Mike are quite naughty.

B: Yes, Mike is. (polite)

In this example, speaker B observes the maxim of agreement by attempting to express his/her agreement partially, so that s/he reduces the disagreement with the other party (Wang, 2009, p. 291). In 2014, this maxim is reformulated to be a constraint that: "Gives a high value to O's opinions".

### **6) Sympathy Maxim**

This maxim explains why, despite the fact that condolences indicate unpleasant feelings towards the hearer, congratulations and condolences are respectful speech acts (Leech, 1983, p. 138). Sympathy maxim is represented by reducing or decreasing antipathy between self and other, and increasing sympathy between self and other. This means that what is achieved by other must be admired, evaluated and respected. On the contrary side, the disaster or the adversity to other must be given sympathy and commiseration (Maharani, 2017, p. 4).

I am so happy that you pass the exam.

I feel sorry about losing the match.

In the first example, the speaker performs the sympathy maxim by congratulating and appreciating that the other passes the exam. In the second, the use of the word 'sorry' expresses the speaker's observance of the sympathy maxim and shows his commiseration (Ibid). This maxim is reformulated in 2014 as a constraint that "Gives a high value on O's feelings". It is needed in order to explain our concerning of other people's feelings in speech acts such as congratulations and consolation. Sharing people their feelings reveals that you are polite. Speech acts such as, good wishes, consolation and congratulations are all "Courteous speech acts" that need no attenuation, for example; Well done, Enjoy your holiday, Have a good day! (Leech, 2014, p. 97).

On the contrary side, expressions that express sadness, such as; "I was so sorry to hear about your sister" (Leech, 2014, p. 98). Such an example shows the S's sympathy and regard or solicitude.

How's your father? I wish he is feeling good...

### **7) Consideration Maxim**

This maxim is presented by Leech as a separate principle. It is put as follow: "Minimize the hearer's discomfort/displeasure: Maximize the hearer's comfort/pleasure" (Leech, 1983, p. 147). Within consideration maxim, different devices can be used to express negative politeness. For instance, references to painful, saddening, or embarrassing events, facts or things that are shocking. Moreover, this sub-maxim can be manifested through euphemism, where indirectness is used in order to avoid offence (Cruse, 2000, p. 366).

I was sorry to hear about your husband.

\*I was sorry to hear about your husband's death.

According to Leech (1983, p. 147), the other aspect of this principle can be represented by the tendency

to minimize the degree to which things look bad. For example, the use of the “minimizing adverbials of degree” such as a **little bit**, **a bit** and **a little**.

The paint was a bit dirty.

\*The paint was a bit clean.

### **8) Obligation of Speaker to Other**

This maxim is stated as follows: “Give a high value to S’s obligation to O” and it is called obligation of S to O maxim. When the speaker apologizes to the H for a certain iniquity, for instance, he/she performs speech acts that give high prominence to S’s fault and obligation to O. For instance:

“I am terribly sorry”, “please excuse me.” Or “I am afraid I’ll have to leave early” (Ibid).

### **9) Obligation of Other to Speaker**

This maxim is stated as follows: “Give a low value to O’s obligation to O” and it is called obligation of O to S maxim. On the contrary to the obligation of S to O maxim, the fault is usually minimized by providing responses to apologies. For example:

“It is ok, don’t worry.”

The same thing with the debt that can be minimized by providing responses to thanks; like “That is all right.” and “No problem.” (Leech, 2014, p. 96).

### **10) Opinion-Reticence Maxim**

Opinion-reticence maxim is stated as follows: “Give a low value to S’s opinion”. People usually use propositional hedges like; I think, I guess or it might....., to indicate that they don’t provide a clear cut decision and to soft their opinion (Leech, 2014, p. 97).

A: It is a beautiful day!

B: Well, I think it is a bit hot. (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 123)

### **11) Feeling-Reticence Maxim**

Feeling-reticence maxim is stated as follows: “Give a low value to S’s feelings”. Speaker’s feelings are given a low value or consideration according to negative politeness constraint. For instance, Brown and Levinson (1978) say that in English, it seems that one shouldn’t acknowledge obviously that he is feeling bad(Ibid).

A: Hi, how are you?

B: Oh, fine, Actually though.....

## **3. Research Methodology**

This section presents some of the study methodological aspects which are related to the investigation of the Iraqi EFL university learners’ recognition of politeness principle.

### **3.1 The Participants**

One hundred Iraqi EFL students at the fourth-year for the academic year (2021-2022/morning studies) are selected randomly from the Dept. of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Thi-Qar. The researcher takes into consideration the fact that the participants are homogeneous in their

first language, Arabic and in the foreign language they are studying, EFL. In addition, there is no other foreign language they are exposed to.

### *3.2 Description of Data Elicitation Tool*

The tool that is used for the data elicitation in this study is a test. It is designed with respect to the nature and aims of the study. The test takes the form of multiple choice to test the students' recognition level. The informants are asked to choose the correct answer. It comprises eleven situations, each situation is supplied with four alternatives. One of the alternatives is the true response whereby one or more than one maxim of Leech's politeness principle is/are observed. The other three ones are flouting one or more of Leech's eleven maxims of politeness principle; tact, consideration, approbation, agreement, generosity, sympathy, obligation of S to O, modesty, feeling-reticence, obligation of O to S, approbation, and opinion-reticence maxims.

The fact that Leech's approach of politeness is a goal-oriented approach is taken into consideration. This means that S has a purpose in using certain utterances which is to give an impression of courtesy toward O (Leech, 2014, p. 87). According to Leech (2014, p. 89), the maxims of politeness principle represent the goals people strive for in order to maintain communication harmony. It is presumed that we have goals in mind which we try to achieve, some of them are illocutionary goals such as asking permission, requesting something, giving advice etc. as well as social goal which is sustaining good interpersonal communication. According to Leech, the context or the situation, in which speaking activities take place, is very important as it determines the kinds and degrees of politeness (Leech, 2014, p. 5). To clarify this recognition test, all the items are explained separately (See Appendix 2):

Item (1) tests the Iraqi EFL university learners' ability in recognizing the tact maxim. For this situation, **(a)** is the most appropriate answer because it observes the tact maxim and at the same time it does not violate any of the maxims of politeness principle. In addition to the use of the expression "**please**", the speaker formulates his request indirectly "**Would you give me your pen, please?**", as a result s/he increases the degree of politeness. S/he observes the tact maxim and gives the other party more optionality, minimizing cost to H and maximizing benefit to H. On the other hand, the other alternatives are not considered polite as they are formulated directly and the hearer is given little if no chance to refuse the request as a result, if the testee selects one of them s/he will violate the tact maxim.

Item (2) tests the informants' ability to recognize the consideration maxim. In this second situation, **c. "The painting is a bit bad"** is considered the most appropriate response as it observes or consideration maxim and does not violate any of the maxims of politeness principle. According to this maxim, in order for the participants to be polite in a conversation, they should try to avoid unpleasant topics and look on the bright side of life rather than the gloomy side, as a result they have the tendency to lessen the degree to which things look bad. So, "a bit bad" is more polite than "bad", "not good", and "horrible" which are impolite as they violate consideration maxim. At the same time they violate approbation maxim and opinion-reticence maxim that constraint the participants in a conversation to understate any criticism.

Item (3) tests the informants' recognition of the agreement maxim. In this situation, **d. "Well, I think it would be a better idea if I were free."** is the most polite and appropriate response because the agreement maxim will be observed and the testee does not violate any of the maxims of politeness principle. S/he does not express his/her disagreement directly so that s/he increases the degree of politeness by providing an indirect disagreement which is preceded by the temporizing expression "well". The other alternatives are not polite because they violate the agreement maxim through the direct disagreement which is the dispreferred response.

Item (4) tests the Iraqi EFL university learners' ability to recognize the generosity maxim. For this situation, **a. "Relax and let me clean the whiteboard and write the subject."** is the most appropriate response because in the case of offering, the more direct form is the more polite one. It appears that there is no sacrifice is made by the offerer so that accepting the offer will be less impolite for the H. If the testee chooses this alternative, s/he will observe the generosity because the speaker minimizes benefit to self and maximizes cost to self. At the same time, s/he minimizes cost to other and maximizes benefit to other. The other alternatives are less appropriate as they flout the generosity maxim, and show that the speaker makes some sort of sacrifice so that it will be impolite for the hearer to accept the offer.

Item (5) tests the informants' use of the sympathy maxim. In this situation, **d. "I am so terribly sorry to hear about your father. I hope he will get better"** is the appropriate response because it observes the sympathy maxim which constraints the participants in a conversation to give a high value to others' feelings and at the same time it does not violate any of the other maxims of politeness principle. The use of the word "sorry" which is intensified by the use of the adverb "terribly" shows the speaker's commiseration and increases the degree of sympathy between self and other. On the other hand, the other alternatives are considered less polite and less appropriate as they violate the sympathy maxim and show that the speaker does not care about the other's adversity.

Item (6) tests the Iraqi EFL university learners' recognition of S's obligation to O maxim. The most appropriate response for this situation is **b. "I hope this is not going to bother you, I have some work that I have to do."** If the testee chooses this alternative, s/he will observe the obligation of S to O constraint or maxim that gives high value to the speaker's fault and his/her obligation to the hearer and at the same time it does not violate the other maxims of politeness principle. The speaker apologizes for the other party politely using indirect speech act in order to mitigate the offensive effect of the direct refusal. The other alternatives are impolite because they refuse the invitation directly. Thus, they violate the obligation of the S to O maxim.

Item (7) tests the Iraqi EFL university learners' recognition of the modesty maxim. For this situation **a. "Oh, it's just something I picked up in a Sale."** is the polite and appropriate response because it observes the modesty maxim and does not violate any of the maxims of politeness principle. According to this maxim, participants in a conversation minimize praise of self and maximize dispraise of self. That means self-deprecation is considered polite. The speaker uses a remark that lessen the attribution of value to him/herself and attributes it to luck. On the contrary, the other alternatives are considered less polite

because they violate the modesty maxim and indicate that the speaker is proud of what s/he wears and did not care about the principle of humility.

Item (8) tests the informants' recognition of the feeling-reticence maxim. The most polite and appropriate response for the this situation is **d. "Good, everything is okay."** By saying such statement the speaker gives low value to his/her feeling and suppresses everything bad, as a result s/he observes the feeling-reticence constraint or maxim. According to this maxim, people should hide their sadness and problems when they talk to others, they should only show positive feelings. On the other hand, the other alternatives are considered less polite and inappropriate as they express the speaker's feelings and sufferings directly and violate the feeling- reticence constraint.

Item (9) tests the Iraqi EFL learners' recognition of the O's obligation to O maxim. In this situation **c. "Don't worry, it was nothing"** is the polite and appropriate answer. If the testee chooses this alternatives, s/he will observe the obligation of O to S constraint or maxim. S/he accepts the obligation and minimizes the fault. If the testee chooses **(a)** or **(b)**, s/he will violate the obligation of O to S and agreement maxims because s/he express about his/her annoyance directly which is inappropriate and impolite behavior. The testee will seem to be polite if s/he chooses **(d)** but actually s/he is not polite. In fact, by saying such expression "That is all what I wanted" ironically, the speaker violates the quality maxim and says the opposite of the truth. S/he does not express about his/her dissatisfaction directly, instead s/he creates an implicature that makes him/her looks to be polite.

Item (10) tests the Iraqi EFL learners' recognition of the approbation maxim. In this situation, **d. "Your performance was not terribly good."** is the polite and appropriate response because it observes the approbation, at the same time it does not violate any of the maxims of politeness principle. This maxim constraints the speaker to minimize dispraise of other, maximize praise of other and avoid saying something bad about the hearer. As a result s/he softens and hedges his/her criticism "was not terribly good". On the other hand, the other alternatives are inappropriate and impolite as the speaker violates the consideration, approbation and modesty maxims. S/he speaks directly, saying something unpleasant as if s/he is more experienced, or has a dominant role. S/he minimizes praise of other and maximizes dispraise of other by saying bad expressions about the other's performance.

Item (11) tests the informants' recognition of the opinion-reticence maxim. In this situation, **b. "I think it might be better if you wear a white dress."** is the most appropriate response as it observes opinion-reticence maxim. The speaker tries to avoid saying something bad about the speaker, minimize dispraise of other and softens his/her opinion by using propositional hedge "I think it would be better..." and speaking indirectly in order to be more polite. on the contrary side, the other alternatives are impolite because they express the speaker's opinion about the hearer directly, something which is offensive and rude.

### 3.3 Test Objectives, Validity and Reliability

The test is constructed in order to achieve the following objectives:

- 1). Testing the mastery of the Iraqi EFL learners of the maxims of the politeness principle at the recognition production level.
- 2). Examining the Iraqi EFL learner's ability to observe or flout the maxims of politeness principle.
- 3). Stating the maxim that is mostly flouted and the one that is least flouted in the recognition level.

Validity is one of the important qualities for a test in order to be described as a well-made test. The test is judged by a jury (See Appendix 3) comprised of a number of specialists in EFL teaching and linguistics in order to guarantee its validity. Regarding the reliability, the test is reliable because it is a multiple-choice question which is objective and highly reliable (Tavakoli, 2012, p. 417). The test is reliable because each item involves only one correct answer. Consequently, it does not affect by the testee's personal impression or by the tester's prejudices. This means it is an objective, highly reliable test (Fulcher, 2010, p. 57 and Tavakoli, 2012, p. 417).

### 3.4 Test Implementation

The test is tried out in order to give a general view about the necessary modifications and the required time for responding to the test. Four days before the test date, the pilot study is carried out on 2022/5/25 fourth-year students who are selected randomly from the University of Thi-Qar, College of Education for Humanities, Department of English. Following the pilot study, a number of points were settled down:

- 1). The time that is required to perform the test is an hour.
- 2). The students face some difficulties that were addressed, such as the difficulty in knowing the meaning of some words which necessitated some explanation to help them understand the meaning.
- 3). The original administration of the test does not need for modification.

The participants are requested to perform the test on Wednesday 25 of May 2022. The total number of the students who participate in the test is one hundred at the fourth year, Dept. of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Thi-Qar for the academic year (2021-2022). The participants ought to fill out the test sheet with their answers without mentioning their names for privacy.

## 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the practical side of this study. It concentrates on data analysis and discussion. The results are displayed by using tables and percentages.

### 4.1 Analysis and Discussion of Observing the Maxims of Politeness Principle in the Test

Observing the maxims refers to the correct responses that are provided by the participants who observe one (or more than one) maxim of politeness principle. The test is designed in order to discover the Iraqi EFL learners' ability to recognize which maxims should be respected in certain situations in order to achieve a certain personal goal and at the same time to maintain comity and good relationship with others. There are four alternatives for each item, one of them is the correct response because it observes one or

more than one maxim of the politeness principle. The other three ones are incorrect and represent flouting the maxims of the politeness principle.

The learners, throughout their interaction, should take into consideration the fact that there are a number of constraints that must be respected such as giving high value to others' wants, giving high value to others' qualities and giving low value to the obligation of O to S, etc. Table 1 contains the numbers and the letters of the correct responses (observing the maxims) for each item and shows the results of observing the maxims of politeness principle for the eleven items of the recognition question.

**Table 1. The Frequency and Percentages of the Participants' Observing the Maxims of Politeness Principle**

Item	Observing the Maxims	%
No.		
1.a	55	5
2.c	29	2.64
3.d	27	2.45
4.a	18	1.64
5.d	36	3.27
6.b	56	5.09
7.a	5	0.45
8.d	66	6
9.c	56	5.09
10.d	14	1.27
11.b	37	3.36
Total	399/1100	36.27

The above table shows that the total number of the correct responses that observe the maxims of the politeness principle is (399) out of (1100) responses, making 36.27%. The highest frequency of the correct responses is represented by item (8.d), 66 occurrences. It is formulated as follows:

**8-What would you say if your colleague says to you “how are you?”**

a- I feel uncomfortable.

b- I am annoyed. Actually there are some problems that might be bypassed.

c- Not fine.

d- Good, everything is okay.

The feeling-reticence maxim is the observed maxim in this situation. It is considered the highest among the other correct responses of the items because such a situation is easy for the learners to deal with as the learners see it is unnecessary to inform others about their feeling especially when it is a sad feeling and suffering which is something inappropriate. As a result, d is considered the most appropriate and polite response because it observes the feeling-reticence maxim. The speaker gives low value to his feeling, admitting that s/he feels good though s/he may have some problems. So, this result refutes hypothesis (1) thus, “the feeling-reticence maxim is the most observed maxims of the Iraqi EFL learners’ recognition of politeness principle”. Most participants do not prefer to express about their suffering and sad feelings directly, or make others aware of their problems. As a result, they suppress these sad feelings or bad news.

Coming less than (8.d) is 9.c, (56) occurrences in which, the O’s obligation to S maxim is observed because in such a situation, the learners find it is necessary and more appropriate to show that they are tolerant by mitigating the fault of others when they apologize in order for the communication to go on and be successful:

**9-What would you say if someone apologizes for stepping on your foot, saying: “I am terribly sorry, I hope that you do not hurt”.**

a- Oh, you really hurt me.

b- That is so hard.

c- Don’t worry, it was nothing.

d- That is what I wanted.

This maxim constrains the participants in a conversation to give low value to the obligation of the hearer, and minimize the fault by providing responses such as: It is OK, It was nothing, etc. The same case is with thanks which must be answered with expressions that minimize the debt such as: It was a pleasure, You’re welcome etc. Accordingly, c is considered the most appropriate response as it observes the obligation of O to S maxim, the speaker minimizes the fault of the speaker by giving it low value saying “Don’t worry, it was nothing”.

Similarly, in item 6.b, there are (56) occurrences in which the S’ obligation to O maxim is observed:

**6-when your colleague invites you to come to his/her birthday party, but you can’t go because you have some work that you have to do. What would you say?**

- a- I can't come to your birthday party.  
 b- I hope this is not going to bother you, I have some work that I have to do.  
 c- I think I do not have time to come.  
 d- I have some work to be done

It is a common habit that the learners apologize where it is necessary. The obligation of S to O maxim gives high value to the speaker's obligation to the hearer. Accordingly, b is the most appropriate and polite response for item (6) because it observes the apology of S to O maxim. The speaker apologizes directly that s/he has some work as a result s/he cannot go to the birthday party.

#### *4.2 Analysis and Discussion of Flouting the Maxims of Politeness Principle in the Test*

Flouting is the term that can be used in analyzing the incorrect responses that are selected by the participants who do not observe one or more than one maxim of the politeness principle. For example, flouting the tact maxim means that it is not observed by the informants and so on and so forth. Flouting the tact maxim is done by formulating their requests directly, flouting the agreement maxim by expressing disagreement directly, or flouting the sympathy maxim by neglecting the feeling of others, etc. The term flouting is appropriate to be used because the participants do not have intentions in the non-observance of the maxims of politeness principle. The following table shows the frequency and percentages of flouting the maxims in the recognition question:

**Table 2. The Frequency and Percentages of the Participants' Flouting the Maxims of Politeness principle**

Item No.	Flouting the Maxim	%
1.	45	4.09
2.	71	6.45
3.	73	6.64
4.	82	7.45
5.	64	5.82
6.	44	4
7.	95	8.64
8.	34	3.09

9.	44	4
10.	86	7.82
11.	63	5.73
Total	701/1100	63.73

From Table 2 above, the total number of the incorrect responses that flout the maxims of politeness principle is (701) out of (1100) responses, making 63.73%. Item 7 of the test is the highest frequency of the incorrect responses, 95 occurrences, in which most learners flout the modesty maxim, as they do not prefer to dispraise themselves:

**7-What would you say if your friend said to you “I really like your outfit”.**

a- Oh, it’s just something I picked up in a sale.

b- Oh, thank you.

c- Yes, it is beautiful.

d- Oh, yes.

This indicates the participants’ lack of the sufficient pragmatic knowledge to observe such a maxim and how humility is important in certain situations to enable them to achieve different goals. As a result, they accept such a compliment without any attempt to deflect it, for example, by making a remark which mitigates the attribution of value to themselves or associate the value to lack. Thus hypothesis (2) is rejected: The modesty maxim is the most flouted maxim of Iraqi EFL learners’ recognition of politeness principle.

For this item (7), (a) is the most appropriate response as it observes the modesty maxim, only 5 occurrences. The speaker deflects the compliment and attribute the value and the beauty of his/her outlook to luck. On the contrary side, b c and d are less polite and inappropriate as they flout the modesty maxim, 95 occurrences. The speaker accepts the commendation without any attempt to deflect the compliment and lessen its power. According to this maxim, self-deprecation is always considered to be polite in contrast to the commendation of oneself which is inappropriate. Depending on what is prevalent in their society, the learners do not prefer, under the title of humility, to underestimate the value of themselves, or the value of someone or something that belongs to them. Additionally they do not have the sufficient pragmatic knowledge about the importance of such maxim that makes others see the speaker as a polite and humble person who deserves respect. As a result they do not give attention to it throughout their conversational interaction.

Coming less than (7) is item (10), 86 occurrences, in which the approbation maxim is flouted because the participants do not hedge their criticism, they maximize dispraise of other by criticizing him/her directly which is something impolite and inappropriate:

**10-What would you say if Your friend is not so good at English pronunciation, s/he must improve her/his performance.**

- a- Your performance was terrible.
- b- Your performance was not good.
- c-Your performance was not really up to standard.
- d- Your performance was not terribly good.

For this item, (d) is the appropriate and polite response as it observes the approbation maxim, 14 occurrences. The speaker mitigates the degree to which the other's performance is bad by saying "was not terribly good". On the other hand, a, b and c are less polite and inappropriate because the speaker criticizes the other directly as a result they flout the approbation maxim.

Then comes item (4), 82 occurrences, making 7.45%, in which the generosity maxim is flouted because the participants formulate their offers as if they made sacrifice then it will be less polite for the other to accept such an offer.

**4-If you want to help your teacher to clean the whiteboard and write the subject, what would you say?**

- a- Relax and let me clean the whiteboard and write the subject.
- b- I will clean the whiteboard and write the subject, if you can't.
- c- Let me clean the whiteboard and write the subject, if you like.
- e- If you want, I will clean the whiteboard and write the subject.

For this item, (a) is the most appropriate and polite response because it is formulated directly without any obvious sacrifice by the speaker. In contrast to the other alternatives b, c and d that make the speaker look as if s/he made some sort of sacrifice. As a result, they flout the generosity maxim.

Item 8 is the lowest item in its frequency, i.e. 34 occurrences in which some of the participants flout the feeling-reticence maxim by giving their feeling high value and expressing their suffering directly which is something inappropriate.

Accordingly, in the recognition question, the percentage of the incorrect responses is higher than the average, which indicates the participants' insufficiency to adhere to or comply with the constraints or maxims of politeness principle for a number of reasons: Firstly, the participants do not practise EFL sufficiently. Secondly, they lack the pragmatic competence which is necessary to the appropriate use of the language. Thirdly, they neglect most of the contextual factors that are important to use the language appropriately to understand the intended meaning of the language and then to respond correctly and appropriately.

*4.3 A Comparison of the Participants' Observing and Flouting of the Maxims of Politeness Principle in the Test*

After the analysis and discussion of observing and flouting the maxims of politeness principle by the participants in recognition, it is essential to make a comparison between the percentages of observing

and flouting these maxims in this question. The following table shows the results and percentages of observing and flouting the eleven maxims at the recognition question:

**Table 3. The Participants' Observing and Flouting the Maxims of Politeness principle**

Item No.	Observing the Maxims	%	Flouting the Maxims	%
1. Tact	55	5	45	4.09
2. Consideration	29	2.64	71	6.45
3. Agreement	27	2.45	73	6.64
4. Generosity	18	1.64	82	7.45
5. Sympathy	36	3.27	64	5.82
6. S's obligation to O	56	5.09	44	4
7. Modesty	5	0.45	95	8.64
8. Feeling- Reticence	66	6	34	3.09
9. O's obligation to S	56	5.09	44	4
10. Approbation	14	1.27	86	7.82
11. Opinion- Reticence	37	3.36	63	5.73
Total	399/1100	36.27	701/1100	63.73

The above table shows that the total number of the incorrect responses that flout the maxims of politeness principle is (701), constituting (63.73%) and, that of the correct responses that observe the maxims of politeness principle is (399), making (36.27%). This means that the participants' performance in

respecting the maxims of politeness principle is much less than the average and this is because of the lack of EFL practice in pragmatic competence and neglecting the contextual factors. This result confirms hypothesis (3) since the Iraqi EFL learners' flouting of the maxims of politeness principle in the recognition question is more than their observance of such maxims.

According to the table above, the occurrences of observing the tact maxim is 55 occurrences, and that of flouting the same maxim 45 ones. This means that, though Iraqi EFL university learners have some difficulty in recognizing which speech act is suitable to formulate their requests politely, a good deal of them are aware of how to be tactful by using indirect language that lessens the imposition on the hearer. They prefer to formulate their requests indirectly in order to not to obliged the hearer to do what s/he wants, giving him/her more optionality. Ordering someone to do something directly may be something offensive not only to the hearer but also to the speaker him/herself when it is refused by the other. According to the tact maxim, speakers in a conversation, should minimize cost to other, maximize benefit to other and give low value to their wants. As a result, they should formulate their requests indirectly by using indirect illocutions such as a hypothetical question to make a request or using expressions such as please or excuse me.

Twenty nine participants observe the consideration maxim and seventy one flout it. This result refers to the insufficient knowledge of the Iraqi EFL university learners about the consideration maxim that constraints the participants in a conversation to avoid talking about unpleasant topics, looking to the bright side of life and minimizing the degree to which things look bad. As a result, they must use euphemism to talk about unpleasant topics and use adverbials that minimize the negative effect of the expression to which they are attached. In most situations, Iraqi EFL university learners have difficulty to comply with the consideration maxim, they do not try to avoid unpleasant topics or minimize their criticism or the effect of their bad opinion about others or something related to others. Additionally, they usually tend to be pessimistic when they are speaking about how they will do in their exams and express directly about their criticism which is something inappropriate.

Regarding the agreement maxim, the number of occurrences of observing it is 27, and that of flouting it is 73 occurrences. In order for the participants to be polite in a conversation, according to this maxim, they should minimize disagreement with the hearer, maximize agreement with him/her, and give high value to the hearers' opinion. Iraqi EFL university learners do not have the necessary awareness about the agreement maxim, they do not always show their agreement with the other party as it is part of their social nature, many of them are, to some extent, strict with their opinion and decisions. As a result, they usually do not adhere to this maxim and it is normal for them to express their disagreement directly.

Regarding the generosity maxim, only 18 participants who observe it and 82 flout it. According to this maxim, the participants in a conversation should give high value to the others' wants, minimize benefit to self and maximize cost to self. This maxim can be represented by offers and invitations which involve benefit to the hearer. Thus, the majority of Iraqi EFL university learners do not always adhere to the

generosity maxim. They do not prefer to maximize benefit of others at the expense of themselves as a result they usually formulate offers in a way that makes it less polite for the hearer to accept.

The majority of participants flout the sympathy maxim (64: 36 occurrences). This means that the majority of Iraqi EFL university learners are not aware of and do not comply with the sympathy maxim that constrains the participants in a conversation to minimize antipathy between self and other, maximize sympathy between self and other and give high value to others' feelings. This maxim explains why congratulations and condolences are polite speech acts. This means sharing others' feelings is important, feeling happy for their happiness and feeling sad when they are so.

The majority of participants observe the S's obligation to O maxim, i.e. 56 occurrences, compared to those who flout it are 44 occurrences. This result indicates that the majority of Iraqi EFL university learners' have high awareness of the importance of apologizing to the other especially in formal situations, for example, when they are speaking with the teacher; a situation that requires the learners' awareness of the difference of the power and the social distance with teacher. The majority of Iraqi EFL university learners have a good knowledge about such a maxim that gives high value to the speaker's obligation to the hearer since it is a common habit to them to apologize directly to the other when it is necessary.

Regarding the modesty maxim, it is the least observed one. Only 5 participants observe the modesty maxim and 95 occurrences flout it. This indicates the lack of awareness and the insufficient knowledge of the Iraqi EFL university learners about the importance of such a maxim that constrains the participants in a conversation to give high value to the hearers' qualities and minimize praise of self because self-deprecation is always considered to be polite in contrast to the commendation of oneself which is impolite. It is a common habit in their society that they refuse to belittle themselves or the value of their qualities. The percentage of observing the feeling-reticence maxim is 6%, 66 occurrences indicates the high observance of the feeling-reticence maxim. As a result, it is considered the most observed maxim. This is because most Iraqi EFL university learners do not express their feelings directly. They prefer to keep their privacy and suppress their problems or what they feel. They are aware of this maxim that constrains the participants in a conversation to suppress their troubles, sad feeling, and bad news and express only their happy feelings.

Fifty six participants observe the O's obligation to O maxim, constituting 5.09%, and 44 of them flout it. This result refers to the Iraqi university EFL learners' awareness of such constraint, most of them adhere to it and see it is inappropriate to insist on others' fault or mistakes especially when other people express their obligation. This maxim constrains the participants in a conversation to give low value to the obligation of the hearer, and minimize the fault by providing responses such as: It is OK, It was nothing etc. The same case with thanks which must be answered with expressions that minimize the debt such as: It was a pleasure, You're welcome etc.

The majority of participants, 86, flout the approbation maxim. This is because most of Iraqi EFL university learners speak and express themselves directly even when they criticize others because of their insufficient knowledge about the importance of respecting such a maxim throughout the conversational

interaction in order to create an appropriate atmosphere, good relationship with the other and to get successful communication.

The number of participants who observe the opinion-reticence maxim is 37, constituting 3.36% and that of flouting it is 63, constituting 5.73%. This result indicates that part of the Iraqi EFL university learners do not give attention to others' feelings and express their opinion directly as if they are more experienced or have more power than the other which is something inappropriate. The opinion-reticence maxim constraints speakers to avoid saying something bad about the other. Their opinion should be softened by using, for example, propositional hedge and speaking indirectly, the thing that is not respected by some of the participants in answering both questions. They do not recognize how to express about their opinion politely depending on the context of conversation.

## 5. Conclusions

Depending on the results of the data analysis and discussion, this study arrives at a number of conclusions:

- 1) The feeling-reticence maxim is the most observed maxims of the Iraqi EFL university learners' recognition of politeness principle.
- 2) Regarding the feeling-reticence maxim, most participants do not prefer to express about their suffering and sad feelings directly, or make others aware of their problems. As a result, they suppress these sad feelings or bad news.
- 3) The most flouted maxim of Iraqi EFL university learners' recognition of politeness principle is the modesty maxim as they don't prefer to minimize praise of self and maximize praise of others.
- 4) The EFL learners' flouting of the maxims of politeness principle in the recognition question is more than their observance of such maxims. This is because of a number of reasons including the lack of EFL practice, the lack of pragmatic competence and neglecting the contextual factors.
- 5) Regarding the flouting of the consideration maxim, the Iraqi EFL learners' flouting of this maxim is more than their observance. They do not hedge their criticism, they maximize dispraise of other by criticizing him/her directly which is something impolite and inappropriate.
- 6) The Iraqi EFL learners' observance of O's obligation to S maxim is more than its flouting. Because of their awareness of such constraint, most of them see it is inappropriate to insist on others' fault or mistakes especially when other people express their obligation.
- 7) The Iraqi EFL learners' observance of the feeling-reticence maxim is more than its flouting. Most of them do not express their feelings directly. They prefer to keep their privacy and suppress their problems or what they feel.
- 8) The Iraqi EFL learners' observance of the modesty maxim is lower than its flouting. This refers to the insufficient knowledge of the Iraqi EFL learners about the importance of such maxim that constraints the participants in a conversation to give high value to the hearers' qualities and minimize praise of self because self-deprecation is always considered to be polite in contrast to the commendation of oneself

which is impolite. It is a common habit in their society that they refuse to belittle themselves or the value of their qualities.

9) The Iraqi EFL university learners' observance of the S's obligation to O maxim is higher than its flouting. Iraqi EFL learners have a good knowledge about such maxim that gives high value to the speaker's obligation to the hearer since it is a common habit to them to apologize directly to the other when it is necessary.

10) The Iraqi EFL university learners' observing of the sympathy maxim is higher than its flouting. This means that Iraqi EFL learners are aware of the sympathy maxim that constrains the participants in a conversation to minimize antipathy between self and other, maximize sympathy between self and other and give high value to others' feelings.

11) Regarding to the generosity maxim, the Iraqi EFL university learners' observance of this maxim is lower than its flouting. They do not always prefer to maximize benefit of others at the expense of themselves as a result they usually formulate offers in a way that makes it less polite for the hearer to accept.

12) The Iraqi EFL learners' observance of the agreement maxim is lower than its flouting. Iraqi EFL learners do not always show their agreement with the other party as it is part of their social nature, many of them are, to some extent, strict with their opinion and decisions. As a result, it is normal for them to express their disagreement directly.

13) The Iraqi EFL learners' observance of the consideration maxim is lower than its flouting. In most situations, Iraqi EFL learners do not try to avoid unpleasant topics or minimize their criticism or the effect of their bad opinion about others or something related to others. Additionally, they usually tend to be pessimistic when they are speaking about how they will do in their exams and express directly about their criticism which is something inappropriate.

14) The Iraqi EFL learners' observance of the tact maxim is higher than its flouting. Iraqi EFL learners have some difficulty in recognizing which speech act is suitable to formulate their requests politely, they are aware of how to be tactful by using indirect language that lessen the imposition on the hearer. They prefer to formulate their requests indirectly in order to not to obliged the hearer to do what s/he wants, giving him/her more optionality.

15) There is a difficulty that the participants experience through the reception and interpretation of different speech acts throughout communication and there is an insufficient ability to provide appropriate answers.

16) Iraqi EFL learners lack to some extent the pragmatic competence that is very important to use the foreign language appropriately. Students have to learn how to recognize these expressions appropriately with respect to the context of interaction (the social use of the language).

17) While Iraqi EFL learners are working to achieve their personal goals, Iraqi EFL learners do not give much attention, to some extent, to contextual factors and the social constraints such as the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, the degree of distance, and the amount of solidarity that have a great

effect on the language of the interlocutors that must be respected in order for successful communication to be carried out.

18) The participants' performance in recognizing the maxims of politeness principle is much less than the average and this is because of a number of reasons including the lack of EFL practice, the lack of pragmatic competence and neglecting the contextual factors.

19) The observing of the maxims of PP is very important as it creates a kind of smooth relationship between the learners on the one hand and between the learners and the teacher on the other.

20) EFL learners do not give much attention to most of the maxims of politeness principle when they are indulged in a conversation with their friends.

21) The Iraqi EFL learners' pragmatic performance is limited because the material that are used in Colleges of Education for Humanities lack the authentic language that is used in every day conversation.

### Acknowledgements

We acknowledge our indebtedness to the jury members who contributed to examine the validity and reliability of the test in this study. In addition, we are indebted to the subjects of our study, fourth year students at the Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Thi-Qar, for responding to our test.

### References

- Baker, P., & Ellece, S. (2011). *Key Terms in Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2005). *Contextualizing interlanguage pragmatics. Language in use: Cognitive and discourse perspectives on language and language learning* (pp. 65-84).  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410613776>
- Betti, M. J., & Al-Jubouri, C. F. (2015). *Approaches and Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. Diwaniya: Nippur.
- Betti, M. J., & Yaseen, K. S. (2020). The Iraqi EFL Learners' Use of Conversational Maxims at the University Level. *Education, Language and Sociology Research*, 1(1), 43-60.  
<https://doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v1n1p43>
- Betti, M. J., & Hasan, A. A. (2020). The Iraqi EFL Learners' Ability to Use Speech Acts in MA and Ph.D. Theses Defense. *Education, Language and Sociology Research*, 1(2), 41-65.  
<https://doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v1n2p41>
- Betti, M. J., & Mahdi, M. A. (2020). A Conversation Analysis of Repair Trouble Sources, Inadequacy and Positions in the Iraqi University Viva Discussions in English. *International Linguistics Research*, 3(4), 69-93. <https://doi.org/10.30560/ilr.v3n4p69>
- Bousfield, D. (2008). *Impoliteness in Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin.  
<https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.167>

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *“Politeness”: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cruse, A. (2000). *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511813085>
- Crystal, D. (2008). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (6th ed.). Malden: Blackwell Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444302776>
- Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using Language to cause Offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511975752>
- Culpeper, J., & Haugh, M. (2014). *Pragmatics and The English Language*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-39391-3>
- D’hondt, S., Östman, & Verschueren, J. (2009). *The pragmatics of Interaction*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam. <https://doi.org/10.1075/hoph.4>
- Dynel, M. (2009). *Where Cooperation Meets Politeness: Revisiting Politeness Models in View of the Gricean Framework*.
- Felemban, F. H. (2012). Building up learners Communicative Competence: The Politeness. *Procedia-social and Principle and behavioral Sciences*, 46, 70-76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.070>
- Fulcher, G. (2010). *Practical Language Testing*. London: Hodder Education.
- Geyer, N. (2008). *Discourse and Politeness*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Gotti, M. (2018). *Using The Devil with Courtesy: Sheakespeare and the Language of (Im)politeness*. Berlin. Peter lang.
- Haryanto, H., Weda, S., & Nashruddin, N. (2018). Politeness principle and its Implication in EFL classroom in Indonesia. *X Linguae European Scientific Language Journal*, 11(4), 90-112. <https://doi.org/10.18355/XL.2018.11.04.09>
- Holmes, J., & Stubbe, M. (2015). *Power and Politeness in The Workplace: A Sociolinguistic Analysis Of Talk At Work*. London, Routledge: Tylar and Frances Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315750231>
- Holtgraves, T., & Yang. (1990). Politeness as Universal: Cross-Cultural Perception of Request Strategies and Inferences Based on their use. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 719-729. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.4.719>
- Huang, Y. (2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kiesling, S., & Bratt Paulston, Ch. (2005). *Intercultural Discourse and Communication: The Essential Reading*. London: Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470758434>
- Koike, D. A. (1989). Pragmatic Competence and Adult L2 Acquisition: Speech Acts in Interlanguage. *The modern language journal*, 73(3), 279-289. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1989.tb06364.x>

- Lakoff, R. T. (1973). The Logic of Politeness; or minding your p's and q's. In *Papers from the ninth regional meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society* (pp. 292-305). Chicago.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. New York: Longman Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_, G. (2007). Politeness: Is there an East-West divide? *Journal of Politeness Research. Language, Behaviour, Culture*, 3(2007), 167-206. 1612-5681 Walter de Gruyter.
- \_\_\_\_\_, G. (2008). *Language in Literature: Style and Foregrounding*. Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_, G. (2014). *The Pragmatics of Politeness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Leech, G., & Tatiana, L. (2014). Politeness: West and East. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 4.
- Little John, W. S., & Foss, A. K. (2009). *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. SAGE.  
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412959384>
- Locastro, V.(2012). *Pragmatics for Language Educators: A Sociolinguistic Perspective*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Locher, M. A., & Jucker, H. A. (2017). *Pragmatics of Fiction*. DeGrueter. Mouton.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110431094>
- Maharani, S. A. (2017). Politeness Maxim of Main Character in Secret Forgiven. *Jurnal Bahasa Lingua Scientia*, 9(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.21274/lis.2017.9.1.1-14>
- Márquez Reiter, R. (2000). *Linguistic politeness in Britain and Uruguay: A Contrastive Study of Requests and Apologies: Pragmatics and Beyond*. New Series 83. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.  
<https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.83>
- Noviani, Q. (2014). *A Pragmatic Analysis Of Politeness Strategies and Politeness Principle in Uptown Girls*. S1 thesis, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta.
- O'keeffe, A., Clancy, B., & Adolphs, S. (2011). *Introducing Pragmatics in Use*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203830949>
- Orsini-Jones, M., & Lee, F. (2018). *Intercultural Communicative Competence For Global Citizenship*. Library of Congress. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58103-7>
- Rasaler, R. (2016). *Conspicuous Silences: Implicature and Fictionality in The Victorian Novel*. Oxford : Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198769743.001.0001>
- Slman, H. S., & Betti, M. J. (2020). Politeness and Face Threatening Acts in Iraqi EFL learners' Conversations. *GLOSSA*, 3(8), 221-233.
- Spencer-oatey, H. (2008). *Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory*. Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Spencer-Oatey, H., & Jiang, W. (2003). Explaining cross-cultural pragmatic findings: Moving from politeness maxims to sociopragmatic interactional principles (SIPs). *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35(2003) 1633-1650. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(03\)00025-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(03)00025-0)
- Supri, I. Z., & Rahmatiany, R. (2021). Investigating the Types and Strategies of Expressive Illocutionary Acts. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education*, 12(8), 402-406.

- Tavakoli, H. (2012). *A Dictionary of Research Methodology and Statistics in Applied Linguistics*. Tehran: Rahnama Press.
- Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Verschueren, J.(1999). *Understanding Pragmatics*. London: Arnold.
- Vine, B. (2018). *The Routledge Handbook of Language in The Workplace*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690001>
- Wang, Z. (2009). Raising and Lowering Speaker's or Hearer's Position in the Politeness Principle in Intercultural Communication. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 18(1), 286-297.

## Appendixes

### *Appendix 1. A list of abbreviation*

Symbol	Description
CP	Cooperative Principle
FTA	Face-Threatening Act
GSP	General Strategy of Politeness
H	Hearer
O	Other (third person)
PP	Politeness Principle
S	Speaker

### *Appendix 2. The Test*

**Q1/ Please, read these situations carefully, and then select ONE appropriate choice only.**

**1) If you need a pen from your friend, what would you say?**

- a- Would you give me your pen, please?
- b- your pen.
- c- Give me your pen.
- d- you won't mind if I borrow your pen.

**2) If you want to express your opinion about your colleague's painting which looks so bad, what do you say?**

- a- The painting is so bad.

- b- The painting is not good.
- c- The painting is a bit bad.
- d- The painting is horrible.

**3) What would you say if your colleague offers you to go for shopping and you want to express your disagreement.**

- a -That is a bad idea.
- b- I don't think that is such a good idea.
- c- No, I will not go.
- d- Well, I think it would be a better idea if I were free.

**4) If you want to help your teacher to clean the whiteboard and write the subject, what would you say?**

- a- Relax and let me clean the whiteboard and write the subject.
- b- I will clean the whiteboard and write the subject, if you can't .
- c- Let me clean the whiteboard and write the subject, if you like.
- e- If you want, I will clean the whiteboard and write the subject.

**5) When you want to express your feeling about Ahmad's father accident, what would you say?**

- a- Don't worry, he will be better.
- b- It is not important, he will be better.
- c- It is ok, never mind.
- d- I am terribly sorry to hear about your father. I hope he will get better.

**6) when your colleague invites you to come to his/her birthday party, but you can't go because you have some work that you have to do. What would you say?**

- a- I can't come to your birthday party.
- b- I hope this is not going to bother you, I have some work that I have to do.
- c- I think I do not have time to come.
- d- I have some work to be done.

**7) What would you say if your friend said to you "I really like your outfit".**

- a- Oh, it's just something I picked up in a sale.
- b- Oh, thank you.
- c- Yes, it is beautiful.
- d- Oh, yes.

**8) What would you say if your colleague says to you "how are you?"**

- a- I feel uncomfortable.
- b- I am annoyed. Actually there are some problems that might be bypassed.
- c- Not fine.
- d- Good, everything is okay.

**9) What would you say if someone apologizes for stepping on your foot, saying: “I am terribly sorry, I hope that you do not hurt”.**

a- Oh, you really hurt me.

b- That is so hard.

c- Don't worry, it was nothing.

d- That is what I wanted.

**10) What would you say if Your friend is not so good at English pronunciation, s/he must improve her/his performance.**

a- Your performance was terrible.

b- Your performance was not good.

c- Your performance was not really up to standard.

d- Your performance was not terribly good.

**11) Your friend wears a brown dress, what would you say if you don't like the color. In your opinion this color makes him/her look older.**

a- I hate this color.

b- I think It might be better if you wear a white dress.

c- This color does not suit you.

d- Well, it is not my favorite.

### ***Appendix 3. The Jury Members***

1) Prof. Abbas Hasan Jasim (Ph.D.). College of Education, University of kufa.

2) Prof. Ala Hussein Oda (Ph.D.). Dept. of English, College of Education, University of Al-Basra.

3) Prof. Bushra Sadoon M. Al-Noori (Ph.D.). Al-Mansour University.

4) Prof. Sabeeha Dehham Dept. of English, College of Basic Education, University of Babylon.

5) Asst. Prof. Bushra Al-Naamh (Ph.D.). College of Education Ibn-Rushed, University of Baghdad.

6) Asst. Prof. Chassib F. Abbas Al-Jubori (Ph.D.). Open Educational College, Al-Diwaniyah.

7) Asst. Prof. Lihadh Abdul Ameer M. (Ph.D.). College of Education for Humanities. University of Babylon.

8) Asst. Prof. Odeh Kadhum Abed Al-Khafaji (Ph.D.). Dept. of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Al-Muthanna.