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Investigating the Illocutionary Competence of Iraqi EFL University Students

A B S T R A C T

This research aims to identify whether or not second-year Iraqi EFL college students have illocutionary competence in studying short stories, also if there is any difference between males and females in illocutionary competence.

This study is a correlational study and the sample of this study is 160 students in the second year of the English Department at Tikrit University in the academic year 2021/2022, and the data is gathered by using a test to determine students' illocutionary competence in studying short stories.

Results show that the majority of them have a low capacity to master illocutionary competence in studying short stories. Also there is no significant difference between male's and female's illocutionary competence
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التحقيق في الكفاءة الخطابية لطلاب جامعة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقية

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لمى عدنان طه / جامعة تكريت/ كلية التربية

الخلاصة:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحديد ما إذا كان طلاب السنة الثانية في لقسم اللغة الانكليزية يتمتعون بقدرات الكفاءة اللغوية في دراسة القصص القصيرة وهل يوجد أي فروق بين الذكور والإناث في الكفاءة

اللغوية.

وعينة هذه الدراسة ١٦٠ طالبا في السنة الثانية لقسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة تكريت في العام الدراسي ٢٠٢٢/٢٠٢١ ، ويتم جمع البيانات باستخدام اختبار لتحديد كفاءة الطلاب في دراسة. قصص قصيرة.

اظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن الكفاءة اللغوية لمعظم الطلبة في القصص القصيرة منخفضة . كما لا توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين كفاءة الذكور والإناث في الكفاءة اللغوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة الخطابية، الكفاءة التواصلية، القصة القصيرة، استقصاء، وظائف

Section One:

1.1 Statement of the problem

Pragmatic competence is an essential element of communicative competence and anyone who wants to communicate successfully in a Foreign Language (henceforth, FL) should work on both their communicative and pragmatic competence (Oda & Mahmoud, 2016:13; Shu, Center, & Radio, 2018:1). "Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader)" (Yule, 2000:3). As a result, One of the concerns attracting attention in the pedagogical field of teaching English as a FL is pragmatic competence as a component of communicative competence(Al Azzawi 2019:37).

Unfortunately, pragmatic competence is undervalued in ELT in Iraq, where the focus is primarily on organizational competence (Oda & Mahmoud, 2016:13). Al-Hindawi, Mubarak, & Salman, (2014:32) add that in Iraqi schools; teaching of English strictly follows the structural approach, which focuses only on the forms of language (rules of usage). The students' task has been to memorize words, learn grammar, analyze sentence structures, and do reading comprehension. As a result, Iraqi college students suffer from a weakness in understanding the meaning of

sentences (Al Azzawi 2019:48).

Illocutionary competence refers to one's ability to understand the message behind the words that one reads or hears, or to make clear one's own message through careful use of words. Illocutionary competence is what (usually) prevents us from 'getting the wrong end of the stick' when people talk to us (Littlemore & Low, 2006:112).

As Bachman(1990:102) states that illocutionary competence as a part of pragmatic competence, which means the ability to understand the meaning of the words, so English Foreign learners should understand the meaning behind the words, which can help to promote students' ability to understand the words behind the sentences.

Traditionally, teachers mainly teach language forms and grammatical rules but neglect language function and use. Many teachers believe that with the study of language form and grammatical rules, FL learners would gradually realize the language functions and acquire the competence to use the language (Shu, Center, & Radio, 2018: ٢).

1.2 Aims of the study

This study aims to identify:

1. Students' illocutionary competence at Tikrit University.
2. The difference between males and females college students in their "illocutionary competence".

1.3 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

1. There are statistically significant differences among Iraqi EFL college students' in their illocutionary competence.

2. There are no statistically significant differences between Tikrit university students' illocutionary competence according to their gender.

1.4 Limits of the study

The present study is limited to:

1. The Illocutionary types in the Textbooks of short stories "The Happy Prince", and "The Open Window ".

3. EFL second-year university students at Tikrit University during the first course of the academic year 2021/2022.

4. The components of illocutionary competence are adapted from Bachman model (1999) for communicative competence.

1.5 Definitions of Illocutionary competence

Illocutionary competency is defined by Littlemore & Low, (2006:112) as "one's ability to understand the message behind the words that one reads or hears or to make one's message plain via careful use of words".

Bachman 1990 cited in (Takkaç Tulgar, 2016: 12) explains that illocutionary competence is made up of "four main functions: ideational function helps language users express their thoughts and feelings; manipulative function allows people to get what they want; heuristic function creates opportunities to learn new things and use language as a problem-solving tool; and imaginative function improves people's creativity." .

Bachman's definitions of illocutionary competence are adopted in the current study.

Section Two Theoretical Background

2.1 Concept of communicative competence

The term 'communicative competence' has been in circulation for about forty years and has been used extensively in justifications and explications of communicative language teaching. One of the fundamental tasks of language is to create a linked chain of communication between persons. Nowadays, communicative competence refers to the general ability to carry out numerous language functions in communication. One could argue that communication competence is the ability to communicate effectively (Tunay & OZlem 2020:87).

The term «communicative competence» is comprised of two words, the combination of which means «competence to communicate». This simple lexicosemantically analysis uncovers the fact that the central word in the syntagm «communicative competence» is the word «competence». «Competence» is one of the most controversial terms in the field of general and applied linguistics. Its introduction to linguistic discourse has been generally associated with Chomsky who in his very influential book «Aspects of the Theory of Syntax» drew what has been today viewed as a classic distinction between competence (the monolingual speaker-listener's knowledge of language) and performance (the actual use of language in real situations)(Bagarić & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2007:94).

2.1.2 Bachman's Model of Language Competence

Bachman (1990), in keeping with previous studies has proposed a very influential model of communicative language competence. His theory categorizes competence and performance into three groups: language competence (knowledge-related items), strategic competence (ability to use these things in communication), and psychophysiological characteristics (i.e. mental processes

affecting the actual implementation). Bachman's larger approach does not distinguish between abstract knowledge and performance. It combines them under the banner of communicative language ability, which refers to both knowing and acting and is assisted by the interaction of all of the components contained in this competence.

There are two unique competencies under the umbrella idea of linguistic competence, each having two distinct sub-competences. While grammatical competence and textual competence are examples of organizational competence, illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence are examples of pragmatic competence (mostly related to function). However, it should be noted that language competence alone is insufficient for communication participation because strategic competence includes specific linguistic systems used to assess, plan, and execute the intended function while taking many contextual and psychophysiological factors into account. As a result, a speaker's communication competence is a combination of knowing what to say and knowing how to express it, **(See Figure 1).**

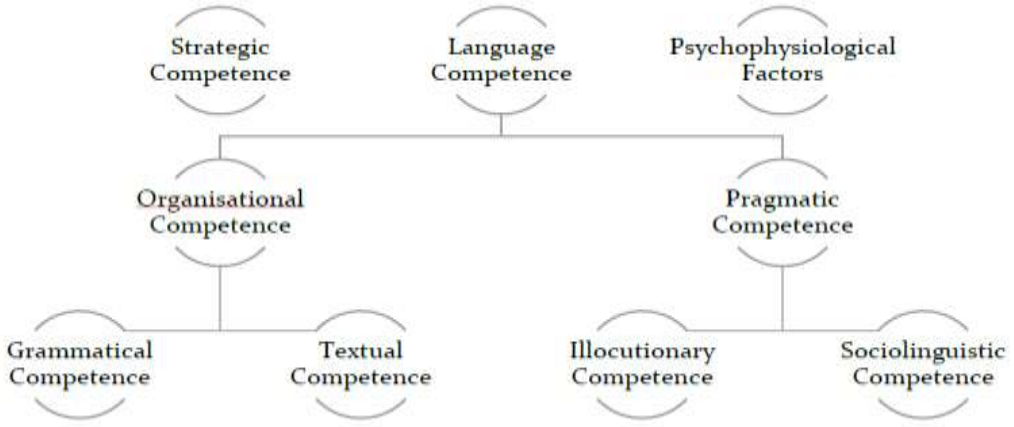
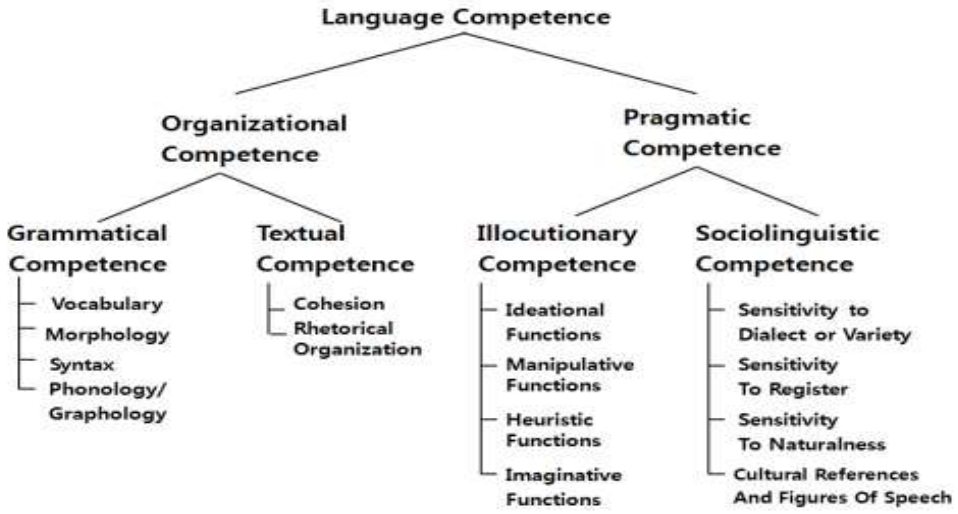


Figure 3 Bachman's communicative language ability model

2.1.3 The Model of the Study

A more advanced model of communicative competence has been put forward by Bachman (1990). One major feature of his model is that it is more hierarchical and elaborate than Canale and Swain's (1980) model. Since the present study adopts Bachman's model as a research framework, his model named "language competence" is illustrated here in detail. The components of his model are schematized in **Figure (2).**



(Figure2): Components of Language Competence (Bachman, 1990)

As in Figure 2, language competence is divided into two overall categories: Organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence further comprises two sub-categories: grammatical competence and textual competence, the latter basically equivalent to Canale's (1983) discourse competence. Grammatical competence covers the knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and phonology at the sentence level, whereas textual competence pertains to the knowledge of the conventions for joining utterances together to form a text, which is a unit of language consisting of two or more sentences that are structured according to rules of cohesion and rhetorical organization (Bachman, 1990).

Pragmatic competence in Bachman's model, on the other hand, encompasses two subcategories: illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence, the two of which are under the category of sociolinguistic competence in Canale and Sawin's model (1980). Illocutionary competence, according to Bachman (1990), refers to the ability to perform a wide range of functions through language use: ideational, manipulative, heuristic, and imaginative functions. Sociolinguistic competence, which is culturally related, covers the following abilities: sensitivity to dialect or variety, to register (the degree of formality), and to naturalness, and the ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech. Bachman underlined strategic competence, arguing that it serves an executive function in determining the most effective means of achieving communicative competence. He treated it as a separate component from the other components. This is in contrast to Canale and Swain's model in which strategic competence was treated simply as one of four components of communicative competence.

Bachman (1990:22) splits linguistic knowledge into two types: organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge, each with its own set of categories. Pragmatic knowledge encompasses both illocutionary and sociolinguistic abilities. That is, "the links between linguistic signals and referents on the one hand (i.e., functional knowledge), and language users and communication contexts on the other hand (i.e., sociolinguistic knowledge" Laughlin et al., (2015:10). Language functions are composed of illocutionary competence: ideational, manipulative, heuristic, and imaginative functions. These functions are accomplished in language use. The functions of language use are illustrated as follows:

1- The ideational function is the way we convey meaning based on our real-world

experience (Halliday, 1973:20 as cited in Bachman 1990: 92-93). This denotes the ability to exchange information regarding knowledge or feelings through language. "Language is utilized ideationally to portray knowledge in lectures or scholarly papers," for example. It is also used to convey feelings such as, when one pours out one's emotions to a close friend or in a diary, with or without the purpose of eliciting advice or assistance" (ibid).

Littlemore & Low, (2006: 112) demonstrate that ideational functions are utilized to transmit feelings about specific information, which is the most important aspect of ideational functions since it can reflect the inner feelings of language users ,and Bachman (1990: 92) describes this function as “most pervasive function” in language use. Leon's Planet.com (1997:123) illustrates the ideational function of language use as “ideation is the process of forming (making) ideas. Language can be used to help make and express ideas”.

2- The manipulative function is the use of language to influence the world surrounding the user, i.e. to influence the conduct of others. According to Bachman (1990: 93), this function is the instrumental function that may be employed to get things done. "We may get such and so, including ourselves, to do something by creating or speaking recommendations, requests, instructions, commands, or warnings," for example. We can accomplish other things by stating our intentions, such as with offers, promises, or threats."

3- The heuristic function is the use of language to provide possibilities for learning new things as well as to solve problems. In other words, it promotes "the use of language to broaden our understanding of the world around us" Bachman, (1990: 93-94). Bachman (ibid) outlines the activities in which this type of

function occurs regularly such as, teaching, learning, problem solving, and conscious memorization, and notes that "teaching and learning may be either formal1, as in an academic setting, or informal, as in self-study." Furthermore, it is worth noting that the heuristic function is used to enhance one's knowledge of language itself, as well as for the goal of acquiring or learning a language.

The following example distinguishes between ideational and heuristic functions in language learning: "When a language teacher points to a book on a table and says, "The book is on the table," he is not providing information. That is, he is not performing an ideational function, but rather a heuristic function of illustrating the meaning of the preposition "on" in English. The heuristic function of language use in problem solving is represented by "the drafting of papers in which one goes through the stages of creation, organization, and revision."

The heuristic function of language use to aid conscious retention of information is shown in the memorizing of facts, words, equations, or rules (ibid).

4- The imaginative function is the use of language to express and improve one's imagination. This capability allows language users to develop or expand their own environment for amusing or esthetic purposes, with the value derived from how the language is utilized itself. For example, "making jokes, sharing fantasies, inventing metaphors or other, as well as attending plays or films and reading literary works such as novels, short tales, or poems for pleasure" (ibid.: 94).

Bachman summarizes that various uses of language exemplify several types of functions that are used concurrently, such as "when a teacher makes an assignment (ideational, manipulative, and heuristic functions) in an amusing way (imaginative function), or when one reads a magazine article for entertainment

(imaginative function) and thus acquires useful information" (heuristic function). Furthermore, while language functions have been discussed as if they occurred in isolated, unconnected utterances, it should be noted that the majority of language use involves the performance of multiple functions in connected utterances, and it is the connections among these functions that provide discourse coherence" (ibid.: 94).

Section Three Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design consists of a planned sequence of the entire research process and a series of guidelines to keep one on the right path. Essentially, the entire research process is within the conceptual structure of research design. In fact, the research designs create the groundwork for the total research effort. It facilitates the chosen task with less trouble and in an organized mode (Lillykutty & Samson, 2018: 20573).

3.2 Population and Sampling:

3.2.1 Population

The population is the group to which a researcher wishes to generalize the study's findings (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011:129). Such group is known as population in research. However, some researchers use the word ‘universe’ in place of ‘population. Universe refers to the set of all the units, which possess a variable characteristic under study (Shukla, 2020: 1).

3.2.2 Sample

Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, and Walker,(2018:148) state that a sample is a number of individuals, objects or events selected for a study from a population, usually in

such a way that they represent the large group from which they are selected.

The sample of the present study includes 160 second-year college students at Tikrit University (male and female) which represents 40 % of the population as indicated in **table 1**

Table (1) *the Population and Sample of Students in the Study*

College	Population	Involved in the Pilot study	Involved in the Sample	Percentage
The College of Education for Humanities(Tikrit)	400	15	160	40%

3.3.2 Test Construction

Collecting information from students is an important duty; therefore it should necessarily be conducted in systematic ways. Otherwise it is difficult to know how rational educational decisions and judgments can be (Hughes, 1989:15).

In order to achieve the aims of this study, a diagnostic test is constructed. The test questions are constructed to find out EFL college students' IC in two English short stories (The Happy Prince and The Open Window).

The test includes five questions; that assess students' performance at recognition and production levels. There are two subjective and three objective questions. The first, second and fourth questions assess the students' performance at the recognition level. While questions number three and five assess students' performance at the production level. There are 32 items which are distributed among the five questions; 8 items for each of the first, the second and the fourth questions whereas the third includes 2 items and 6 items for the fifth one (see table 2)

Table 2 *Categories of the Achievement Test*

Question. No	Types	No. of Items	Category	Total Score
1	Multiple-choice Items	8	Objective	24
2	True –False	8	Objective	16
3	Essay/short answer questions	2	Subjective	14
4	Fill in the blanks	8	Objective	16
5	Essay/ give the reasons	6	Subjective	30
Total		32		100

The test questions deal with Bachman's four components of IC in two short stories. At the recognition level, there are three questions (the first, the second and the fourth questions) with 24 items. In each question, two items are for each of the four components of IC. Furthermore; at the production level, there are two questions (the third and the fifth questions) with 8 items; two items for each one of the IC components. All the items of the test, whether it is subjective or objective, are distributed among the four components.

3.4 Validity of the Test Instruments:

Validity is the most important consideration in the development and evaluation of measurement instruments. Historically, validity has been defined as the extent to which the instrument measures what it claims to measure (Ary et al., 2006:225).

3.4.1 Content Validity

According to Hughes (2003:26), a test is said to have content validity if the content reflects a representative sample of the language skills, structures, and other topics with which it is equipped to identify. An achievement test has been constructed by considering the contents and behavioral objectives of the instructional material. It consists of five questions with thirty-two items and scored out of a hundred, as shown in table (3)

Table 3

The Specifications of the Contents and Behaviors of the illocutionary competence –Test

Levels	No. of Question		No. of Items	Content	Behaviors	Scores
Recognition	1		3.5	Ideational	Tests students' ability to choose the correct answer	24
			4.6	Heuristic		
			2.7	Imaginative		
			1.8	Manipulative		
	2		1.3	Ideational	Write true or false in front each statement	16
			2.5	Heuristic		
			4.8	Imaginative		
			6.7	Manipulative		
	4		1.6	Ideational	Complete the following sentences with suitable words	16
			4.8	Heuristic		
			2.3	Imaginative		
			5.7	Manipulative		
Production	3		A	Imaginative	Give the reasons and write a composition	14
			B	Manipulative		
	5	A	2	Manipulative	Answer the following questions in one or two sentences	30
			1	Ideational		
			3	Heuristic		
		B	2	Ideational		
			1	Heuristic		

			3	Imaginative		
Total		5	32			100

3.4.2 Face Validity

In order to ensure the validity of the study instruments, it has been submitted to jury members who are teachers and specialists in the teaching of English methodology. Nevertheless, a few changes and recommendations are considered before preparing the final instrument.

3.5 Reliability of the Test

Reliability according to Fraenkel et al (2009:154) refers to the consistency of the scores obtained—how accurate they are for each person from one instrument to another and from one collection of items to another. Thus, the same achievement test has been readministered to the pilot sample of (15) students. Chronbach's Alpha, which statistically measures the internal consistency, has been used to find the reliability of the achievement test. The obtained result of alpha Cronbach formula is 0. 84, which is considered appropriate.

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3.5.1 Scoring Scheme of the Test

The test sample includes five questions. Testees' are scored out of 100Ms. Fifty six marks are specified to questions at the recognition level which are Q1,Q2 and Q4 .Three marks are specified for each correct item and zero for each wrong answer in the first question. Two marks are allotted to every item in both Q2 and Q4.These questions are scored by the researcher herself.

The second 44 marks are specified to the questions at the production level which are Q3 A, B, Q5 A, B .These questions are scored by a committee* (the researcher herself and two other instructors) in terms of certain criteria, namely: vocabulary, grammar and idea). The 3rd question consists of two items; seven marks are allotted to each item. very good grammar is 2Ms, vocabulary is 2 Ms, but 3 Ms, to the idea for its real importance.

Finally, The fifth question consists of two branches A and B, 5 marks are allotted to each branch of A and B and each branch contains 3 items . Very good grammar 1M, vocabulary 2Ms, but 2Ms are allotted to the idea. Marks are not only given to the very good rank but also to good rank and rarely to the weak rank. (See Table 4).

Table 4

The Scoring Scheme of the test

Criteria	Qualities	Scores							
		Q3		Q5					
		A	B	A			B		
				1	2	3	1	2	3
		7.M	7.M	5.M	5.M	5.M	5.M	5.M	5.M
Grammar	Very good	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
	good	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Weak	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vocabulary	Very good	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	Good	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	Weak	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Idea	Very good	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
	Good	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	Weak	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Questions three and five have been scored by a scoring committee that consists of Assit. Prof. Enaam Zuhair Hamed, Lect. Hawar Sardar Ali, and the researcher. After the students have finished their responses, answers of questions three and five have been copied to be scored by the scoring committee

Section Four Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

4.1 The First Hypothesis of the Study

The researcher then interprets to present the results of student diagnostic test in an illocutionary competence . The total score is translated to the standard score of 100 ,and then divided into five categories. The interpretation of student'sdiagnostic test in illocutionary competence is based on the following table:

Table 5

Categories of Students' illocutionary competence

Score	Category
X < 40	Very Low
40 ≤X ≤ 50	Low
50 < X ≤ 65	Average
65 < X ≤ 80	High
X > 80	Very High

Students' diagnostic test results in illocutionary competence are presented in the following diagram:

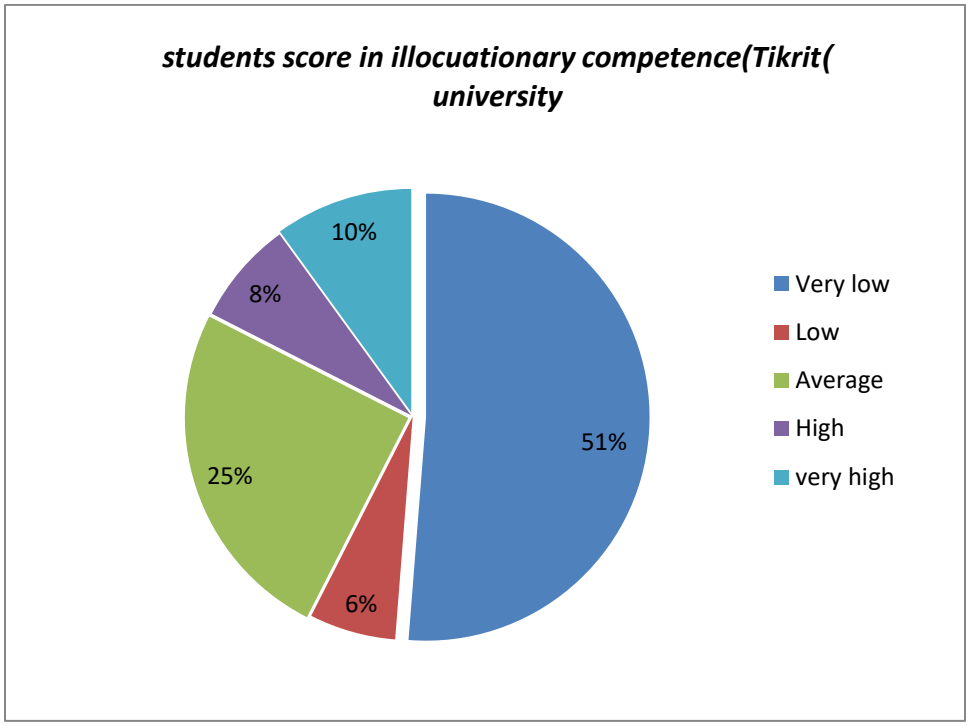

Figure 3 Students Score in Illocuationary Competence

Based on the diagram, the lowest percentage at Tikrit University is (6.25%) and the highest is (51.25%). The above classification shows that there are 82 students (51.25 %) in a very low category, 10 students (6.25%) in a low category, 40 students (25 %) in an average category, 12 students (7.5 %) in a moderate category and 16 students (10 %) in a very high category. As a result, it is clear that most second-grade students in the Department of English have very low illocutionary competence .

4.2 The second Hypothesis of the Study

To find out if "there *are statistically significant differences among Iraqi EFL college students' illocutionary competence according to gender*", all mean scores are obtained and compared. Statistics show that the mean scores of the males are

45.54 and that of females is 51.76. By using the t-test formula for two independent, the calculated t-value is found to be 2.390, while the tabulated t-value is found to be 1.968 at the degree of freedom (328) and level of significance (0.05). This means that there is a significant difference between the two groups and in favour of the female group. Thus, the sixth hypothesis is accepted (See table 6).

Table 6

Means, Standard Deviation, and t-Values of the Illocutionary Competence

gender	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
Male	111	45.54	21.532	Calculated	Tabulated	328	0.05
Female	219	51.76	22.714	2.390	1.968		

4.3 Findings and Discussions

The Results illustrate that computed t. test value for the functions of language use is higher than the tabulated one. This shows that most second-year students in EFL Tikrit university students of English department are low in their illocutionary competence as they are unable to use language appropriately. Moreover; the results indicate that the students are unable to use language to express a wide range of language functions, and to interpret the illocutionary force of utterances or discourse.

Finally, It is found that the average (mean) of the vote for each group: (41.21) for males and (46.43) for females, and the sig. =0.226, so p value is (0.226). This implies p (0.226) higher than 0.05 and equal variances can assumed. Moreover Sig. 2-tailed =0.116 in the t-test part, so p is (0.116) and p is greater than 0.05.

To sum up the findings, It is clear that p>0.05, so H0 hypothesis is accepted and there are no a statistically significant differences between males and females in illocutionary competence .

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