١. Introduction

In the middle of the ١٥th century the word *nickname*, which is first appeared in ١٣٠٣, was established as a variant of the Middle English noun *eke-name*. Semantically both nouns described "a (usually familiar or humorous) name which is given to a person, place, etc., as a supposedly appropriate replacement for or an addition to the proper name" or "a familiar or abbreviated form of a forename"(Oxford English Dictionary Online).

The compound-constituent *eke* is not productive anymore. It derived from the Old English lexeme *ēac* which was a common adverb at that time. The origins are somewhat uncertain, but as variants still are present in some of the existing Germanic languages (e.g. German *auch*, Dutch *ook*, Swedish *och*), it is seemingly Indo-European (Lilo, ٢٠٠٣: ٣).

Various dictionaries define the term nickname in different ways. In Cambridge Dictionaries Online, a nickname is defined as:

> [A]n informal name for someone or something, especially a name which you are called by your friends or family, usually based on your proper name or your character: We always use the nickname Beth for our daughter Elizabeth. "Darwin" was the nickname he was given at high school, because of his interest in science.

Lakaw (٢٠٠٦:١) affirms that, in addition to the semantic qualities of this lexeme, which most definitions agree on, the word nickname gained new meaning due to the development of virtual reality and the possibility of communicating via the Internet or mobile phones.

Nicknaming is universal. People use it among relatively closed groups like slang and other forms of exclusive behavior to reinforce their boundaries and control access. It is central to informal situations of abuse, mockery, and fun. Nicknaming may be deferential or signal membership of a friendship group. A good nickname may change people's impression of a place or person (Wilson, ١٩٩٨: ٢٨٧).

Scholars in various disciplines have shown considerable interest on nicknaming practices and the roles that nicknames play in social life. Sociolinguists consider nicknames as part of the study of systems of personal address (Philipsen, ١٩٨٥: ٩٤).

Nicknames serve a range of functions over and above the typically referential function of the first name. They are frequently semantically transparent and their usage reveals insights into the characteristics (personal and physical) of their bearers, as well as into their role in society that devised and uses them (Raper, ١٩٨٧: ٩١).

Anthropologists often look at nicknaming practices as part of the study of kinship terminologies and the social organization of the communities under study (Antoun, ١٩٦٨: ١٥٨). Folklorists have explored the nature of nicknames as folk expressions and social psychologists focus on their uses as observable mechanisms of group life (McDowell, ١٩٨١:١٨).

On-line communicators, like the traditional writers whose works were published under pseudonyms and pen-names for certain reasons, can hide their real personality behind a nickname. The nickname became a tool to create anonymity (Lakaw, ٢٠٠٦:٢).

Nicknames are used to protect the anonymity of the users. This semantic characteristic of anonymity in on-line communication is a very new quality of this lexeme (Galimberti and Ibarra, ٢٠٠٦:٣٤).

Geertz, as cited in Bruck & Bodenhorn, ٢٠٠٢:١٠, announces that naming is a crucial aspect of converting "anybodies" into "somebodies." Naming practices may express information about a broad range of social classification. European names, among others, can provide information about gender, kinship, class, marriage, ethnicity, and religion, reflecting

existing classificatory groups. In many societies, changes in social status are reflected by name changes and in some; the name change affects the shift in status (ibid).

According to Wierzbicka (١٩٩٢:٣٠٤), "a rigorous analysis of the semantics of names reveals to what extent different attitudes are linked in a given culture to different genders and to different age statuses". For example, the addressee's, being seen as a woman, child, or a girl" determines the displays of affection and similar feelings.

Mill (١٩٧٤:٩٨١) notes that "Sophronicus" and "the father of Socrates" are both "names of the same object" but with different meaning. The former identifies the man; the latter tells us something about him. He draws the distinction between sense and reference of names. Reference points to an object; sense is the context that gives it meaning. "Mr. Jones" and "Henry" may or may not refer to the same person. Only with the context, we can judge whether or not the statement, "Mr. Jones is Henry" makes sense (ibid).

Huffaker (٢٠٠٤:١٥) declares that nicknames affect social interaction. They may provide ways to fit in among users and may affect self-image or users perceptions. The people that surround us often give nicknames, but a self-chosen nickname may enhance a person's confidence. In addition to representing the user's individual identity, nicknames also have an affect on the perceptions of the individual by others (Huffaker, ٢٠٠٤:١٧).

Gladkova (٢٠٠٢:١) states that, being optional and transient terms of address and reference, nicknames can give indications of social relationships, culture and language. The nickname shows a characteristic of a person when it is relevant to the name-giver.

"Names mean something - not just in an etymological sense but in a synchronic sense. They carry important pragmatic meanings which color and even shape the character of human interaction" (Wierzbicka ١٩٩٢:٣٠٢).

In many situations, people are faced with the possibility of choosing among acceptable names, the choice reflecting conscious strategies concerning the social relationship (Bruck & Bodenhorn, ٢٠٠٢:٤). L´evy-Bruhl, as cited in Bruck & Bodenhorn, ٢٠٠٢:١٢, shows that for many people, names are very important. To a significant extent, he asserts, some people *are* their names. "[They] regard their names as something concrete and real and frequently sacred."

The aspects of language that are most revealing and most responsive to social and cultural change are the pragmatic ones. Hence, the

conventions regarding nickname coinage and usage are intimately connected to the gender of bearers and users. An analysis of nicknames, because of their transient nature, shows a closer relationship to culture and society than other more fixed parts of the language (Klerk and Bosch, ١٩٩٦:٨١).

The power of the name itself, which varies cross-culturally, often plays a critical role in social life. Bruck & Bodenhorn (٢٠٠٢:٤) introduce that names may reveal crucial information about gender, kinship, geographical origin, or religion. At the same time, they may also provide the vehicle for crossing boundaries between those very same categories, as well as between life and death, past and future, humans and non-humans.

Wierzbicka (١٩٩٢:٣٧٥) points out that the parts of the language, which are related to the relationship between the speaker and the addressee, are among those most likely to reflect the living, on-going culture. Moreover, linguistic categories that are optional are more likely to be linguistically revealing of trends within the ongoing culture than obligatory ones.

Another important aspect of nicknames is their role in influencing the perceptions of users because of the semantic value evident in some nicknames. Additionally, nicknames have the consequence of reinforcing the character of certain relationships and social attitudes, reminding everyone of the attributes of the bearer and creating expectations, which affect perceptions. This can be particularly influential with regard to the continuation of gender-related stereotypes such as that male nicknames relate typically to connotations of strength, hardness and maturity, while female nicknames relate more to beauty, pleasantness, kindness and goodness (Klerk and Bosch, ١٩٩٦: ٨٩).

It is commonly claimed that male nicknames have a higher frequency of occurrence and are more masculine, often derived from surnames and less affectionate than female nicknames (Klerk and Bosch, ١٩٩٦:٢٣). In early childhood, names are typically terms of endearment, often with a humorous flavor, but those that offer a more significant insight into cultural, social and interpersonal relations are those, which are assigned at school, during adolescence, when there is heightened awareness of gender-related roles (Raper, ١٩٨٧: ٧٩).

Bearers too may well accept their appellations as somehow indicative of the kind of person they are. Hence, nicknames function as a kind of "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Klerk and Bosch, ١٩٩٦: ٩٠).

Nicknames grow spontaneously among small groups of people who know each other intimately, and are frequently indicative of a need to express particular attitudes and feelings such as warmth, affection, solidarity, friendship and playfulness that would not be expressed in the use of the real name (Raper, ١٩٨٧: ٩١). Thus, it becomes clear that the use of nicknames is a widely spread phenomenon among people, and is consequently study-worthy.

٢. The Study

٢.١ Objective of the Study

The present study aims at investigating the use of nicknames of "Bluetooth Devices" by Iraqi advanced learners of English. Within this general objective, the researcher endeavours to study the tendency of using nicknames, and if sex and age have an effect on the selection of nicknames.

٢.٢ Informants of the Study

The informants of the current study are all students at the Dep. of English, Shat Al Arab University College. The researcher has first had four meetings with the ١st and ٢nd year students, both the morning and evening classes, has explained to the idea of the research, and has asked for their volunteer cooperation in participating in the study. He has indicated that he needs those students whose mobiles have Bluetooth service. Consequently, ١٧٨ students, out of ٢٦٦, have participated in the study. The informants are divided into two groups according to age. The first group includes the morning classes where age ranges from ١٨ to ٢١. In the second one for evening classes, the age of participants ranges from ٣٢ to ٤٥. the number of informants for morning classes group is ١١٨, and for the evening classes group is ٦٠.

٢.٣ Procedure of the Study

Since most students do not leave their Bluetooth devices turned on at college, which makes it impossible to know the nicknames they use, and also to avoid giving subjective and impressionistic analysis and explanation behind the use of nicknames, the researcher has devised a simple questionnaire for the informants. In this questionnaire, the informants will give information on their 'sex' and 'age' and answer questions like 'Do you use a nickname for your Bluetooth Device?' & 'Why?' and 'What is the

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١ See Appendix

nickname you have chosen for your Bluetooth Device?' & 'Why did you choose that nick?'.

٢,٤ Analysis and Discussion of Results

The analysis of the informants' responses to the first question of the questionnaire, "Do you use a nickname for your Bluetooth device?" reveals that ١٦٠ of the informants have answered with "Yes", in that (٨٩,٨٨٪) of them do prefer to use nicks.

In regard of the age factor, it has been found that young people tend to use more nicks than old people do. The analysis shows that only (٦) (٥,٣٥) informants of the (١١٨) constituting first age group (١٨-٢١ years) have provided the answer "No", whereas (١٢) (٢٠٪) ones of the (٦٠) of the second group (٣٢-٤٥ years) have responded with "No".

The researcher has also investigated whether gender is an influential factor in the use of nicknames. In this respect, it has been revealed that gender plays a slightly insignificant role. Among the ٩٥ males, ٨٤ (٨٨,٤٢٪) use nicknames, and ٧٦ females of the total number (٨٣) use nicknames, (٩١,٥٦٪).

As a conclusion of the analysis of the first question about the use of the nicknames, it can be stated that the majority of the informants tend to use nicknames. The following table summarizes the statistics found in the analysis of the first question:

Table ١: Percentage of Using Nicknames

		Total No.	No. of *Yes*	Percentage	No. of *No*	Percentage
Gender Factor	Male	٩٥	٨٤	٨٨,٤٢	١١	١١.٥٧
	Female	٨٣	٧٦	٩١,٥٦	٧	٨,٤٣
Age Factor	١st Group (١٨-٢١)	١١٨	١١٢	٩٤,٩١	٦	٥,٣٥
	٢nd Group (٣٢-٤٥)	٦٠	٤٨	٨٠	١٢	٢٠
	Total	١٧٨	١٦٠	٨٩,٨٨	١٨	١٠,١١

In the analysis of the informants' responses, the researcher has found that the majority of the ١٦٠ nicknames used is in Arabic, the following table shows:

Table ٢: Percentage of Using Nicknames in Arabic and English

		Total No.	No. of *Nicks in Arabic*	Percentage	No. of *Nicks in English*	Percentage
Gender Factor	Male	٨٤	٥٧	٦٧,٨٥	٢٧	٣٢,١٤
	Female	٧٦	٥٣	٦٩,٧٣	٢٤	٣١,٥٧
Age Factor	١st Group (١٨-٢١)	١١٢	٧١	٦٣,٣٩	٤١	٣٦.٦٠
	٢nd Group (٣٢-٤٥)	٤٨	٣٤	٧٠,٨٣	١٤	٢٩.١٦

In the second question of the questionnaire, the informants, who answered "yes" in the first question, have been asked to give the nickname they use for their Bluetooth device. Accordingly, all the ١٦٠ informants have provided their nicknames. Moreover, the researcher has then classified these nicks into categories presented in the following table:

Table ٣: Classification of Nicknames Used by the Informants

Category	No.	Percentage
Self-character traits	٦٤	٤٠
Famous people	٣٧	٢٣,١٢
Flora & Fauna	٢٢	١٣,٧٥
Actual Names	١٧	١٠,٦٢
Social status and jobs	١٥	٩,٣٧
abbreviations	٥	٣,١٢

As the table above indicates, most of the nicknames used express self-character traits, in that ٦٤ informants (٤٠٪) have used names denoting or revealing personal features of their users. Examples of these nicknames are "polite", "romantic", "calm", "wild", "beautiful", "courageous", "sad", "optimistic", and "playful". In the next place comes the category of "famous people" nicks. The majority of the (٣٧) informants have selected their nicknames to be names of "athletes", "singers", "actors and actresses", "politicians and leaders", and "literary writers & poets".

The analysis has also shown that ٣٠ informants use nicknames related to flora and fauna. Among these nicknames are "rose of Basrah", "lion of Iraq", "eagle of college", "cat of dreams", and "deer of Basrah". Under the category of "social status and jobs", the researcher has found ١٧ nicknames such as "the engineer", "trader", "ruler", "judge", "doctor", "killer", and "musician".

Less frequent is the use of actual names in that the analysis has indicated that only ١٥ informants use their real names as nicks. And finally, the researcher has found that the least category used is that of "Abbreviation", where the informants abbreviate their names and use the initial letters of these names as their own nicks.

Additionally, the researcher has investigated these categories according to the gender and age factors. The following table presents the nicknames used by the informants according to gender:

Table ٤: Classification of Nicknames According to Gender

Category	Total No.	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
Self-character traits	٦٤	٢٩	٤٥,٣١	٣٥	٥٤,٦٨
Famous people	٣٧	١٣	٣٥,١٣	٢٤	٦٤,٨٦
Flora & Fauna	٢٢	١٧	٧٧,٢٧	٥	٢٢,٧٢
Actual Names	١٧	١٣	٧٦,٤٧	٤	٢٣,٥٢
Social status and jobs	١٥	١٢	٨٠	٣	٢٠
Abbreviations	٥	٠	٠	٥	١٠٠

The table above shows that the percentages of males and females in using nicknames expressing "self-character traits" are (٤٥,٣١٪ & ٥٤,٦٨٪ respectively). The researcher has found that males mainly tend to use these nicks denoting power, whereas females prefer to use those expressing beauty. For instance, males use nicks as "strong", "wild", "brave" and females "beautiful", "pretty", "soft", and "attractive".

In the second category, famous people, females have shown a higher tendency than males, in that the percentage of females using nicks taken from the names of famous people is (٦٤,٨٦٪), whereas that of males is (٣٥,١٣٪). Most of the nicks used by female͟ ͟ ͟ this category are names

of famous and beautiful actresses or singers, whereas the majority of nicks used by males are names of athletes, strong actors, and historically famous leaders. Thus, it can be stated that females seek to express beauty in their nicknames, while males power and dominance.

In using "Flora & Fauna" nicknames, males have scored a higher percentage than females, ٧٧,٢٧٪ & ٢٢,٢٧٪ respectively. A noticeable finding here is that males tend to use nicks of wild animals (fauna) like "Iraqi Tiger", "Lion" and "Wolf of College", and females use names of plants (flora) such as "Rose of Basra", White Flower", and "Strawberry". Again, males use more nickname of "social status and jobs" than females. As the table indicates, (٧٦,٤٧٪) of the nicknames used under this category are used by males and only (٢٣,٢٥٪) by females. Similarly, males tend more than females to use their actual names as their nicks, in that it has been found that (٨٠٪) of the actual names used as nicks by the informants are used by males. In the last category, "Abbreviation", females have been found to be the users of all the (٥) abbreviated nicknames provide by the informants.

The following table presents the nicknames used by the informants according to age:

Table ٥: Classification of Nicknames According to Age

Category	Total No.	1st Age Group (١٨-٢١)	Percentage	2nd Age Group (٢٢-٤٥)	Percentage
Self-character Traits	٦٤	٥١	٧٩,٦٨	١٣	٢٠,٣١
Famous People	٣٧	٣١	٨٣,٧٨	٦	١٦,٢١
Flora & Fauna	٢٢	١٦	٧٢,٧٢	٦	٢٧,٢٧
Actual Names	١٧	٥	٢٩,٤١	١٢	٧٠,٥٨
Social Status and Jobs	١٥	٤	٢٦,٦٦	١١	٧٣,٣٣
Abbreviations	٥	٥	١٠٠	٠	٠

The table generally shows that the informants of the first group (١٨-٢١ years) tend to use nicknames related to "self-character traits", "famous people", flora and fauna", and "abbreviations" more than the informants of the second group (٢٢-٤٥ years) do. On the contrary, the older people, i.e. those of the second group, tend to use nicknames denoting "social status and jobs" and " actual names" more than those of the first group do.

The analysis reveals that the percentage of using nicknames of "self-character traits", "famous people", flora and fauna", and "abbreviations" by

younger people are (٧٩,٦٨٪), (٨٣,٧٨٪), (٧٢,٧٢٪), and (١٠٠٪) respectively. The reason behind these high percentages of nicknames used by the younger people, the researcher believes, is that people at this age, by selecting specific nicknames wish to attract and be admired by others, and more importantly to hide their real identity.

The researcher also thinks that the high percentage the older people scored in using nicknames of actual names and social status and jobs can be attributed to the fact that those people wish to win the respect of other people, and they need not hide their real identity.

In the analysis of why the informants have selected these given nicknames, it has been found that the majority of the informants prefer to remain unknown for others. They like to hide behind these nicknames and they do not wish to reveal their real identity. The table below summarizes the reasons for using nicknames and reveals:

Table ٦: Reasons for Selecting Certain Nicknames by the Informants

No.	Reason	Total No.	Percentage
١	To hide the user's identity and character	٤٦	٢٨,٧٥
٢	To avoid problems and embarrassment	٣١	١٩,٣٧
٣	To communicate and exchange contents freely	٢٦	١٦,٢٥
٤	Wishing to be like the names/ person of bluetooth	٢١	١٣,١٢
٥	It reflects something about the user's personal traits	١٨	١١,٢٥
٦	To gain respect, love, admiration, …etc.	١٣	٨,١٢
٧	It is the real name of the user	٥	٣,١٢

It is clear from the table above that the first three reasons, which constitute ٦٤,٣٧٪ of the answers all confirm that the informants tend to hide themselves.

As far as anonymity is concerned, the researcher investigates the degree of anonymity of the nicknames used by the informants. To classify the nicknames according to their degree of anonymity, the researcher has adopted Bechar- Israeli's[1] general types of nicknames, which are shown in the following table:

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[1] Bechar-Israeli, H. ١٩٩٦. From (Bonehead) To (cLoNehAd) : Nicknames, play, and Identity on Internet Relay Chat. Online-journal Mediensprache.

Table ٧: Degree of Anonymity of Bechar- Israeli's General Types of Nicknames

Anonymity	Relation to …	Characteristics	Example
Very high	١ Unknown	No conclusions about the user's identity are possible. No information about gender, etc. given.	\<rwx>
	٢ Identity	The user is aware of the anonymity of nicknames and hides his/her personal information deliberately.	\<Me>
	٣ Language play	No personal information given, only the awareness and the ability to play with language give a hint on identity.	\<whathell>
	٤ Onomatopoeia	May reveal some information about the mother tongue of a user. No personal information given.	\<Tamtam>
High	٥ Personal interest	No information about the user's identity given. Only his/her interests can be detected.	\<froggy>
	٦ Famous names	Age and sex can be guessed by the person the nickname refers to. Other personal information is not given.	\<elvis>
	٧ Provocations	Personal interest and as well as the social and cultural origin can be detected by the reference to the provocations being made.	\<hitler>
	٨ Place names	Personal relation or interest can be recognized by regarding the place names the user refers to.	\<irish>
Low	٩ Age	Age is the most strictly kept secret of a person. Delivered in nicknames it provides some important hints on identity.	\<ann١٢>
	١٠ Profession	The profession of a user provides some hints on the gender, interest, and the social status of that person.	\<FooTBallPlayER>
	١١ Personal names	Mentioning one's name is the lowest degree of anonymity.	\<janetB>

According to Bechar-Israeli's classification, the most anonymous nicknames (very high degree of anonymity) are those that give no information about the users' identities. The second degree of anonymity, which is classified as high, includes those nicknames that are made up of terms related to technology, flora and fauna, objects and status symbols, as well as literature an entertainment. Such nicknames, though they give no information about the users' identities, give some information about the users' interests, personal relations, and age & sex. The third degree of anonymity is "low" where the nicknames give hints on identity or overtly state the users' professions or names.

The researcher has analyzed the degree of anonymity of the nicknames given by the informants and found that only (٥) nicknames are of very high degree, (١٢٣) of high degree, and (٣٢) of low degree. The following table summarizes this finding:

Table ٨: Classification of Degree of Anonymity of Nicknames Used by The Informants

Degree of Anonymity	Category	No.	Percentage
Very high	Abbreviations	٥	٣,١٢
High	Self-character traits	١٢٣	٧٦,٨٧
	Famous People		
	Flora& Fauna		
low	Social Status and Jobs	٣٢	٢٠
	Actual Name		

In the analysis of the degree of anonymity of nicknames, the researcher has found that all the five nicknames with the very high degree of anonymity have been used by young females. Also, it has been found that both males and females of the first age group (١٨-٢١ years) tend to use nicknames with high degree of anonymity. Another finding is that nicknames of low degree of anonymity have been used by older people, those of the second group (٣٢-٤٥ years). This, the researcher believes, can be attributed to the informants' willingness to show or hide their real identity.

٣. Conclusions & Recommendations

The purpose of the study is to investigate the use of nicknames by Iraqi advanced learners, the effect of age and gender on the selection of nicknames, and the degree of anonymity of the selected nicknames. The researcher, after carrying out the analysis, has arrived at some concrete conclusions:

١. The majority of Iraqi advanced learners tends to use nicknames for their Bluetooth devices and do not like to keep the original name of the device, as it does not convey any information about them.

٢. Age & gender play a crucial role in the selection of a specific nickname in that it has been found that males tend to express power, whereas females beauty. In addition, it has been shown that older people prefer nicknames denoting their social status, whereas younger people tend to use, for instance, those nicknames expressing their character traits.

٣. With regard to anonymity, the researcher has found that females tend more than males to use nicknames that are more anonymous. Similarly, younger people use more anonymous nicknames than older people do.

For further studies, the researcher recommends that such studies focus on the social and/or the cultural factors that influence the selection of a specific nickname by Iraqi learners of English or even Iraqi people in general. Additionally, the researcher believes it is valuable that other scholars pragmatically approach the use of nicknames in online communication.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Gender: ....

Age: ....

Q١/ Do you use a nickname for your Bluetooth Device?

Q٢/ If yes, what is the nickname?

Q٣/ Why did you select this nickname?