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The influence of strategic competence on Iraqi EFL university students' conversations

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Abstract

Conversation is the most fundamental means we have of interacting with others. Through conversation, people share information, form relationships, solve problems, and accomplish a multitude of everyday goals. Thus, writing and speaking are one of the more traditional aspects of effective communication.

Strategic competence is one of the competencies that contribute in communicative competence. It is the ability to convey information to a listener and correctly interpret information received. It includes the use of communication strategies to solve problems that arise in the process of conveying the information.

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Thus, the current study aims to evaluate EFL students' conversational performance in accordance to competence in the written and spoken conversation. In order to accomplish these objectives, the following research questions are formulate: Is there statistical significance in strategic competence as a general dimension between university students' performances at Tikrit and Samarra universities? Is there statistical significance among Iraqi EFL university students' conversational performances in strategic competence at both spoken and written levels? To achieve these research questions, the following aims are posed: Identify and compare influences of strategic competence on Iraqi EFL university students' conversational performance between two universities (Tikrit and Samarra). Moreover, Identify and compare strategic competence levels in spoken and written acts between the two universities (Tikrit and Samarra).

After that, the researcher designs a test in which consists of two fields; written test and spoken test (tape- recorder) to evaluate their performances. The researcher use criteria of strategic competence especially approximation, asking for clarification and asking for repetition based on Celce-Murcia model (1995). The test is applied to a sample of (100) participants. The participants are undergraduate EFL students, at the fourth year English Departments, from two universities (College of Education For Humanities at Tikrit University and College of Education at Samarra University). The study is conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023. The data have been gathered by using a diagnostic test to evaluate students' conversational performances. The test consists of one question, but it is divided into three levels real – life situations. After achieving test validity and reliability, the tests have been applied to a sample of (50) students from Tikrit university in which divides into (25) males and (25) females, moreover, a sample of (50) students from Samarra university in which divides into (25) males and (25) females in order to evaluate students' conversational performances according to strategic competence in the spoken and written levels in social contexts. The results show that there are statistically significant in written level, Tikrit university students' performances have a high level in the strategic competence rather than Samarra university, but both have low level in the spoken aspect.

Keywords: Conversation and Strategic competence.

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تأثير الكفاءة الاستراتيجية على محادثات طلاب الجامعات العراقية في مجال اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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الـمستخلـص

المحادثة هي الوسيلة الأساسية التي لدينا للتفاعل مع الآخرين. من خلال المحادثة، يشارك الأشخاص المعلومات، ويشكلون العلاقات، ويضعون الحلول للمشاكل، ويحققون عددًا كبيرًا من الأهداف اليومية. وبالتالي، تعد الكتابة والتحدث أحد الجوانب التقليدية للتواصل الفعال.

الكفاءة الاستراتيجية هي إحدى الكفاءات التي تساهم في الكفاءة التواصلية. إنها القدرة على نقل المعلومات إلى المستمع وتفسير المعلومات الواردة بشكل صحيح. ويتضمن استخدام استراتيجيات الاتصال لحل المشكلات التي تنشأ أثناء عملية نقل المعلومات. ومن ثم، تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تقييم الأداء الحواري لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وفقًا لكفاءتهم في المحادثة المكتوبة والمنطوقة. لكي نحقق اهداف الدراسة, من خلال أسئلة تم اعداداها وهي: هل هناك فرق احصائي في الكفاءة الاستراتيجية كبعد عام بين طلبه الجامعتين (تكريت و سامراء) ؟ هل هناك فرق احصائي في الأداء الحواري بين الجامعتين في الكفاءة الاستراتيجية في مستوى اللفظي والكتابي؟ و لتحقيق أسئلة البحث تم وضع اهداف البحث :تحديد ومقارنة تأثيرات الكفاءة الاستراتيجية على الأداء الحواري بين طلاب الجامعة في اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعتين (تكريت وسامراء). علاوة على ذلك، تحديد ومقارنة مستويات الكفاءة الاستراتيجية في المستويات الشفوية والمكتوبة بين الجامعتين (تكريت وسامراء). بعد ذلك قام الباحث بتصميم اختبار يتكون من مجالين؛ اختبار كتابي واختبار شفهي (تسجيل أدائهم على شريط) لتقييم أدائهم. واستخدم الباحث معايير الكفاءة الاستراتيجية وخاصة التقريب وطلب التوضيح وطلب التكرار على أساس أنموذج سيلس مرشيا (1995).

تم تطبيق الاختبار على عينة مكونة من (100) مشارك. المشاركون هم طلاب المرحلة الجامعية في المرحلة الرابعة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، من جامعتين (كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية في جامعة تكريت وكلية التربية في جامعة سامراء). وطبقت الدراسة خلال الفصل الدراسي الثاني من العام الدراسي 2022-2023. وقد تم جمع البيانات باستخدام اختبار تشخيصي لتقييم أداء الطلاب في المحادثة. يتكون الاختبار من سؤال واحد، ولكنه مقسم إلى ثلاثة أفرع من المواقف حياتية. وبعد تحقيق صدق وثبات الاختبار، تم تطبيق الاختبارات على عينة مكونة من (50) طالباً من جامعة تكريت مقسمة إلى (25)

ذكراً و(25) إنثى، بالإضافة إلى عينة مكونة من (50) طالباً من جامعة سامراء في محافظة تكريت. والتي تنقسم إلى (25) ذكراً و(25) أنثى بهدف تقييم الأداء الحواري للطلبة وفق الكفاءة الاستراتيجية في المستويين المنطوق والمكتوب في السياقات الاجتماعية. وأظهرت النتائج أن هناك دلالة إحصائية في المستوى الكتابي، حيث أن أداء طلبة جامعة تكريت كان مرتفعاً في الكفاءة الاستراتيجية مقارنة بجامعة سامراء، ولكن كلاهما كان ذو مستوى منخفض في الجانب الشفوي.

الكلمات الدالة: المحادثة، الكفاءة الاستراتيجية

Section One
Introduction

1.1 Significance of the Problem

Language is used as means of communication where people used it as a tool to express their ideas and wishes. According to Ramelan (1991: 8), "language can help man to express his ideas and wishes to another such as when people needs some helps, so that close relationship among member of the group can be carried out". In our daily life, people always meet in social life and communicate each other, as communication is one of the ways to interact with others.

Generally, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a complex process because English language teaching deals with various issues and all of these issues are somewhat need to evaluate in education of English language. The evaluation can extend to some fields to shape effective communication**.** In order to make EFL students conversational performances are well, they need to be aware of the competencies, one of them is strategic competence. Foreign language students (FL) need to understand the purpose of communicative act and how to overcome breakdown or gaps through communication to achieve full understanding.

However, in an EFL environment such as in Iraq, it is not easy for EFL students to surround themselves with large amounts of the input of the target language. As a result, this may affect EFL students' conversation ability, so it is expected that Iraqi EFL university students may face many problems in developing their intended messages in their conversations because various reasons. Structural approach is one of these reasons according to which those students have been taught in their pre – university study of English for a long time.

Generally, the researcher use criteria of strategic competence especially approximation, asking for clarification and asking for repetition based on Celce-Murcia model (1995) at both spoken and written levels to check students' conversational performances.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The current study aims to

1-Identify and compare influences of strategic competence on Iraqi EFL university students' conversational performance between two universities as a general dimension (Tikrit and Samarra).

2-Identify and compare strategic competence in spoken and written levels between the two universities (Tikrit and Samarra).

1.3 Questions of the Study

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1- Is there statistical significance in strategic competence as a general dimension between university students' performances at Tikrit and Samarra universities?
2. Is there statistical significance among Iraqi EFL university students' conversational performances in strategic competence at both spoken and written levels?

1.4 The value of the study

1- It sheds lights on the detailed components of strategic competence.

2- It is hoped that this study is useful to the researchers by providing information about influence of strategic competence on conversational performance to English Education students, and lecturers.

1.5 Limits of study

This study is limited to fourth stage students in the departments of English language at the two Colleges of Education (College of Education for Human Sciences at Tikrit University and College of Education at Samarra University) in the academic year 2022 – 2023.

1.6 The Model adopted

The researcher is adopted a certain model. It is including Celce-Murcia model (1995) for the strategic competence to achieve the objectives of the current study for aevaluating Iraqi EFL University Students' Conversational performance at both written and spoken levels.

Section Two
Literature Review

2.0 Conversation

One of the biggest challenges to current language teaching methodology is to find effective ways of preparing students for spontaneous communication. As language is means of communication, people use it to express their own needs, feelings and thoughts. It follows that learning another language apart from the mother tongue helps people to express themselves to other nations. Learning how to communicate evokes the speaking skill. By developing the communication skills, people have to learn to speak effectively and listen attentively. Hence it is called "skill", it needs to be learned, practiced and developed. Speaking is so much part of human daily life activities, but learning speaking (whether in a first or other language) involves developing detailed knowledge about why, how and when

to communicate and other skills for producing and managing interaction. As one answer to this challenge, a new type of language lesson, the conversation class, has appeared, whose main teaching objective is to improve the students' conversational skills (henceforth CSs) (Grice,1975).. So, conversation: According to Brennan (2010: 9) describes conversation as a "joint activity in which two or more participants use linguistic forms and nonverbal signals to communicate interactively". Also, it is defined as the talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information are exchanged (Mazeland, 2006).

Goffman (1981) offers a restrictive definition, stating that a conversation occurs when a small group of participants come together and perceive the moment as a brief period separate from their practical activities. Within this timeframe, each person is granted the opportunity to speak and listen without adhering to a predetermined schedule. The participants engage in a free and unrestricted dialogue, focusing solely on the exchange of ideas without any external pressures or time constraints**.** However, Fairclough (2001, p.9) states "conversation is systematically structured, and that there is evidence of the orientation of participants to these structures in the way in which they design their own conversational turns and react to those of others." Conversation consists of two or more participants taking turns and only one participants speaking at any time. In most conversations, the responses are a spontaneous reaction to what has previously been said.

2.1 Strategic Competence as a part of Communicative Competence

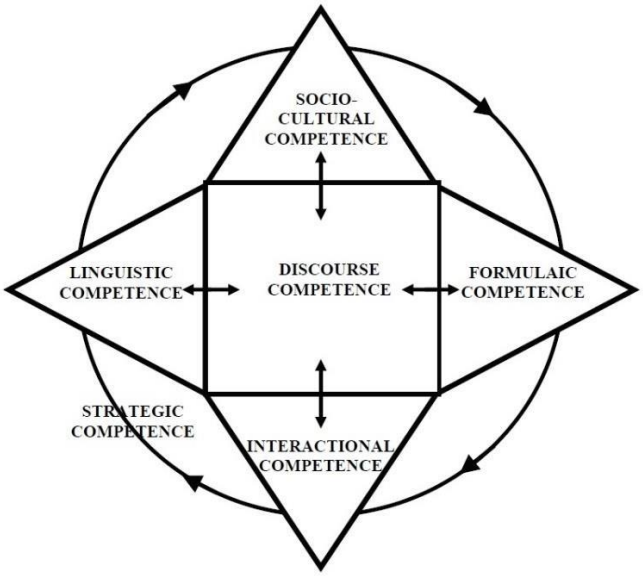
Celece-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell (1995) propose another model of communicative competence, which as they maintain, is the continuation of Canale and Swain's (1980) and Canale's (1983) work. Celece-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell developed a model of communicative competence which comprised five competences; they are linguistic competence, strategic competence, sociocultural competence, actional competence and discourse competence. This model intended to elaborate sociolinguistic competence, which was separated from discourse competence and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) divide it into two competences of sociocultural and actional competence. As Celce-Murcia et al indicate, there are two terminological differences between their model and Canale and Swain's (1980). The first is that they prefer the term "linguistic competence" to "grammatical competence" to indicate clearly that this component also includes lexis, phonology, morphology, syntax and all sorts of grammatical or lexical systems needed for oral or written communication.

The second difference is their use of the term "sociocultural competence" instead of "sociolinguistic competence" so that they can better distinguish it from actional competence. The reason they give is that Hymes used the term "communicative competence" to challenge Chomsky's (1965,p.10) notion of "linguistic competence" from a sociolinguistic perspective, and therefore "originally the sociolinguistic dimension of

language proficiency was associated with everything that was missing from linguistic competence." See figure 1

Figure 1. *Revised schematic representation of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia, 1995:45).*

The



The second aspect proposed by Celece-Murcia et al (1995) is the discourse competence, which involves the capability of using cohesion, well-structured sentences and words that are suitable for the generic structure as well as the conversational context. Further, this use should be coherent to achieve a unified effective oral or written communication.

Aa stated in Celece-Murcia et al (1995) linguistic competence, which is parallel to the notion of Canale and Swain's(1980) grammatical competence, refers to the principal elements of successful communication. For example, the syntactic knowledge, the morphological knowledge and all sorts of grammatical or lexical systems needed for oral or written communication. The second aspect proposed by Celece-Murcia et al (1995) is the discourse competence, which involves the capability of using cohesion, well-structured sentences and words that are suitable for the generic structure as well as the conversational context. Further, this use should be coherent to achieve a unified effective oral or written communication. Discourse competence is considered as a highly important part in communicative competence, language learning and teaching (ibid).

The third component of communicative competence is the actional competence. It is defined as the ability to relate the linguistic utterances to the actional intended meaning by the speakers. In other words, it is the competence that enables language users to understand the communicated meaning. As demonstrated by Celece-Murcia et al (1995), this competence involves the realization of speech acts, sets and their illocutionary force. It was

also explained that actional competence is confined to oral communication; since in written communication rhetorical competence would be its equivalent.

Interactional competence has at least two sub-components relevant to the current model: Actional competence refers to knowledge of how to perform common speech acts and speech act sets in the target language involving interactions such as information exchanges, interpersonal exchanges, expression of opinions and feelings, problems (complaining, blaming, regretting, apologizing, etc.), future scenarios (hopes, goals, promises, predictions, etc.). The second is conversational competence. It is inherent to the turn-taking system in oral conversation (Celce-Murcia et al. 2007) .

Socio-cultural competence refers to the ability of manipulating communication appropriately within social and cultural contexts. This competence encompasses the knowledge of variation of language related to the different aspects of pragmatic context besides social and cultural factors.

Celce Murcia et al (1995:26) indicates that strategic competence as knowledge of communication strategies and how to use them. Strategic competence is an essential component of one's ability to communicate effectively in a second language, both in writing and speaking proficiency. Strategic competence, as one of the sub-components of communicative competence, has been defined in a number of different ways.

Canale and Swain (1980:30) describe strategic competence as providing a function when the linguistic competence of the language users is unsatisfactory. In other words, they state that strategic competence is the ability to convey information to a listener and correctly interpret information received. It includes the use of communication strategies to solve problems that arise in the process of conveying the information.

Strategic competence is the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which enhance the efficiency of communication and, where necessary, enable the learner to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur."(Celce-Murcia, et al, 1995:7)**.**

Here, Celece et al (1995: 26) highlight on communication strategies which has typically three functions of strategy use from three different perspectives:

(a) Psycholinguistic perspective: Communication strategies are verbal plans used by speakers to overcome problems in the planning and execution stages of reaching a communicative goal; e.g., avoiding trouble spots or compensating for not knowing a vocabulary item (cf. Faerch & Kasper, 1984a).

(b) Interactional perspective: Communication strategies involve appeals for help as well as other cooperative problem-solving behaviors which occur after some problem has surfaced during the course of communication, that is, various types of negotiation of meaning and repair mechanisms (cf. Tarone, 1980; Varonis & Gass, 1985; Gass & Varonis, 1991)

(c) Communication continuity/maintenance perspective: Communication strategies are means of keeping the communication channel open in the face of communication difficulties, and playing for time to think and to make (alternative) speech plans.

To be able to actively participate in a conversation, a participant is commonly required to have the ability or competency to speak in such an effective and efficient manner namely socio-cultural competence, discourse competence, formulaic competence and interactional competence.

Generally, communication strategies help learners develop flexibility to handle unexpected and unpredictable situations in communication effectively. Moreover, they expose students to the reality of non-exact communication, which is a prevalent aspect of natural language use.

2.2 Components of Strategic Competence

Based on the four functions above, Celce et al (1995: 27) describe that strategic competence consists of five main parts:

•*Avoidance or reduction strategies* involve tailoring message to one's resources by *replacing messages, avoiding topics*, or, as an extreme case, *abandoning one's message* altogether.

• *Achievement or compensatory strategies* involve manipulating available language to reach a communicative goal and this may entail compensating for linguistic deficiencies. The components included in this strategy: **a)** Circumlocution: "Circumlocution strategy is applied by speaker through exemplifying, illustrating or describing the properties of the target object or action." **b)** Approximation strategy as "a strategy by using alternative lexical items, such as a superordinate or a related term which shares semantic features with the target word or structure." **c)** All-Purpose Words mean a strategy of extending a general, "empty" lexical item to contexts where specific words are lacking. **d)** Non-Linguistics Means strategy as "describing whole concepts nonverbally, or accompanying a verbal strategy with a visual illustration." **e)** Restructuring is abandoning the execution of a verbal plan because of language difficulties, leaving the utterance unfinished, and communicating the intended message according to an alternative plan." **f)** Word-Coinage is a strategy when speakers "creating a non-existing L2 word by applying a supposed L2 rule to an existing L2 word". **g)** Literal Translation from L1 Literal translation from L1 strategy is "Translating literally a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from L1/L3 to L2." **h)** Foreignizing strategy is a strategy of "Using a L1/L3 word by adjusting it to L2 phonology (i.e., with a L2 pronunciation) and/or morphology." **i)** Code-Switching strategy is a strategy of "including L1/L3 words with L1/L3 pronunciation in L2 speech; this may involve stretches of discourse ranging from single words to whole chunks and even complete turns." **j)** Retrieval strategy is a strategy "in an attempt to retrieve a lexical item saying a series of incomplete or wrong forms or structures before reaching the optimal form."

• *Stalling or time-gaining strategies* include*hesitation devices and gambits* as well as *repetitions* (e.g., repeating what the other has said while thinking). Celce notes here that

several authors draw attention to the danger of L2 learners using taught filler/ gambit inappropriately if the presentation has been superficial and not adequately contextualized.
• *Self-monitoring strategies* involve correcting or changing something in one's own speech *(self-repair)* as well as *rephrasing* (and often over-elaborating) one's message to further ensure that it gets through.
• *interactional strategies,* highlights the cooperative aspect of strategy use.
a) Appeals for help are similar to achievement strategies in function but through using them the learner exploits interlocutor's knowledge rather than manipulating own resources. **b)** Indicators of Non/Misunderstanding: When speaker do not understand what the interlocutors are saying, they often respond by making a gesture or expressing nonunderstanding in both verbal and non-verbal ways (e.g., "Can you repeat that again?") or by using an interpretive summary (e.g., "Oh, I see. What did you mean?"). In addition to using these expressions, speakers can also ask for clarification by using words like "can you repeat that?" or "did you say?" or by asking for a repetition by using words like "pardon?" **c)** Responses strategy uses when the speaker is having trouble understanding what is being said, it can also be used as a response to someone speech. According to Celce-Murcia's framework (1995:28), there are seven types of response strategy, namely repetition, rephrasing, expansion, reduction, confirmation, rejection, and repair. **d)** Comprehension Check, according to Dornyei & Scott (1997:191), comprehension check is "asking questions to check that the interlocutor can follow you."

2.3 Previous Study

a. Herlamang (2022)

This study aimed to investigate the strategic competence of English Department Jambi University students who performed in proposal seminars and thesis defense examinations in order to determine the strategic competence components that students use based on their performance and interaction with the lecturers.

The participants in this study were three English Education Department Jambi University students. Direct observation and video recorder documentation was the instrument used in this study. The researcher considers to used qualitative descriptive research as a method of the research. The findings showed that English Department Education Jambi University students performed all the five strategic competence strategies by Celce-Murcia (1995). The strategy most used by the students is the stalling or time-gaining strategy, with a total number of 66 out of 182 data. Furthermore, the strategy that students least used was the avoidance or reduction strategy, with a total number of 6 out of 182 data. The other strategies are achievement or compensatory strategy, with a total number of 48 out of 182 data. Self-monitoring strategy with a total number of 22 out of 182 data, and the last is the interactional strategy with 40 out of 182 data.

Section Three
Methodology

3.0 Research Design

The researcher is considered the importance of verbal act in Students' Speaking and writing Performance to be explored. The researcher decides to use qualitative research to analyze and evaluate the use of verbal act of the students' conversational performance at the two colleges of education for humanities of both Tikrit and Samarra Universities. According to Creswell (2002:4) indicates that qualitative research is for exploring and understanding the meaning individual or group considered to social or human problem.

3.1 The Population and Sample

The population according to Best (1981: 263) states that it is set of subjects, items, individuals of a special group, while the sample is a more limited part of that groups**.** The sample defines as " any group of individuals which is selected to represent a population " (Richards, 1992, 321). The population in the present study is 330 of 4th stage students from both genders have been chosen from two collages of Education for Humanities at Tikrit and Samarra Universities for the academic your 2022 – 2023. While the sample of the present study includes (100) 4th stage students, it divided into (50) male and (50) female students who are randomly selected from the morning studies in the Department of English language in two Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit Universities and Samarra Universities. As shown in the following table 1.

Table 1. Sample of the study

University	**College**	**No. pilot study**	**No. Sample**	**No. male**	**No. female**	**Percentage**
Tikrit	College of Education for Humanities	10	50	25	25	60%
Samarra	College of Education for Humanities	10	50	25	25	60%
Total		20	100	50	50	36%

3.3 Test Construction

Gathering data from students is a crucial process, and it should be carried out in an organized and systematic way. Test construction represents the process of producing a test, it includes planning for the tests preparing its items and instructions.

According to Aljuboory (2014:7), a test is a tool that is utilized to gather information about a student's performance and achievements in a specific course of study. Before design the test for the current study, the researcher does questionnaire for English language lecturers in Department of English Language at two Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit and Samarra Universities to get information and data in which help the researcher to diagnose Iraqi EFL university students' problems during their conversational performances and to design the tests according to these problems.

In order to achieve the aims of this study, a diagnostic test has been constructed with two aspects; writing and speaking levels. A test- taker perform writing through written real life items while in speaking, the researcher recodes for each test-taker response to the same real life items by using tap-recorder and then transcript each response into written responses. Strategic competence to measure three criteria (approximation, asking for clarification and asking for repetition). The total scores of strategic competence is 15 marks and each branch gets 5 marks. The test is carried out on the 19th of March 2023 at Tikrit University in writing level and the same test is carried out on the 20th of March 2023 at Tikrit University in speaking level, whereas at Samarra University, the test is carried out on the 21th of March 2023 in writing level and the same test is carried out on the 22th of March 2023 in speaking level by using tape recorded.

Table 2. *Table of Specification*

No. Questior	**No. Item**	**Competence**	**Scores**	**Total Scores**
Q1/	a	Strategic	5	15
	b	Strategic	5	
	b	Strategic	5	

3.4 Validity of the Test

Harris (1969: 19) explains that validity of a test means the extent to which the test measures what it is designed to measure and nothing else. Bell (1981: 192) states that validity is concerned with the truth of the test and its relations to what it is intended to test.

3.4.1 Face Validity

Richards and Schmidt (2002: 178) retain the meaning of face validity in the answer of this question "Does the test measures what it is supposed to measure?" In this regard, the test has been exposed to jury members who are specialists in the field of English of teaching EFL and linguistic who approved its face validity.

3.4.2 Construct Validity

Construct validity refers to the extent to which a test accurately measures the specific theoretical construct or concept it is intended to measure. Wier (2005:17) explains that construct validity involves as a matter of a posteriori statistical validation of whether a test had measured a construct in individuals.

3.5 The Pilot Study

Strategic competence test is administered on a pilot sample of twenty students chosen randomly from the two Colleges of Education at Tikrit and Samarra universities. The pilot study is carried out on the 23th of January 2023 at Tikrit University in writing level and the same test is carried out on the 24th of January 2023 at Tikrit University in speaking level, whereas at Samarra University, the pilot study is carried out on the 25th of January 2023 in writing level and the same test is carried out on the 26th of January 2023 in speaking level. A sample consists of (5) males and (5) females from Tikrit University, and (5) males and (5) females from Samarra University.

Table 3. *Pilot Study*

The university	Collage	The department	The stage	Male	Female	Total
Tikrit	Collage of Education for Humanities	English Department	4th stage	5	5	10
Samarra	Collage of Education for Humanities	English Department	4th stage	5	5	10
				Total		20

3.6 Item Analysis

According to Linden and Glas (2010: 181-182) item analysis refers to the way of collecting, summarizing and utilizing the results obtained through the performance of students in order to make an objective and comprehensive assessment on the quality of the items.

3.6.1 Item Discrimination Power of that test

Richards et al. (1992 : 192) state that the discriminatory power of an achievement test refers to the degree to which item discriminates between the students will high and low achievements.

However, to construct test items, the researcher employed the extreme groups method and the relationship between the item score and the total score, which are appropriate procedures in item analysis.

First: Extreme Groups Method

To calculate the discriminatory power of each item in the scale, the researcher is followed the following steps:

a. The scale is administered to a sample of 100 male and female students, and then the total score is determined for each questionnaire.

b. The lists are arranged in descending order based on their total scores, from highest to lowest.

c. The researcher has taken the 27 percent as an upper group student who do well on the test with the highest scores and also 27 percent as a lower group of the student

d. Extracting the Mean and Standard deviation of the scores for each group of the testees in which are calculated for each item in the scale. Then applying the T-test for two independent samples to check the differences between the scores of the upper group and the lower group for each item at the level of significance (0.05).

3.7 Reliability of the Test

Reliability represents the consistency of assessment score and it shows the statistical procedures which are used to establish testees' performance within a given test or a cross more than one test (Gronland: 1981: 102).

In order to correct the test in the two domains objectively, inter- rater reliability is required in the test correction as it indicates the extent to which two or more raters agree. Therefore, the specialize committee is constructed from the researcher and two English teachers. The researcher has computed the reliability coefficient of the test by using person's Formula Split – Half method and modified by using Spearman – Brwons' formula: (2r / r+1). The reliability of the test is extracted by using two tools, namely Cronbach's alpha in which is 0.73 and Spearman-Brown Coefficient in which is 0.69.

3.8 Final Test Administration

According to experts' indication, each test item achieves more than 80% percent of agreement of the experts. On that basis the test becomes ready for application. The test has been applied at the second course at academic year 2022 – 2023, on the 20th of February 2023, the test is applied at Tikrit University and on the 23th of February 2023, it is applied at Samarra University

3.9 Scoring Scheme of the Tests

Olshtain and Cohen (1991 : 122) state that it is important to use scoring scheme in the tests in order to correct the students answers. The entire test has been scored out of (15) marks.It divides into three branches based on the criteria of strategic competence (approximation, asking for clarification and asking for repetition) and the score of each item is between (0-5) according to four answers levels (weak, average, good and very good).

Table 4. *Scoring Scheme for EFL university students' conversation (Tikrit and Samara universities)*

	Criteria			
Qualities	**approximation**	**Asking for repetition**	**Asking for clarification**	**Total marks 15**
	Scores			
	Q4.A			
Very Good	**5**	**5**	**5**	**15**
Good	**3-4**	**3-4**	**3-4**	**9-12**
Fair	**1-2**	**1-2**	**1-2**	**3-6**
Weak	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**

3.10 Model of the Study

The adopted model of the present study is in order to identify and compare Iraqi EFL university students' conversational performances in social situations of the target language. Strategic competence in the current study belongs to Celec Murcai's model (1995). Celce considers these the strategies most relevant to communicative language use and CLT. However, Celce's description of strategic competence consists of five main parts, two of them are used in this study; **a-** Achievement or compensatory strategies. One of its criteria

is approximation **b-** interactional strategies like asking for repetition and asking for clarification.

3.11 Statistical Tools

The researcher has applied the following statistical means for analyzing the collected data. The Spearman-Brown formula for correlation coefficient to compute test reliability. T-Test for one sample and two independent samples and Alpha Cronbach Formula.

Section Four

Analysis of collected Data and Results

4.1 Presentation of the Results

The results of the test are processed statistically using mean, standard deviation and t-test for one and two dependent variables to find out the students' conversational performances level in social contexts.

According to the first aim, the study sample at Tikrit and Samarra universities has a low level in the dimension of strategic competence at both writing and speaking levels as a general dimension. So, there is no statistically significant among EFL university students' conversations in the two universities.

Table 5: *The Influence of Strategic Competence as a general dimension among EFL University Students (Tikrit and Samarra) in Written and Spoken* Levels.

Strategic competence	**Type of test**	**Number**	**Mean**	**S.D**	**T-value**		**Significant 0.05**
					Computed T- Value	**Tabulated T-Value**	
Tikrit and Samarra	Written 100	200	7.7650	4.76585	0.786	**1.960**	No Significant
	Spoken 100						

According to the table 5 the finding results of the statistical analysis are used the t-test for one sample, it is shown that the mean value of strategic competence is (7.7650) with standard deviation is (4.76585) with the computed t-value is (0.786) which is lower than the tabulated t-test value which is (1.960) at the level of significance of (0,05). This indicates that there is no statistically significant in their performances.

Additionally, the second aim is to identify and compare strategic competence level in spoken and written acts between the two universities (Tikrit and Samarra).

Table 6: *The Influence of Strategic Competence among EFL University Students (Tikrit and Samarra) in Written and Spoken* Levels

Strategic competence	**Type of test**	**Number**	**Mean**	**S.D**	**T-value**		**Significant 0.05**
					Computed T- Value	**Tabulated T-Value**	
Tikrit university	Written 50	100	9.1600	4.18140	2.807	2.021	Significant
	Spoken 50	100	7.4000	4.72941	-0.150	2.021	No significant
Samarra university	Written 50	100	8.3000	4.78198	1.183	2.021	No significant
	Spoken 50	100	6.2000	4.96107	-1.853	2.021	No significant

The results related to the second aim shows that Tikrit University students have a high level in the strategic competence especially in writing level because The mean value of strategic test is (9.1600) with standard deviation is (4.18140) and the computed t-value is (2.807) which is higher than the tabulated t-test value which is (2.021) at the level of significance of (0,05). This means that it is statistically significant. While in speaking level, Tikrit University students have low level in the dimension of strategic competence as the mean value of strategic test is (7.4000) with standard deviation is (4.72941) and the computed t-value is (-0.150) which is lower than the tabulated t-test value which is (2.021) at the level of significance of (0,05). This means that it is not statistically significant. According to this comparison, Tikrit university students' performance in writing level is higher than their performance in speaking level.

Otherwise, the study sample of Samarra University have a low level in the dimension of strategic competence in writing level because the mean value of strategic test is (8.3000) with standard deviation is (4.78198) with the computed t-value (1.183) is lower than the tabulated t-test value is (2.021) at the level of significance of (0,05). This means that it is not statistically significant. In addition to that, the students of Samarra University have low level in the dimension of the strategic competence because the mean value of strategic test is (6.2000) with standard deviation is (4.96107) with the computed t-value is (-1.853) which is lower than the tabulated t-test value which is (2.021) at the level of significance of (0,05). This means that it is not statistically significant.

Section Five

5.0 Conclusion

In the light of the obtained results, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1-The university students (Tikrit and Samarra) has a low level in writing and speaking levels by using strategic competence. This conclude a need for improvement in language skills across both universities and it may be influenced by various factors such as the quality of English language instruction, educational resources, language exposure, and individual motivation and these dimensions are affected by similar factors across both universities, such as curriculum design or language proficiency requirements.

2- Additionally, Tikrit University students have a high level in the dimension of strategic competence. This implies that they possess a well-rounded set of skills needed for effective written communication. While in speaking level, Tikrit University students have a low level of the strategic competence as a. This indicates a need for improvement in spoken language skills and behavioral factor also effect in their performances such as, anxiety and hesitation through oral interaction.

3- Samarra University students have a low level in the written aspect as a general dimension, as well as in the dimensions of strategic competence. since Iraqi EFL students' patterns and behaviors are highly influence by their own habits and cultural background. Otherwise, they have low level in the dimension of strategic competence. This conclude that they have some ability to engage in conversations and they have limited vocabularies to employ strategic language use when they need to understand unfamiliar word or ask for clarification.

5.1 Recommendations

1- Depend on the findings and conclusions of this study as a whole, the following recommendations are given to improve and develop the levels of the EFL students' conversations.

2- Foreign language teachers need to understand the importance of the strategic competence and use specific strategies that can be employed in the class-room for making the EFL students' conversation aware of the target language they are learning. This problem has been talked by supplying the necessary information in the field.

3- Teaching strategies should focus on raising students' ability level of communicative competence by providing opportunities for students to further develop their skills in organizing and presenting information coherently and effectively.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Studies

In the light of the findings of this study, the following suggestions are put forward:

1-Further researches in the field of EFL students' conversations, the study can be conducted among students from different stages and in variety of academic fields.

2-Conduct longitudinal studies to track the development of conversation over time. This will provide a clearer understanding of how strategic competence and progress or change throughout the university years.

3- An investigation with the gender differences and examine the underlying reasons for these differences and explore ways to promote gender equality in interactional situations.

4- Investigate the language needs of university students in terms of written and spoken conversations.

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