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وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي  
جامعة الموصل  
كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

# مجلة التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

مجلة عليّة فضيلة محكمة  
تصدر عن كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية  
في جامعة الموصل

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## شروط النشر في مجلة التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

ترحب مجلة (التربية للعلوم الإنسانية) العلمية المحكمة بإسهام الباحثين من العراق وخارجه، فتخطو بهم ومعهم خطوات واثقة نحو مستقبل مشرق، وفيما يأتي بعض ضوابط النشر فيها:

- ❖ تستقبل المجلة البحوث العلمية في مجالات العلوم الإنسانية كافة.
- ❖ تقوم هيئة التحرير بالبحوث علمياً مع خبراء مشهود لهم بالكفاية العلمية في اختصاصهم الدقيق. في الجامعات العراقية والعربية.
- ❖ ترفض المجلة نشر البحوث التي لا تطابق منهج البحث العلمي المعروف.
- ❖ يلزم الباحث بالأخذ بما يرد من ملحوظات حول بحثه من خلال ما يحدده الخبراء المقومون.
- ❖ ألا يكون البحث مقدماً إلى مجلة أخرى، ولم ينشر سابقاً، وعلى الباحث أن يتعهد خطياً بذلك.
- ❖ يثبت على الصفحة الأولى ما يأتي: عنوان البحث ، واسم الباحث، ولقبه العلمي، ومكان عمله، وبريده الإلكتروني ، ورقم هاتفه ، وكلمات مفتاحية ، جميع هذه البيانات باللغتين العربية والإنكليزية وفي حالة وجود أكثر من باحث تذكر أسمائهم وعناوينهم، لتسهيل عملية الاتصال بهم.
- ❖ يطبع الباحث ملخصاً للبحث في صفحة مستقلة، وباللغتين العربية والإنكليزية، على ألا يزيد عن (٢٠٠) كلمة.
- ❖ تعتمد المجلة أسلوب APA للنشر العلمي في التوثيق، ويجب على الباحث اتباع قواعد الاقتباس وتوثيق المصادر وأخلاقيات البحث العلمي وفق هذا النظام.
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- ❖ كنية المؤلف اسمه. (سنة النشر). عنوان الكتاب. رقم الطبعة (١٣) دار النشر. مكان النشر (المدينة). انظر (موارد وثائق نظام APA). لمزيد من المعلومات (<https://www.apa.org>).
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- ❖ إذا كانت المصادر العربية لها ترجمة معتمدة من اللغة الإنكليزية، فيجب اعتمادها، أما المصادر التي ليس لديها ترجمة معتمدة للغة الإنكليزية (مثل: لسان العرب، تتم ترجمتها صوتياً، أي أن المصدر مكتوب بحروف إنكليزية (Lisan AleArab).

- ❖ تطبيق المجلة نظام فحص (الاستلال) باستخدام برنامج (Turnitin)، حيث يتم رفض نشر الأبحاث التي تزيد فيها نسبة (الاستلال) عن المعدل المقبول دوليًا.
- ❖ لا يعد قبول النشر ملزماً للمجلة بنشر البحث العلمي ضمن الاعداد إلا ما يليق بسمعتها العلمية.
- ❖ رسوم البحث للباحثين من داخل العراق (125,000) دينار، على ألا يتجاوز عدد صفحاته (25) صفحة بما فيها البيانات والخرائط، والمصورات، وإذا زاد البحث على ذلك يتحمل الباحث دفع مبلغ (2000) دينار عن كل صفحة إضافية.
- ❖ يطبع البحث على الآلة الحاسبة، وعلى ورق حجم (A4) وبوجه واحد.
- ❖ يطبع البحث وبواسطة برنامج (Microsoft Word) بخط (Simplified Arabic)، للبحث المكتوب باللغة العربية وخط (Times New Roman) للبحث المكتوب باللغة الإنجليزية، بحجم (١٤) لمثن البحث، و (١٦) للعناوين الرئيسية والفرعية ، ويكون ادراج الهوامش الكترونيا وليس يدويا .
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- ❖ التباعد بين الاسطر (١) سم باللغة العربية و (١.٥) سم باللغة الإنكليزية .
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- ❖ لا تلزم المجلة بإعادة البحث إلى صاحبه إذا اعترض على نشره الخبراء، ويُكتفى بالاعتذار.
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- ❖ تتم المراسلة عبر الوسائل الاتية:

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## المحتويات

١. بناء مقياس الحيوية النفسية لدى طلبة جامعة الموصل  
عزيزة خالد خير الدين و أ.م.د. رنا كمال جباد..... ١٥٨٥-١٦٠٦
٢. حكم أخذ الأجرة على العبادات دراسة فقهية مقارنة  
م.م. معاذ محمد حسين الجحيشي..... ١٦٠٧-١٦٣٨
٣. منتخب ثواب الأعمال لأبي الشيخ الأصبهاني من قوله ثواب من ملك نفسه عند الغضب إلى قوله مداراة الناس -دراسة وتحقيق-  
امنه غازي حميد و أ. د. عمار جاسم محمد..... ١٦٣٩-١٦٦٢
٤. المقاصد الجزئية في باب التيمم عند الصنعاني في كتاب سبل السلام  
زهراء فوزي حسين احمد و أ.د. نبيل محمد غريب..... ١٦٦٣-١٦٧٦
٥. المقصد الجزئي من عدم قطع اليد على الضيف إذا سرق ممن أضافه ولم يخرج ما سرق خارج الدار عند الكمال ابن الهمام  
محمود عبدالله فتحي و أ. م. د مضر حيدر محمود اليوزبكي..... ١٦٧٧-١٦٩٦
٦. معوقات تطبيق الذكاء الاصطناعي بكلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية من وجهة نظر الطلبة  
أ.د. ندى فتاح زيدان و م.م. فائق زكي محمد حميد..... ١٦٩٧-١٧١٦
٧. بلاغة النداء في شعر العباس بن الاحنف  
م.د.محمود عبد الجبار محمود المشهداني..... ١٧١٧-١٧٢٨
٨. الصحابية سلمى بنت عميس (رضي الله عنها) دراسة في سيرتها  
م.د.د. مها صالح مطر و أ.د. عمر أمجد صالح..... ١٧٢٩-١٧٤٤
٩. الحذف عند المهدي (٤٤٠هـ) في كتابه التحصيل لفوائد التفصيل الجامع لعلوم التنزيل  
عبير محمد حسن و أ.م.د. صالح علي شيخ علي..... ١٧٤٥-١٧٦٦
١٠. تعبيرية الفقد في الافتتاح والإقبال قراءة في قصيدة (بتول) للشاعرة بشرى البستاني  
أ.م.د. جاسم خلف الياس..... ١٧٦٧-١٧٨٢
١١. الذكاء الاصطناعي محلاً تداولياً، دراسة لبائية وليد الصراف  
م.د. أحمد الشهاب صالح ذياب..... ١٧٨٣-١٨٠٨
١٢. ازدواجية التعبير العاطفي لدى طلبة جامعة الموصل  
م.م. عبير عبدالستار عبدالله و أ.د. صبيحة ياسر مكطوف..... ١٨٠٩-١٨٢٦

١٣. الذكاء الاصطناعي بين المخاطر الإنسانية والممارسة الأخلاقية  
د. يوسف ادريس عبدالرزاق و د. نور عوني عبدالرحمن..... ١٨٢٧-١٨٤٢
١٤. المرجعيات الدينية في رسائل ابي المطرف بن عميرة نماذج مختارة  
دعاء بشير يونس و أ.د. مثنى عبدالله محمد..... ١٨٤٣-١٨٦٦
١٥. الشعارات والهتافات الجماهيرية لثورة ١٩١٩ في مصر  
نهى سعد عزالدين و د. بيداء سالم صالح..... ١٨٦٧-١٨٨٢
١٦. الذكاء الاصطناعي ومعالجة اللغة العربية دراسة  
حول التحديات والآفاق  
د. حسين مهني و أ. عبد الكريم حسين الشرعة..... ١٨٨٣-١٨٩٨
١٧. بناء مقياس الشخصية الساذجة لدى طلبة المرحلة الاعدادية في  
مدينة الموصل  
م.م نشوى معيوف مردان و أ.د. أسامة حامد محمد..... ١٨٩٩-١٩١٦
١٨. النمذجة المكانية لاحتمالية حدوث الفيضانات في حوض دهوك  
سمير غانم خليل و أ.م. د. عمر عبدالله إسماعيل القصاب..... ١٩١٧-١٩٤٨
١٩. الذكاء الاصطناعي وتطبيقاته في علم النفس التربوي: نحو نموذج  
تكاملي لتطوير طرائق التدريس (دراسة نظرية تحليلية)  
أ.م. رقية رافد شاكر و م. د. شوان حميد حسن..... ١٩٤٩-١٩٦٨
٢٠. بناء مقياس انماط التفاعل الاجتماعي وفق نظرية Bales لدى  
موظفي مديرية زراعة نينوى  
محسن موفق محسن و أ.د. فضيلة عرفات محمد..... ١٩٦٩-٢٠١٠
٢١. المعرفة الانفعالية لدى طلبة الجامعة  
اسراء محمد احمد و أ.م. د. اسيل محمود محمود..... ٢٠١١-٢٠٣٦
٢٢. دراسة التغيرات في استخدامات أراضي بساتين مدينة خانقين باستخدام  
تقنيات الاستشعار عن بعد للمدة ١٩٩٠م - ٢٠٢٢م  
م. عبدالله علي إبراهيم و شادان عبدالله علي..... ٢٠٣٧-٢٠٦٢
٢٣. جهود علماء الشام في التدريس والتعليم في مصر  
ا.د محمود فياض حمادي و م.د. حسام قاسم محمد الصميدعي..... ٢٠٦٣-٢٠٧٤

٢٤. اثر انموذج بارمان في تنمية مهارات التفكير المنظومي لدى طالبات الصف الرابع الاعدادي
- ٢١٠٢-٢٠٧٥ ..... اميرة اسماعيل هادي و ا.د ندى لقمان محمد امين الحبار
٢٥. اعادة احياء مدينة الموصل التاريخية والتنمية المستدامة عبر استخدام برامج الذكاء الاصطناعي
- ٢١١٤-٢١٠٣ ..... أ.د. ليث شاكر محمود
٢٦. حاشية إبراهيم وحدي (ت ١١٢٦هـ) على تفسير البيضاوي سورة يونس الآيات (١٩ - ٢٦) (دراسة وتحقيق)
- ٢١٣٨-٢١١٥ ..... جمال حمود مهاوش و أ.م.د. فارس فاضل موسى الشمري
٢٧. تحولات البنية الزمنية في بناء النص السردي شعراء بلنسية نموذجاً
- ٢١٦٢-٢١٣٩ ..... م.م شلاش خلف يونس و أ.د. مثنى عبدالله محمد علي
٢٨. الحكم التكليفي الصريح في باب الخلع عند الصنعاني في سبل السلام
- ٢١٨٠-٢١٦٣ ..... نبراس حمود خليف علي و أ. د نبيل محمد غريب
٢٩. تحليل جغرافي لصناعة الاثاث الخشبي في محافظة نينوى ومشكلاته
- ٢٢٠٨-٢١٨١ ..... سفيان سالم عبد الله و ا.م.د احمد طلال خضر
٣٠. التوجهات الامريكية في السياسة الدولية وموقع العراق منها
- ٢٢٣٠-٢٢٠٩ ..... أ.د. احمد داود و أ.د. احمد سلمان و م. هويدة عبدالغني
٣١. التفسير التحليلي للآية (٤٣) من سورة النساء بين الإمام الرازي وابن عاشور دراسة مقارنة
- ٢٢٥٨-٢٢٣١ ..... رحمة طلال عبد الله و ا.م.د حذيفة فاضل يونس
٣٢. Minor Disorder, Major Collapse: A Broken Windows Reading of Wertenbaker's *The Grace of Mary Traverse*
- 2259-2276 Mohammed Majid & Ahmed Sabah.....
٣٣. Neurotic Trauma in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- Dr. Abdulhameed Abdullah & Dr. Omar M. Abdullah & Yousif Ismael.....
- 2277-2294 Breaking the Quantity Rule: Exploring Gender Differences in Learners' Responses to Gricean Maxim Violations
٣٤. Ashraf Abdulwahid & Maha Khaled & Kamal Hazim
- 2295-2308

EFL College Students' Self-Reported of Their Sociolinguistic Competence	٣٥
2309-2330 Dr. Shoaib Saied Abdulfatah.....	



## Breaking the Quantity Rule: Exploring Gender Differences in Learners' Responses to Gricean Maxim Violations

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الكلمات المفتاحية: جنس المتكلم، المرونة التداولية، مبدأ الكم.

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### الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في تأثير جنس المتكلم على ردود فعل المتعلمين العراقيين للغة الإنكليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية تجاه خرق مبادئ غرايس، وبشكل خاص استكشاف ردود فعل المتعلمين الذكور والإناث تجاه خرق مبدأ الكم. وتم اعتماد الفرضية التداولية نموذجاً لتحليل البيانات التجريبية التي جمعت من ردود مائة متعلم عراقي، من كلا الجنسين، لمهام تقييم الجمل بنظام ثنائي وثلاثي الخيارات. وقد تضمنت المهام سياقات حوارية شملت خرقاً لمبدأ الكم. وتتمحور مشكلة الدراسة الحالية حول امرين: (١) فهم كيفية اختلاف ردود فعل المتعلمين الذكور والإناث تجاه اللغة غير الملائمة من الناحية التداولية، و(٢) التحقيق في هذا الموضوع في محاولة ملئ الفجوة المعرفية فيما يتعلق بالاختلاف بين سلوك المتعلمين الذكور والإناث في

مثل هذه الحالات. وافترضت الدراسة بأن المتعلمات هن أكثر مرونة من الناحية التداولية من المتعلمين الذكور. ونظرًا للطبيعة العددية للبيانات، تطلب تحليلها اتباع نهج كمي يتمثل في التحليل الإحصائي باستخدام برنامج SPSS. بينت نتائج تحليل البيانات بأن لجنس المتعلم تأثير على المرونة التداولية، حيث كانت المتعلمات أكثر مرونة من الناحية التداولية من المتعلمين الذكور. علاوة على ذلك، أظهرت نتائج الدراسة إلى وجود علاقة عكسية بين الكفاءة البراغماتية والمرونة البراغماتية.

### Abstract

The impact of gender on Iraqi EFL learners' reactions toward the violation of Grice's maxims is what this study seeks to investigate. Particularly, it explores male and female learners' reactions towards violations of the quantity maxim. In the current study, the pragmatic hypothesis is adopted as the model for analyzing the empirical data collected from one hundred Iraqi EFL male and female learners' responses to two types of sentence judgment tasks: binary and ternary. The tasks included conversational contexts that involved violations of the quantity maxim. The current study problem consists of two parts: (1) understanding how male and female EFL learners differ in their reaction towards pragmatically inappropriate language and (2) investigating such a subject it tries to fill the gap of knowledge concerning the difference between male and female learners' behavior in such situation. It is hypothesized that female learners are more pragmatically flexible than male learners. Due to the numerical nature of the data, data analysis required a quantitative approach, namely, a statistical analysis using SPSS software. The results of the data analysis revealed that gender impacts pragmatic flexibility. The female learners were more pragmatically flexible than the male learners. Additionally, the results of the study indicated that a reverse relationship exists between pragmatic competence and pragmatic flexibility.

### Introduction

The language of men and women is one of the most controversial concepts that takes much concern in language research. There is a permanent interest in identifying, describing, and explaining the diverse features of gendered language. This increased attention comes from the fact that gendered language can cause conflict, social issues, psychological defacement, and, most importantly, gendered dilemmas.

One of the earliest accounts of language and gender is that of Lakoff (1975). Lakoff's work can be considered the spark that ignited the interest in gendered language research; consequently, a significant interest in the relationship between pragmatics and gender is generated. Chambers (1992) indicates that there is a wide range of differences between men and women regarding their language use. Furthermore, males and females differ in their utilization of speech acts. Several studies provided evidence of different disagreement strategies used by males and females (Ludwig, 1983; Thijittang & Lê, 2008).

In the earliest investigations, researchers attempted to examine the strategies employed by men and women during conversational interaction and what features characterize strategies. Politeness, recently, has been a subject of investigation in much research focusing on a basic and complex question, which is 'Are women more polite than men or vice versa?'. In this regard, Holmes (1995) states that answering such a question represents a challenge for those doing research in the field of sociolinguistics. She, despite her knowledge of the complexity of such a question, indicates that women are more polite than men. Since gender plays a vital role in language use, it would play such a role in the process of second language acquisition. Thus, it received considerable attention in second language research. It is indicated by many studies that in second language acquisition there are gender-related differences. Bacon and Finnemann (1992) found that females and males employ different learning strategies. Furthermore, language learning motivation differs according to gender, as Ludwig (1983) indicated.

The role of pragmatics in second-language acquisition is highly significant; being pragmatically competent enables second-language learners to communicate effectively and successfully. Acquiring pragmatic competence is not an easy task as it comes with various challenges; one of these is the fact that pragmatics does not have explicit rules that can be taught using traditional teaching methods. Accompanying such challenges are many factors that impact acquiring pragmatic abilities. One of the most influential factors is gender. Therefore, many studies attempted to investigate whether learners' pragmatic competence is impacted by learners' gender. Recent research provided evidence regarding males' and females' different pragmatic abilities in their second language. Starting with the impact of gender on

pragmatic competence, evidence is found indicating that there is a difference between males and females regarding their pragmatic abilities (Thijittang & Lê, 2008; Usuludin et al., 2021). That is, female learners are more pragmatically competent than male learners. Conversely, the study of Alnaas Taha et al. (2022) provided evidence indicating the absence of gender differences in pragmatic competence. They found that Pakistani male and female EFL learners have nearly equivalent levels of pragmatic competence. It can be observed that the relationship between language and gender, although a complex one, is valuable in giving deeper insights into second language pragmatics acquisition.

One of the pragmatic aspects that may include gender difference is the use of Grice's maxim of quantity. People normally interact by providing sufficient information. In other words, speakers just say what is required to communicate. Thus, the quantity maxim is believed to be a cornerstone in any conversational interaction. Grice (1975) indicated that observing this maxim requires two principles: "a) Make your contribution as informative as required for the current purposes of the exchange you are engaged in; b) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required." Since this maxim concerns the amount of information provided and obliges interlocutors to share sufficient information only, Kearns (2000) calls it the informativeness maxim. Even though the quantity maxim is essential in communication, it can be violated by interlocutors with or without deliberation. The maxim of quantity can be violated with interlocutors providing withholding or misleading information, which causes confusion and misunderstandings (Cutting, 2008). Therefore, this maxim is seen to be of serious significance to communicating successfully and efficiently. EFL learners' acquisition of such maxim helps them to be communicatively and pragmatically competent. However, their reaction to the violation of this maxim is an integral part of their pragmatic competence.

People may be involved in conversations, including under informative utterances; some of them accept such utterances to maintain smoothness during interaction, while others reject such utterances. The acceptance of underinformative utterances may arise from their pragmatic flexibility. Katsos and Bishop (2011) investigated the understanding of underinformative sentences among children and adults in L1 acquisition research. They proposed the pragmatic hypothesis to

account for the observed distinctions between children and adults in their derivation of scalar implicature. This hypothesis suggests that violations of informativeness and logical truth within an utterance are not all equally severe. While participants tend to reject utterances that seriously violate logical truth, their responses to violations of informativeness, which breach the cooperative principle, can vary. This variation is due to individual differences in "pragmatic flexibility," or the threshold for what is considered acceptable.

Interestingly, second language research considers the conception of pragmatic flexibility promising in revealing many significant findings concerning EFL learners' acquisition of pragmatic competence. Accordingly, the path is paved for this hypothesis in second-language research. According to what the researchers know, the application of the pragmatic hypothesis took place in two studies. The first is that of Schulz (2021), and the second is the one that Feng (2022) made. The argument that is raised in both studies is that research made in the past attempted to test L2 pragmatic abilities by limiting themselves to using the binary task only. Basing their argument on L1 research, the researchers claim that the binary task targets the pragmatic flexibility that learners exhibit. The studies revealed EFL learners are as pragmatically competent as native English speakers, and EFL learners may differ in their pragmatic flexibility.

Although considered one of the most significant variables in second language acquisition, gender has not been taken into account as an effective variable that can impact EFL learners' pragmatic flexibility.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, the recent studies are not concerned with the gender of the EFL learners with respect to their pragmatic flexibility. In other words, this phenomenon has not been investigated by any previous study. Thus, the primary focus of the present study is to fill in that gap and examine the role of gender in pragmatic flexibility. Consequently, the following questions are posed to be addressed in this study:

Q1- Who is more pragmatically flexible towards violations of the quantity maxim, male or female learners?

Q2- Can gendered context influence male and female learners' pragmatic flexibility?

## Method

The current research involved designing an experiment, which is designed utilizing Microsoft Word. It included formulating conversational contexts involving utterances violating the maxim of quantity. The conversational context consists of two characters: one providing normal utterances indicating his/her desire to communicate and the other providing informatively inappropriate utterances. The utterances that violate the quantity maxim are different in the degree of maxim violation. The total number of the formulated contexts is four: two male and two female contexts; each encompasses four pragmatically infelicitous utterances. The male contexts include male topics, such as a discussion concerning cars; the female contexts are about female interests, such as shopping. Eventually, the study involved sixteen utterances violating the maxim of quantity.

The instruments used to measure EFL learners' pragmatic flexibility and their ability to derive quantity implicature are Sentence Judgment Tasks (henceforth, SJTs). SJTs are one of the most frequently used instruments in linguistic experimental research. In such tasks, participants are presented with statements in a situation of evaluation; then, they are asked to judge the felicity of such statements. Accordingly, SJTs are widely used tasks in implicature research. SJTs have two primary types: binary and ternary (or graded). Binary SJTs can be used to provide considerable results about learners' pragmatic flexibility. Still, they are accused of being deficient in providing clear insights concerning the connection between learners' pragmatic flexibility and learners' pragmatic competence. In other words, binary SJTs reveal learners' pragmatic flexibility and do not inform whether their receptivity is accompanied by pragmatic comprehension or implicature derivation. Thus, an alternative strategy has been adopted, employing ternary (or graded) SJTs as a better choice to cure such a problem (Veenstra & Katsos, 2018).

The binary and the ternary SJTs are utilized in this study: the binary SJTs measure learners' pragmatic competence, and the ternary SJTs measure learners' ability to derive quantity implicature. In the binary SJTs, the pragmatically infelicitous utterances were highlighted, and the participants were asked to deem these statements as "satisfied or unsatisfied". The ternary SJTs involved having the participants evaluate the same utterances on a scale of "strongly unsatisfied-somehow unsatisfied-neutral-somehow satisfied-strongly satisfied". In an attempt to obtain reliable results, an evaluation of the pragmatically inappropriate statements was asked to be done by the participants as if they were involved in a situation similar to the contexts of the experiment. All contexts were created in English, printed on paper, and handed out to the participants of the study. Conducting the experiment in this way assured gaining reliable responses from the participants, which helps investigating their actual pragmatic abilities. That is, they read and comprehend the context of the experiment without any external effect. This way, the participants could read and understand the contexts without any extraneous effects, ensuring the results were based only on the participants' abilities and not on any unknown individual's interference. 15-20 minutes is the time the participants took to complete the tasks. One hundred participants participated (50 male and 50 female participants) from the Department of English Language/College of Education for Humanities/ University of Mosul and the Department of English Language/College of Education/ Al-Noor University for the academic year 2024-2025.

The analysis of the data is conducted utilizing IBM SPSS 24 software. Inspired by Katsos and Bishop's (2011) pragmatic tolerance hypothesis and because of the numerical nature of the data, several statistical tests were run to analyze the provided data of the current study. The data analysis procedure involved transforming the answer options into numbers since performing the statistical analyses requires numbers. Thus, the binary task involves 'satisfied'/ 'unsatisfied' as options for answering it. The options are transformed as follows:

Satisfied / Unsatisfied

1            0

The ternary task involves a similar procedure of answer option transformation. That is, the answer options in the ternary task were

"strongly unsatisfied-somewhat unsatisfied-neutral -somewhat satisfied -strongly satisfied". Therefore, the options for the task are transformed as follows:

1=" strongly Unsatisfied"

2= "Somewhat unsatisfied"

3= "Neutral"

4="Somewhat satisfied."

5=" strongly Satisfied"

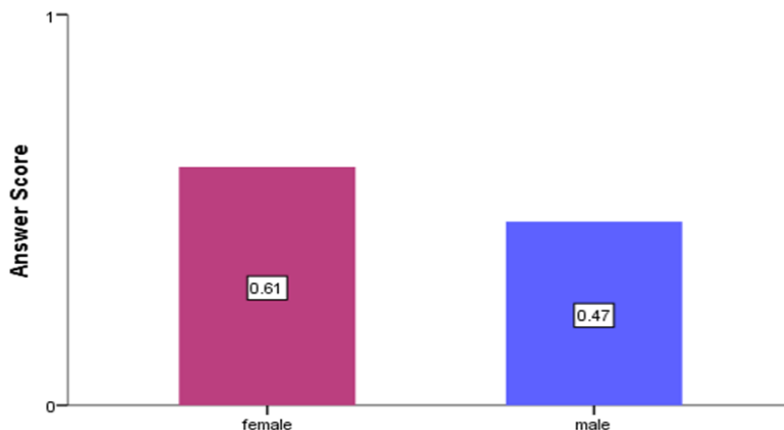
## Results and Discussion

### Binary Task

This task involves measuring EFL learners' pragmatic flexibility. Thus, having the mean of answers approximates '1'1; the participants are deemed to be pragmatically flexible. However, providing mean answers approximating '0' by participants deem them as unflexible pragmatically. The statistical analysis showed that female participants are more pragmatically flexible than male participants towards violations of the quantity maxim. That is, female participants' mean answer scores approximated "1", while male participants' mean answer scores approximated "0".

**Table 1.** The Mean and S.E. Mean of Both Groups' Answers.

Gender	Mean	S.E. Mean
Female participants	0.61	0.035
Male participants	0.47	0.060





**Figure 1.** Both Gender Groups' Mean Answer Score of Utterance Violating Quantity Maxim in the Binary Judgment Task.

A between-group test of mean answers is conducted to explore to what extent male and female learners differ in their pragmatic flexibility. Conducting such a test helps reveal the possibility of different statistical results in both gender groups' mean answers of utterances violating the quantity maxim in the binary judgment test. Before conducting a between-group test, the normality of data distribution is required. Therefore, the results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test indicate the non-normal distribution of the data (male participants:  $W(50) = 0.911$ ,  $p < .05$ ; female participants:  $W(50) = 0.951$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These lead to conducting Mann Whitney u-tests, which are non-parametric tests. Importantly, the tests reveal different statistical results between male and female participants' mean answers for statements, including violation of the quantity maxim is found. Namely, the female participants were more pragmatically flexible than the male participants, who exhibited low levels of pragmatic flexibility ( $U = 1131.0$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Evidence is found supporting the claim that females are more socially flexible than males (Elsinbawi & Wolosin, 2023). This could justify female participants' pragmatic flexibility. Thus, the hypothesis indicating "Female learners are more pragmatically flexible than male learners" is validated according to the results.

Furthermore, a t-test was conducted to investigate the impact of gendered context on male and female participants' pragmatic flexibility.

Firstly, the data from male contexts is analyzed to explore whether the male and female participants differ in their reactions according to the gendered context. The results reveal that male participants tend to be more flexible with their same-gender peers than female participants (mean score: Males (44.5); females (30.1). In contrast, females showed higher levels of pragmatic flexibility towards female context than males (mean score: males (40.2); females (60.3). Accordingly, the hypothesis indicating that "gendered context directs male and female learners' pragmatic flexibility" is validated. This behavior of both gender groups can possibly be attributed to the fact that each of them is less interested in the other gender topics. That is, females do not find any interest in discussing things about cars; vice versa, males do not like things related to shopping.

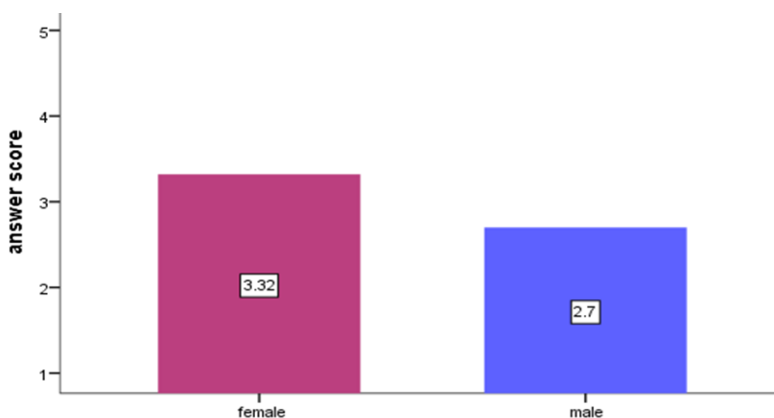
According to the concept of pragmatic flexibility, when learners accept pragmatically infelicitous utterances, they are not pragmatically incompetent, but their behavior is attributed to the fact that they are pragmatically flexible. Such an assumption can be investigated by conducting a quinary test.

### Quinary Test

A quinary test targets the pragmatic competence of EFL learners and their ability to derive quantity implicature. The participants are considered to be pragmatically competent and can derive quantity implicature by estimating the pragmatically infelicitous utterances with intermediate judgments ("somewhat satisfied /neutral / somewhat unsatisfied") or refusing the utterances (unsatisfied). A statistical examination of this can be done by analyzing the answer behavior of the participants towards pragmatically infelicitous utterances. Giving lower ratings indicates that they are somehow pragmatically competent and can derive quantity implicature; conversely, high ratings are a sign of pragmatic oblivion.

**Table 2.** The Mean and Standard Error Mean of Both Groups' Answers in the Quinary Test.

Gender	Mean	S.E. Mean
Female participants	3.32	0.167
Male participants	2.7	0.093



**Figure 2.** Both Gender Groups' Mean Answer Score of Utterance Violating Quantity Maxim in the Quinary test

As can be apparently seen in Table 2 (and Figure 2), female participants' mean score answer approximates "5", while male participants' mean answer approximates "1". This general observation concerning groups' pragmatic comprehension and derivation of quantity implicature is examined statistically to understand both groups' behavior towards utterance violating quantity maxim. This is achieved by conducting a between-group test of mean answer differences for each gender group. The results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, which reveal ( $P > .05$ ) a non-normal distribution of the data, demand conducting a non-parametric test. The test results of the Mann-Whitney test revealed a significant statistical variation between the male and female groups in their mean answer score for utterances violating the quantity maxim. The female participants provided higher ratings compared to male participants ( $U = 1092.0$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The male participants' tendency to provide lower ratings than female participants can be attributed to their nature of communication and their preference for directness (McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Male participants' behavior can also be attributed to the difference between males' and females' pragmatic abilities (Usuludin et al., 2021). This may be taken as a justification for the difference between male and female reactions in this task.

### **Conclusion**

The aim sought to be achieved in this study is to determine whether gender influences pragmatic flexibility when Grice maxims are violated.

According to the findings of the study, a conclusion is formulated indicating that gender influences Iraqi EFL learners' pragmatic flexibility. This difference is detected in males' and females' reactions toward violations of the quantity maxim, with the female learners exhibiting higher levels of pragmatic flexibility than their male counterparts.

Interestingly, male and female participants further responded differently to violations of quantity maxim within same-gender versus mixed-gender contexts. Male and female participants were more flexible in same-gender peer contexts. Furthermore, the interplay between pragmatic flexibility and pragmatic abilities is explored. The findings indicate that higher levels of female participants' pragmatic flexibility reveal their weak pragmatic competence, unlike their male counterparts,

who reveal better pragmatic abilities, although less flexible. This is attributed to their performance in the ternary task. Eventually, the researchers of this study hope to make a contribution to the field of second language acquisition research by providing insights into gender and pragmatic flexibility relationships with each other.

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