

The Role of Gender in the Use of Communication Strategies in Iraqi University Students' Interaction

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines how gender affects EFL students' communication strategies (CSs) at Iraqi universities. While communication strategies are crucial in overcoming language breakdowns during interaction, there remains limited research on how male and female learners differ in their application of these strategies, particularly in the Iraqi context. To fill this gap, the study investigates how male and female students employ CSs in spoken interactions. The study examines how male and female students differ in their use of CSs in spoken interactions employing Dörnyei's (1995) taxonomy for their categorization. A total of 40 participants, third- and fourth-year, English department, University of Anbar., Iraq. —20 males and 20 females are recruited using a stratified random sampling method. Interviews were used to collect data, which was then quantitatively examined. The findings show notable differences in the frequency and type of strategies used by both genders. Female students characteristically rely more on message abandonment, topic avoidance, appeal for help, and fillers, whereas male students exhibit greater use of approximation, circumlocution, and non-linguistic signals. The study shows the significance of gender-specific teaching methods in Iraqi higher education settings by highlighting how sociocultural norms and gender roles influence language use purposefully and have an impact on EFL instruction. Teachers are recommended to understand how gender affects communication skills to meet the needs of both male and female language students.

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Introduction:

In second language acquisition (SLA), communication strategies (CSs) are essential for learners to reduce linguistic breakdowns (Tarone, 1981). These strategies can assist EFL learners to tackle communication collapses resulting from deficiencies in vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammatical proficiency (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). Studies on CSs have concentrated on their efficacy and categorization, with minimal attention given to the impact of gender on their use.

There hasn't been much research on how males and females use language differently in different sociolinguistic settings, but it has been shown that both genders use language (Ehrman & Oxford, 1988; Holmes, 1995). According to Green and Oxford (1995), female students often employ more collaborative and participatory approaches, whereas male students tend to use more direct and risky ones. However, these results need to be looked at more closely in EFL settings, especially with Iraqi university students, where gender may affect the way individuals communicate. This study tries to fill the gap by looking at how male and female Iraqi EFL learners communicate with each other. Learning about the differences between males and females may give us significant knowledge about how cultural and societal factors affect how people communicate when they are learning a language. However, the current study aims to answer the following research question:

How do Iraqi male and female EFL learners differ in their use of communication strategies?

Literature Review:

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) where learners have difficulty communicating in a second language, especially when they don't have enough vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation. When learners don't know enough about language, they have to use a lot of different CSs to convey their message across (Tarone, 1981). Even though there has been a lot of research on the subject in different educational settings, the effect of gender on the CSs used by EFL learners, especially Iraqi university students, is still not explored or understood. Studies on language learning have shown that gender affects how males and females use CSs. Female students tend to be more social and cooperative, while male students are more direct and task-oriented (Bialystok, 1990; Rababah and Bulut, 2007). Gender variations may affect communication strategy frequency and type. In academic settings where debates, discussions, interviews, and presentations need complex English speech, cultural norms may affect male and female students' communication strategies.

While earlier research has shown that communication strategies are gendered in various situations, little is known about how gender affects Iraqi university students' use of them. Language educators and curriculum designers could benefit from understanding how gender affects communication strategies by highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive teaching practices; how they differ in their employment, which can help educators tailor instruction to meet learners' needs more effectively in Iraq's EFL classrooms. This study examines how gender affects communication strategies in Iraqi higher education, providing valuable insights into language acquisition, communication, and gender.

Criteria of CSs

CSs are best understood through two key criteria: problem-orientedness and consciousness. Problem-orientedness refers to strategies used to overcome gaps between communicative intent and linguistic resources. Dörnyei and Scott (1997) classify communication problems into three types: (1) performance problems errors or uncertainties in speech that require self-correction; (2) problems in the interlocutor's speech unclear or incorrect utterances that require negotiation of meaning; and (3) processing time pressure delays in speech planning, leading to the use of fillers and repetition.

Consciousness, based on Faerch and Kasper (1983), implies that CSs are intentional efforts to resolve communication difficulties. Dörnyei and Scott (1997) further describe three aspects of consciousness: (1) awareness of the problem, (2) intentional use of a strategy, and (3) awareness of using less-than-perfect language to achieve mutual understanding.

Accordingly, learners use CSs when they face a language-related challenge, become aware of it, and apply strategies to maintain communication. Tarone (1981, cited in Faerch & Kasper, 1983) adds that CSs involve: (1) intent to communicate a specific meaning, (2) lack of access to appropriate linguistic forms, and (3) the decision to either avoid or find alternative ways to convey meaning. Therefore, CSs can be identified by the presence of problem-orientedness and consciousness in the learners' communication behaviour.

Communication Strategies in EFL Contexts

Recent studies have investigated the communication strategies employed by EFL learners, including studies conducted by Abu-Nawas (2012), Hua et al. (2012), Ugla et al. (2013), Al Alawi (2016), Aldalbahy (2022), Sarwari et al. (2023). These studies reveal a correlation between linguistic proficiency and the use of code-switching. Al Alawi (2016) and Abu-Nawas (2012) identified that advanced learners used strategies such as approximation and circumlocution, whereas lower-level learners predominantly utilized L1-based strategies including code-switching, literal translation, and self-repair. Ugla et al. (2013) observed that learners frequently employed fillers and repetition to accomplish speech pauses and grammatical difficulties. Research conducted by Sarwari et al. (2023) and Hua et al. (2012) examined the use of CS among various ethnicities. Arab students often engaged in code-switching, particularly at lower proficiency levels, as seen by Elashhab (2020). Conversely, Aldalbahy (2022) and Khan et al. (2024) contended that the use of L1, even in professional contexts, smoothed communication and did not indicate a lack of competence. At the same time, Madina and Anwar (2023) discovered that students of various competency levels employed analogous tactics.

Gender has been examined as a variable in computer science utilization. Amin (2017) and Najjari (2016) documented disparities in the utilisation of social, emotive, and non-verbal strategies by male and female students. Yaman et al. (2013) noted that women utilised a broader array of communication strategies, while Arshad et al. (2015) discovered that men engaged in English conversation more frequently due to enhanced self-confidence and prior experience.

Factors Affecting the Choice of CSs

A number of individual and contextual variables affect how EFL learners choose and employ CSs. These include the way you speak English, your gender, how frequently you speak English outside of class, your motivation, and your anxiety. Each aspect affects how learners deal with problems with communication in a particular way. For example, students who are less skilled may use more compensatory methods like approximation or code-switching, whereas students who are more confident may use more risky strategies. There have also been reports that gender affects the choice and frequency of strategy use, with men and women often using strategies in different ways.

Some of the noticed factors are:

1. Language Proficiency

Students' proficiency levels impact their choice of CSs. High-proficiency learners tend to use more effective, L2-based strategies like circumlocution, while lower-proficiency learners often rely on message abandonment, L1-based strategies, or repetition (Chen, 1990; Paribakht, 1985; Liskin-Gasparro, 1996). Some studies (Poulisse & Schils, 1989) suggest high-proficiency learners use fewer CSs due to greater vocabulary knowledge. High proficiency correlates with strategies focused on fluency and social interaction (Nakatani, 2006; Li, 2010).

2. Gender

Gender plays a role in strategy use. Research (Politzer, 1983; Green & Oxford, 1995) shows females often use more social and affective strategies, while males may use different strategies or show no significant difference (Wharton, 2000; Chou, 2002). Cultural context also influences these patterns (E-Dib, 2004). Girls are generally more active in classroom communication, while boys tend to use English more outside school (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000).

3. Self-Perceived Oral Proficiency

Perceived speaking ability affects communication more than actual proficiency (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000). Learners with high self-perception show greater willingness to communicate (WTC), though some studies (Cheng, 2007) argue effective communication also depends on cognitive skills like choosing the right words and ensuring mutual understanding.

4. Frequency of Speaking English Outside the Classroom

Regular use of English outside class improves CS use. Studies (Huang & Van Naerssen, 1987; Bialystok, 1981) found that interacting in English with native speakers or peers increases fluency and strategic competence. Consistent exposure boosts motivation, cultural understanding, and conversation skills (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010).

5. Motivation

Motivation—both intrinsic and extrinsic—plays a key role in strategy use. Highly motivated learners are more likely to engage in communication and apply CSs effectively (Schumann, 1986; McIntyre & Noels, 1996). Intrinsic motivation, such as personal satisfaction, is particularly effective for learning success (Gardner, 1985; Dornyei, 1998).

6. Anxiety

Anxiety negatively affects language performance. It can be trait-based (general) or state-based (situation-specific) (Scovel, 1978; Brown, 2001). Communication anxiety is especially impactful in speaking tasks (Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Researches show

anxiety increases with external motivation, but decreases with internal motivation (Khodadady & Khajavy, 2013), and it can significantly affect speaking performance.

Methodology:

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design to answer the research questions. The first stage of this design is qualitative, and the second part is quantitative. This lets researchers discover carefully what participants experienced before getting those results into numbers and doing statistical analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

It is crucial to highlight the value of mixed-methods research, which offers a more complete examination of research phenomena by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. According to Creswell and Clark (2018), mixed-methods research integrates qualitative and quantitative data to enhance the scope and depth of results. By using both statistical measurements and participant narratives, this approach allows researchers to gain a more complete knowledge of language learners' use of CSs.

Following Creswell and Clark (2018), the qualitative data were turned into quantitative data by counting how often each implied approach was used. This is known as "quantifying qualitative data" (p. 291). This transformation enables researchers to do statistical analyses on patterns observed in qualitative data, such as descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests, to investigate gender differences.

This approach line up with mixed methods procedures, which link and import textual codes and attributes (such as gender and proficiency level) into statistical software for more analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The design ensures that the role of gender in EFL CSs is clear, deep, and reliable by combining qualitative investigation with quantitative validation.

The Model Adopted

Dörnyei's (1995) classification of CSs is the basic theoretical basis for this study. Dörnyei's approach gives a complete and systematic way to group the strategies that language learners employ to tackle communication challenges, especially when they have trouble with vocabulary or grammar during conversations. It is one of the most complete and well-known systems for learning a second language (SLA) since it builds on earlier taxonomies and adds more precise definitions and categories.

Dörnyei's model is particularly appropriate for empirical studies since it enables the exact identification and quantification of strategy use in both spoken and written data. The idea divides CSs into two main types: achievement (or compensatory) strategies, which aim to overcome communication obstacles and maintain the continuity of involvement; and reduction strategies, which include avoiding or abandoning difficult messages. It categorizes communication strategies into twelve distinct types:

1. Message Abandonment
2. Topic Avoidance
3. Circumlocution
4. Approximation
5. Use of All-Purpose Words
6. Word Coinage

7. Non-Linguistic Signals
8. Literal Translation
9. Foreignizing
10. Code Switching
11. Appeal for Help
12. Using Fillers (Time-gaining strategies)

Participants and Sampling

The study includes 40 Iraqi university students (20 males and 20 females), third- and fourth-year, English department, University of Anbar., Iraq. They were chosen to participate in English language interviews. Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling method to ensure equal gender representation. This sample method, however, disregards other possible confounding variables such as age, proficiency level, and language exposure that might affect the findings.

Data Collection Instruments

Data for this study was gathered using a demographic questionnaire and an individual audio-recorded interview.

The demographic questionnaire gathered age, gender, and other demographic information from participants. This information was necessary for the representation of all participants and the contextualization of the CSs analysis.

Audio in a controlled classroom atmosphere was recorded for every interview. Simply twenty minutes long, each interview was allotted sufficient time to gather the required information. Interviews should be long enough to gather significant data, usually from one to two hours, according to Becker 2013; however, short-term interviews are also appropriate depending on the study's emphasis. These recordings showed in depth the EFL CSs of participants. Interviews were arranged to maintain regularity and spontaneity. Dornyei's (1995) CSs were used to categorize and transcribe the data.

Data Analysis Procedures

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach for its analysis. It started with collecting qualitative data and then moved on to quantitative analysis. Here are the measures that were taken:

1. Transcription of the Interviews: After doing with 40 participants (20 males and 20 females) individually, the audio recordings were transcribed word for word to precisely record what the participants said and how they communicated.
2. Identifying and coding CSs: The transcribed data have been examined qualitatively using Dörnyei's (1995) classification of CSs. Each strategy used, such as message abandonment, approximation, or code-switching, was recognized and labelled using the model's 12-strategy classification.
3. Checklist Documentation: A pre-made checklist was utilized throughout the interviews, along with looking over the transcripts to keep up with how often each CS was

- employed by each participant. This stage made sure that there was a consistent and organized way to keep track of how strategies were used.
4. Quantifying qualitative data: The coded qualitative data were turned into numbers by counting how often each participant used each strategy. This process of turning qualitative data into numbers made more statistical testing possible.
 5. Statistical Analysis: IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25 was employed to analyse the frequency data. We used descriptive statistics like totals, percentages, and means to sum up how males and females used different CSs. Independent samples t-tests were used to see if there were statistically significant differences between males and females in how they used certain strategy.

Results and Discussion

This section looks at and explains how male and female Iraqi EFL learners use CSs in interviews. The results are shown as a frequency and percentage, and they are based on Dörnyei's (1995) classification of CSs. The analysis looks at how gender affects CSs among Iraqi EFL learners and tries to link the use of these strategies to current theories and past research on learning a second language. The results are supported up by statistical tests that show any differences that are statistically significant.

Table 1: Use of Communication Strategies by gender

Communication Strategies	Female participants		Male participants	
	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency
1. Message Abandonment	18	1.52%	44	3.59%
2. Topic Avoidance	21	1.77%	37	3.02%
3. Circumlocution	30	2.53%	14	1.14%
4. Approximation	28	2.36%	24	1.95%
5. Use of all-purpose word	128	10.81%	83	6.77%
6. Word Coinage	2	0.16%	6	0.48%
7. Non-linguistic signal	324	27.36%	296	24.16%
8. Literal Translation	117	9.88%	97	7.91%
9. Foreignizing	0	0%	0%	0%
10. Code Switching	24	2.02%	53	4.32%
11. Appeal for help	115	9.71%	133	10.85%
12. Using Fillers	377	31.84%	498	40.65%
Total: 2409	1184		1225	

Detailed Use of CSs

1. Message Abandonment

Table 1 above shows that the message abandonment strategy was most commonly used by female participants (44 times, with 3.59%) than by male participants (18 times, with 1.52%). This indicates that participants avoid their sentences when faced with challenges in conveying their views properly. For instance, when asked, "If you had an unlimited amount of money, what would be your first action?" one female respondent said, "I would buy a house and...

um... I am ummmm, I have no words." This response illustrates the difficulty an individual female participant experienced in expressing her thoughts, which led to her sudden stop mid-sentence.

This behaviour agrees with Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) categorization of Message Abandonment as a communication strategy. This phenomenon arises when learners initiate a message but fail to complete it due to challenges in selecting suitable vocabulary or organizing their thoughts coherently in the second language (L2). Such examples may indicate the learner's difficulty in articulating complicated ideas in English, potentially due to vocabulary constraints or interference from their first language (L1).

Table (2): Independent Samples T-Test Results for Message Abandonment Strategy by Gender

Message Abandonment					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance
Male	20	0.9	6.256	0.05 = 0.05	Significant
Female	20	2.1			

As shown in Table 2 the findings show a significant difference in the use of message abandonment methods between males and females ($F = 6.256$, $p = 0.05$). The mean for female participants ($M = 2.1$) was significantly above that of male participants ($M = 0.9$), suggesting that female learners were more likely to step away from a message when encountering challenges in self-expression. This may be attributed to their tendency to avoid mistakes or difficulties in speaking when they have uncertainty over how to continue. The findings indicate differences in gender in addressing communication failure, with females more commonly choosing to withdraw from or shorten their statements under linguistic pressure.

This finding aligns with Farrahi (2011), who observed that females typically show more linguistic anxiety, making them more opening to avoidance strategies. Dörnyei (1995) observed that, particularly when they believe they lack appropriate tools of communication, female learners could stop speaking under pressure. In this regard, message abandonment appears to be a self-protective strategy for female learners to cope with perceived shortcomings in

2. Topic Avoidance Strategy

Especially in answers that didn't directly engage with the interviewer's questions, female participants showed a higher tendency for Topic Avoidance, as in Table 1 (37 times with 3.02%) than male participants (21 times with 1.77%). For example, asked, "Do you think that most of the future tasks will be done by robots?" A female respondent said, "I don't know about that, but I think people should concentrate on improving their abilities." This comment suggests the female participant tried to avoid the subject of robots by steering the discussion to another topic. According to Dörnyei (1995), EFL students use this avoidance strategy often, especially when they lack vocabulary or confidence to address a subject. Particularly when dealing with new or difficult topics, Dörnyei (1995) claims students often avoid problems to lower the likelihood of second language errors.

Table 3: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of Topic Avoidance Strategy by Gender

Topic Avoidance					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance

Male	20	1.05	0.917	0.365 > 0.05	Insignificant
Female	20	1.85			

According to Table 3, female participants ($M = 1.85$) used the topic avoidance strategy a bit more than male participants ($M = 1.05$); even though this difference was not statistically significant ($F = 0.917$, $p = 0.365 > 0.05$). This suggests that, while women indicated a little greater tendency to avoid tough or possibly challenging topics in communication, gender does not appear to have a major impact on the general use of this approach. Participants in the study of both genders showed similar patterns of subject avoidance when faced with communication challenges, implying that this approach might be more directly linked to individual characteristics than to gender-specific preferences. Both groups' use of topic avoidance could suggest a general effort to keep fluency and lower anxiety during real-time conversations by avoiding subjects beyond their language competence. This perspective is consistent with the results of Alsadat and Meigouni (2020), who investigated the correlation between learners' self-efficacy views, anxiety levels, and the use of CSs including topic avoidance. Their results showed that students with higher anxiety and lower self-efficacy were more likely to use avoidance-based strategies, like topic avoidance, to cope with communication challenges. Though their research did not focus on gender differences, the results provide an understanding of the psychological factors that might encourage the application of this strategy. They think that the avoidance of specific topics often reflects students' self-assessments of their communication ability and helps to lower the anxiety connected with prospective mistakes or communication failures. This point of view claims that, rather than gender, the learner's psychological state and environmental elements largely drive topic avoidance. A comparison of the present results with those of Alsadat and Meigouni (2020) therefore, shows that topic avoidance is a self-regulating process used to lower anxiety and maintain communicative control. Affective elements, such as confidence and stress, are likely to have more impact on both male and female students' usage of it than social variables. The small gender-based variation discovered in this study could be due to individual student variation rather than systematic gender patterns.

3. Circumlocution Strategy

circumlocution as in Table 1, is shown mostly in male participants (30 times with 2.53%) than in female participants (14 times with 1.14%). Circumlocution—a strategy when students convey a phrase or idea rather than using the precise term—was also noted. Trying to define the term rescuer, one male participant replied, "The person who helps people when there is an accident... umm... like the one who saves them," This example illustrates how the participant used circumlocution by describing the function of the rescuer instead of just recalling the word. Particularly for students with vocabulary deficits, circumlocution is a typical CSs in second language acquisition. According to Dörnyei (1995), this strategy allows students to maintain the flow of the conversation by describing the characteristics or functions of the target item. Faerch and Kasper (1983) characterize circumlocution as a problem-solving strategy that enables learners to sustain fluency by employing alternate terms when exact terminology is inaccessible.

Table 4: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of Circumlocution Strategy by Gender

Circumlocution					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance

Male	20	1.5	4.979	0.314 > 0.05	Insignificant
Female	20	0.7			

Table 4 reveals that male participants in the current study were more likely than female subjects ($M = 0.7$) to use the circumlocution strategy ($M = 1.5$). When the precise word is unavailable, circumlocution is the use of additional words or meanings to describe an object, idea, or concept. This suggests that, rather than abandoning the message or going back to their original language, male students were somewhat more likely to employ descriptive explanations to convey meaning. Though the results did not attain statistical significance ($F = 4.979$, $p = 0.314 > 0.05$) despite the noted numerical variations, implying that the difference might not be wholly attributed to gender differences. Rather than an apparent gender-based tendency, the slight trend showed by male learners may be attributed to personal conversation styles, confidence levels, or knowledge of the required linguistic structures for these kinds of techniques.

The study by Tarabelsi, Aboud, and Shamsi (2024), which looked at the CSs employed by Arab students learning English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) at a public university in North Cyprus, is an important comparative reference. Aiming to identify the major CSs, their quantitative study of 102 participants looked at how social factors including gender and proficiency level affected them. Their results showed significant differences in the employment of specific strategies according to gender, hence proving that male learners were more likely to use circumlocution and other compensatory strategies. Though the present study lacks statistical significance, the findings confirm the pattern observed in this study. The consistency of male students' tendency towards circumlocution across different educational and cultural settings suggests that this approach might fit with more general patterns in male communication, particularly in circumstances with lexical deficits. Therefore, although the present study found no statistically significant difference in gender, the greater mean among men fits with earlier studies linking circumlocution to strategic decision-making of students under communicative pressure. Particularly in multilingual academic environments where students must efficiently control language challenges in real-time, the comparison with Tarabelsi et al. (2024) highlights the need of considering gender and proficiency level in the evaluation of communication strategy execution.

4. Approximation Strategy

the Approximation strategy, as demonstrated in Table 1, was noted more often in male participants (28 times with 2.36%) compared to female participants (24 times with 1.95%). This indicates that learners often replace a term with a synonym when the exact word is inaccessible. In response to an inquiry regarding vacation experiences, a female participant stated, "We resided in a tent next to the water." The term tent was employed instead of the more precise term campsite, reflecting an effort to convey meaning despite a limited vocabulary.

This behaviour corresponds with Dörnyei's (1995) categorization of Approximation as a compensating communication strategy. Students employ this strategy to keep going in communicating their message when they are unsure of the precise term, instead depending on a semantically very similar statement. Such instances demonstrate the learner's capacity to generalize their linguistic knowledge during real-time conversation, highlighting their ingenuity in managing vocabulary constraints in their second language (L2).

Table 5: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of Approximation Strategy by Gender

Approximation					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance
Male	20	1.4	1.028	0.816 > 0.05	Insignificant
Female	20	1.2			

Based on the results in Table 5, the analysis of the approximation strategy indicated a fairly equal use among male and female participants. Male learners used this strategy with a somewhat higher rate ($M = 1.4$) than female learners ($M = 1.2$), yet the difference was not statistically significant ($F = 1.028$, $p = 0.816 > 0.05$). This implies that both groups sometimes use semantically similar terms when they struggle to remember the precise term. Approximation lets students convey their desired point effectively without breaking the flow of discussion. Despite lexical limitations, it shows a flexible conversational style which encourages fluency and mutual understanding. The identical values between genders suggest that gender-specific preferences do not substantially influence the application of this strategy; rather, a shared communicative need does. This pattern of use fits the results of Putra Mahardhika, Suparman, and Sudirman (2014), who found that oral communication among Indonesian EFL students frequently involved approximation. Their research explicitly looked at gender variations and found that both male and female students employed this approach equally, hence supporting the current study's conclusion that gender does not notably influence approximation. Their study found that notably when students gave fluency and communicative efficacy top priority over lexical accuracy, approximation was a frequent compensatory strategy.

The agreement of their results with current research highlights the significance of approximation as an effective and commonly used strategy for facilitating communication between genders in EFL settings.

5. Use of All-Purpose Word Strategy

The Use of All-Purpose Words strategy, as in Table 1, showed up among both male and female participants. It was used more frequently by male participants (128 times, 10.81%) than by female participants (83 times, 6.77%). This indicates that male participants frequently employed general or vague vocabulary when they were unable to recall the precise term. For instance, a male participant stated, "I need to buy that thing... you know, the charger for my phone," referring to a phone charger. This demonstrates his dependence on the generic noun "thing" to express meaning. A female participant employed the term "stuff" rather than specifying particular objects when detailing the contents of her bag: "I always bring my stuff when I go out." These uses align with the All-Purpose Words strategy, where learners use general or ambiguous terms to sustain conversational flow. Kasper and Kellerman (1997) assert that this strategy enables learners to maintain speech despite deficiencies in their lexical expertise. Dörnyei and Scott (1997) highlighted that these generalizations demonstrate learners' attempts to overcome language constraints and prevent breakdowns in communication. This behaviour is especially crucial in second language acquisition, where challenges in lexical retrieval are common.

Table 6: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of All-Purpose Words Strategy by Gender

Use of All-purpose word					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance

Male	20	6.4	0.000	0.031 < 0.05	Significant
Female	20	4.15			

Table 6 shows that male participants showed a higher mean ($M = 6.4$) than female participants ($M = 4.15$), and all-purpose word use showed a statistically significant difference ($F = 0.000$, $p = 0.031 < 0.05$). This implies that males mostly use generalized vocabulary, such as "thing," "stuff," or "something"—as a replacement when specific lexical items are lacking. This behaviour might suggest a successful strategy for maintaining speech flow even if clarity is affected. The result matches earlier research such as Farrahi (2011), which showed that men favoured straightforward, compensated strategies to keep the flow of communication.

Rabab'ah (2001) claims that when talking, male learners usually choose fluency above precise vocabulary. This fluency-oriented strategy may cause people to rely on universal or generic words to keep the conversation going, hence sacrificing lexical correctness. Farrahi (2011) also observed that male students are more likely to select strategies stressing informal interaction over the precise use of language.

6. Word Coinage Strategy

according to Table 1, the Word Coinage strategy was used minimally by participants in this study, with female participants employing it more often (6 times, 0.48%) than the male participants (2 times, 0.16%). This low usage rate indicates that although learners occasionally engage in word creation, it is not a usual strategy among the participants in this context. A clear example of word coinage was identified in a female participant's reply to the inquiry, "Do you believe robots will dominate the majority of jobs in the future?" She responded, "Yes, I believe numerous companies will technologize their operations and use robots instead of humans." The created phrase "technologize" denotes the process of integrating technology, showing her creative effort to convey a concept in the absence of a specific term like "automate" or "digitize." This use of an invented word exemplifies how learners attempt to create meaning through accessible linguistic resources. Dörnyei and Scott (1997) characterize Word Coinage as a compensatory strategy where learners generate new words according to the rules of the target language when the appropriate term is unavailable. The limited use of this strategy among participants suggests that they are willing to engage in linguistic risks for the sake of communication, reflecting adaptability and creativity in second language usage.

Table 7: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of Word Coinage Strategy by Gender

Word coinage					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance
Male	20	0.1	8.389	0.176 > 0.05	Insignificant
Female	20	0.3			

As demonstrated in Table 7, female students had a little higher mean ($M = 0.3$) than the male participants ($M = 0.1$), the examination of the word coinage strategy revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female participants ($F = 8.389$, $p = 0.176 > 0.05$). This implies that both sides rarely participated in the generation of new vocabulary items to fill lexical gaps in communication. The uncommon use shows an overall hesitation among students to generate words either from fear of misinterpretation or from lack of confidence regarding the generation of new words. On the other hand, students appear to choose more established and socially acceptable strategies, such as fillers or approximations, which are considered less disruptive to the flow of participation.

This result corresponds to a comparable study by Putra Mahardhika, Suparman, and Sudirman (2014), which found that both male and female Indonesian EFL students exhibited little reliance on word coinage. The statistical analysis reveals that the general frequency of word coinage was equally low across males and females, suggesting that this strategy is of little value in spontaneous speech. Their ANOVA results confirmed even more the lack of a notable gender influence across several CSs, including compensating methods such as word coinage. The convergence of these results verifies the theory that word coinage is secondary in EFL learner interactions and is not greatly affected by gender. The poor use suggests a general tendency among students to rely on more conventional and less risky approaches for resolving lexical problems in real-time communication.

7. Non-Linguistic Signal

Non-linguistic signals, as shown in Table 1, represented one of the most frequently employed CSs among both female and male participants. Males had slightly higher use (324 times, 27.36%) compared to females (296 times, 24.16%). The higher frequency indicates that participants mostly use gestures and other physical signals to enhance verbal communication during instances of lexical challenges or pauses. For instance, a male participant employed non-verbal cues when answering the question, "Which is better: travelling alone or with friends?" He stated, "Traveling with friends is better, as it allows for shared experiences," while employing hand gestures to illustrate the concept of sharing. These movements enabled him to communicate a more explicit meaning despite the potential lack of exact terminology. Dörnyei and Scott (1997) assert that the use of Non-Linguistic Signals is a crucial compensating strategy for second language communication. Students often use physical gestures, facial expressions, and various visual signals to augment or substitute absent spoken communication. This behaviour corroborates Gass and Selinker's (2008) claim that non-verbal signals enhance communication efficacy, particularly when learners face linguistic deficiencies. The prevalence of this approach among both genders underscores its essential function in resolving communicative breakdowns and sustaining interactional continuity.

Table 8: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of Non- Non-Linguistic Signal Strategy by Gender

Non- linguistic signal					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance
Male	20	16.2	2.702	0.578 > 0.05	Insignificant
Female	20	14.8			

According to table 8, males showed a little higher mean ($M = 16.2$) than females ($M = 14.8$), the examination of non-linguistic signals—such as gestures, facial expressions, and other visual indicators—showed no statistically significant difference between male and female students ($F = 2.702$, $p = 0.578 > 0.05$). The slight number differences, however, suggest that non-verbal communication is a common compensating strategy among EFL students for both genders. Often to clarify content or express emotions when language resources are limited, this strategy lets speakers improve verbal communication with visual cues.

Learners, according to Mahardhika et al. (2014), made great use of non-linguistic cues; female students used them more often than male students (5). This result corresponds to the descriptive data from the present investigation. Though the present results show equal usage across sexes, the data showed greater rates among females, so supporting the idea that non-

linguistic strategies are accessible to everyone and not mostly affected by gender. The inherent human tendency to rely on nonverbal communication during periods of linguistic doubt or delay may lead to the habitual use of gestures and emotions. Park (2007) supports this by noting that gestures, intonation, and facial expressions communicate both verbally and paralinguistically particular emotions and intentions. Parkins (2012) underlines, too, that women may show more expressiveness in face-to-face interaction; nonetheless, the study offered shows that male students are similarly adept at applying these signals as needed.

8. Literal Translation Strategy

Both male and female participants employed Literal Translation as another strategy. As in Table 1, male participants use it more often (117 times, 9.88%) than female participants (97 times, 7.91%). This strategy usually arises when learners simply translate words or phrases from their original language (L1) into English, neglecting suitable equivalents in the second language (L2).

For example, when responding to a question regarding her daily routine, one female participant said, "I live in the university house," rather than using a more suitable term such as "student accommodation" or "university housing." This direct translation from Arabic illustrates a common difficulty encountered by EFL learners, where structures or words from their original language are transferred into the second language.

Dörnyei and Scott (1997) categorize Literal Translation as a common communication strategy employed by learners to address vocabulary deficiencies. While it may result in unidiomatic or clumsy language in English, it demonstrates the learner's effort to sustain communication by employing L1 information. This dependence on native language structures, although occasionally difficult, allows learners to express themselves when encountering lexical deficiencies, especially in novel or context-specific subjects like daily activities.

Table 9: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of Literal Translation Strategy by Gender

Literal translation					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance
Male	20	5.85	0.096	0.644 > 0.05	Insignificant
Female	20	4.85			

Table 9 shows that male students had a slightly higher mean ($M = 5.85$) than female students ($M = 4.85$), while the difference was statistically insignificant ($F = 0.096$, $p = 0.644 > 0.05$). This result suggests that both groups resorted to literal translation when they were unable to recall the appropriate English expression, indicating that they used this strategy with similar consistency. This fits with Mahardhika et al.(2014) finding that EFL students often use literal translations as a rapid address for vocabulary deficits, especially in spontaneous speech.

The comparison study offers further proof by showing that males are more likely to choose literal translations. Though the statistical results showed no notable gender impact, the frequency and percentage suggest that male students were more likely to translate directly from Arabic to English. Contextual factors could cause these gender differences. Male interviewees in open-ended interviews for this study may have felt more comfortable, hence raising their likelihood of taking chances or depending on direct translations. On the other hand, female students showed more caution and cooperation in their replies, which might lead to careful language use. This is in contrast to Wang's (2008) results, which showed more regular use of literal translation among female students. This difference, therefore, might result from

different task kinds—Wang's study (ibid) concentrated on object recognition while the present one let people create and share their own ideas.

Consequently, although statistical analyses show no notable gender difference, the higher percentage of male students in the present research implies a little bit more tendency towards literal translation—supporting Mahardhika et al.(2014) claim that this strategy is often used when students prioritize fluency over accuracy in spontaneous interactions.

9. Foreignizing Strategy

according to Table 1, of the participants employed the Foreignizing strategy throughout the interview sessions. Dörnyei (1995) posits that foreignizing entails using a term from the speaker's native language while modifying it to sound like the target language, frequently through the use of English pronunciation or morphology. For instance, an Arabic speaker may try to make the word "madrasa" seem English.

The lack of this strategy in the participants' responds may be attributed to their preference towards other, more direct strategies such code-switching or circumlocution, which were noticed more frequently. It may also indicate the participants' awareness that foreignizing may not be easily understood to listeners, particularly in academic or semi-formal contexts. According to Gullberg (2006), learners often choose strategies that enhance communicative efficacy and listener understanding.

The avoidance of foreignizing may also be affected by pedagogical approaches in Iraqi EFL programs, where students are generally encouraged to use standard English and may lack exposure to or comfort with integrating native forms into English expressions.

Table 10: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of Foreignizing Strategy by Gender

Foreignizing					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance
Male	20	0	/	/	/
Female	20	0			

As demonstrated in Table 10, no participants, regardless of gender, used the foreignizing strategy. Both groups averaged 0, and no statistical study was important. This is consistent with Mahardhika et al. (2014), who observed that students usually avoid using techniques that either might confuse with interlocutors or do not really help. The complete lack of foreignizing use among participants supports even more the idea that EFL students favour strategies that are more universally clear or socially acknowledged in conversation. Overall, while most of the strategies revealed no notable gender differences, message abandonment, the use of all-purpose words, and the use of fillers were statistically relevant; females showed more reliance on message abandonment and fillers; males showed more use of general-purpose terms. These findings draw attention to notable gender-based patterns in the application of CSs, which affect learner support and pedagogical focus in EFL settings. The other strategies were used equally by both groups, suggesting that individual language awareness, task type, or proficiency rather than gender alone has a greater impact on strategy choice.

10. Code Switching Strategy

Code switching, the process of switching between a first language (L1) and a second language (L2), was observed across both genders, with female participants employing it more frequently, as in Table 1, (53 times, 4.32%) compared to male participants (24 times, 2.02%). This strategy demonstrates learners' dependence on their native language to fill lexical deficiencies when particular English terms are temporarily unavailable.

A female participant exemplified this strategy in her interview response to the inquiry, "If you could invent a new piece of technology, what would it be?" She responded, "If I could create something, it would be a device that helps with تركيز... uh, I mean, focus." The individual briefly resorted to Arabic when unable to recall the English equivalent of the phrase "focus," an abstract psychological concept.

Dörnyei (1995) observes that code-switching is frequently employed by learners encountering challenges in expressing sophisticated, technical, or abstract concepts. This strategy may reveal deficiencies in lexical retrieval, although it enables learners to sustain conversational flow and reduces potential communication interruptions caused by hesitation or silence. This behavior demonstrates how learners use all accessible linguistic resources to facilitate efficient communication during real-time interactions.

Table 4.11: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of Code switching Strategy by Gender

Code switching					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance
Male	20	1.2	7.736	0.148 > 0.05	Insignificant
Female	20	2.65			

In the context of code-switching, Table 11 shows that female students showed a higher mean ($M = 2.65$) than male students ($M = 1.2$); yet, the difference was not statistically significant ($F = 7.736$, $p = 0.148 > 0.05$). This indicates that although female learners may have been more likely to integrate Arabic terminology or phrases into their English conversation, the variation is insufficient to be solely attributed to gender. Some students employ identified strategies for language to maintain fluency, hence, this behaviour could suggest individual preferences or communication styles.

Increased use among female students may imply more pragmatic awareness or strategic use of their first language to make up for vocabulary deficits during spontaneous interactions. This trend fits Mahardhika et al.'s (2014) view that code-switching is often a flexible, context-sensitive tool used primarily by students trying to keep conversational flow in settings where fluency is given priority over exact linguistic accuracy.

11. Appeal for Help

the Appeal for Help, as demonstrated in Table 1, was used more often by female participants (133 times, 10.85%) compared to male participants (115 times, 9.71%), suggesting a slightly higher tendency among females to request assistance when encountering lexical gaps. One clear example was observed in a female participant's response during the interview. Upon asking about her daily routine, she paused and then asked, "What is the term for the device that cleans the floor?" A tool containing a long tube? In this instance, she directly requested assistance, merging a direct question with descriptive hints to move the listener towards the

intended interpretation. Dörnyei (1995) clarifies that the appeal for help strategy facilitates language learners in sustaining the continuity of contact while requesting lexical support. It demonstrates a learner's communicative awareness, as they engage their interlocutor to cooperatively negotiate meaning instead of abandoning the message or reverting totally to their native language. This behaviour not only averts conversational breakdowns but also facilitates learners' active vocabulary enhancement through interaction.

Table 12: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of Appeal for Help Strategy by Gender

Appeal for Help					
Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance
Male	20	5.75	3.934	0.578 > 0.05	Insignificant
Female	20	6.65			

including appeals for clarification or assistance, based on Table 12, females used these strategies more often than males ($M = 6.65$ vs. $M = 5.75$). Statistically, the outcome is irrelevant ($F = 3.934$, $p = 0.578 > 0.05$), suggesting a common tendency among both genders to seek assistance during interactions when needed. As Mahardhika et al. (2014) noted, this behaviour shows the collaborative effort to maintain communication, especially when students face lexical or structural obstacles. Both male and female students choose to interact with the interlocutor by asking for help—whether through direct requests, eye contact, or verbal cues—instead of ignoring the message. These strategies might not only fix language gaps but also show students' dedication to joining the conversation even with limited language skills. This finding supports the view that an appeal for help is a socially interactive strategy that exceeds gender-specific tendencies.

12. Using Fillers Strategy

according to Table 1, the most frequently employed strategy by both groups was the use of fillers, with female participants employing it 498 times (40.65%) and male participants 377 times (31.84%). This suggests a significant dependence on fillers to manage hesitation during spontaneous speech and maintain fluency, particularly among females. This strategy was exhibited by a male participant in his response: "Um... well, you know..." I think that social media can be helpful, but it can also be bad at times. In this instance, the speaker was able to organize his thoughts and maintain the rhythm of his speech because of the repeated use of fillers such as "um," "well," and "you know," in spite of ambiguity about how to continue.

In accordance with Dörnyei (1995), fillers function as a compensatory communication strategy that enables learners to address real-time processing challenges. Instead of staying silent or giving up the message, students use these verbal interruptions to show active involvement while writing their next words. Dörnyei and Scott (1997) further assert that fillers are suggestive of strategic discourse management, as they assist in maintaining the interlocutor's attention and decrease the likelihood of communication problems. Thus, the utilization of fillers is essential for learners to effectively manage spontaneous conversation and sustain interactional coherence.

Table 13: Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Use of Fillers Strategy by Gender

Using fillers

Gender	No.	Mean	F. value	P. value (Sig.)	Statistical Significance
Male	20	18.1	0.703	0.007 < 0.05	Significant
Female	20	24.9			

According to Table 13, the use of fillers showed a notable gender difference, which resulted in a very notable p-value ($p = 0.007$). Compared to male ($M = 18.1$), female participants had a notably higher mean ($M = 24.9$). Fillers—like "um," "you know," or "like"—to serve important discourse roles by giving speakers time to arrange their thoughts, keep conversational flow going, and show involvement. Participants agreed with the findings of Putra Mahardhika et al. (2014) in that they used fillers more often than male. Their research indicates that, in addition to getting time for processing, female EFL students employ fillers such as "uh," "well," and "you know" to control turn-taking and maintain the flow of conversation. Particularly in cases of hesitation or lexical recall, the deliberate use of fillers helped to ease speech delivery and lower communication errors.

Focusing on a typical tendency among female students to prioritize fluency and coherence in communication, female students in the current study showed a dependence on fillers as a discourse management tool. The distinction emphasizes the idea that gender might influence the use of particular CSs, especially those supporting the ongoing flow of conversation.

Conclusion:

This current study adopts Dörnyei's (1995) model to investigate the use of CSs by Iraqi EFL learners by gender. The quantitative analysis of interviews revealed gender differences in strategies use. Female participants were more cautious and active, using message abandonment, topic avoidance, appeal for help, and fillers more often. However, male participants used more non-linguistic signals, approximation, and circumlocution, suggesting a more direct and brave communication strategy. These differences are due to Iraqi gender roles and linguistic skills. The results emphasize the importance of integrating gender dynamics into EFL teaching methods so that teachers may influence students in developing strategies to match their communication styles and more comprehensive strategic skills.

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دور الجنس في استعمال استراتيجيات التواصل في تفاعل طلبة عراقيين جامعيين

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المستخلص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية تأثير الجنس على استراتيجيات التواصل (CSS) لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجامعات العراقية. في حين أن استراتيجيات التواصل ضرورية للتغلب على الهميات اللغوية أثناء التفاعل، إلا أن هناك أبحاثاً محدودة حول كيفية اختلاف المتعلمين الذكور والإناث في تطبيقهم لهذه الاستراتيجيات، وخاصة في السياق العراقي. ولسد هذه الفجوة، تبحث الدراسة في كيفية استخدام الطلاب والطالبات لاستراتيجيات التواصل في التفاعلات المنطوقة. تبحث الدراسة في كيفية اختلاف الطلاب والطالبات في استخدامهم لاستراتيجيات التواصل في التفاعلات المنطوقة باستخدام تصنيف دورني (1995) لتصنيفهم. شارك في الدراسة 40 مشاركاً، من السنة الثالثة والرابعة، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة الأنبار، العراق. - تم اختيار 20 من الذكور و20 من الإناث باستخدام طريقة أخذ العينات العشوائية الطبقية. تم استخدام المقابلات لجمع البيانات، والتي تم فحصها كميًا بعد ذلك. تظهر النتائج اختلافات ملحوظة في وتيرة ونوع الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة من قبل كلا الجنسين. تعتمد الطالبات عادةً على التخلي عن الرسائل، وتجنب المواضيع، وطلب المساعدة، واستخدام الكلمات الزائدة، بينما يظهر الطلاب استخداماً أكبر للتقريب، والإطالة، والإشارات غير اللغوية. تظهر الدراسة أهمية أساليب التدريس المخصصة للجنسين في بيئات التعليم العالي العراقية، من خلال تسليط الضوء على كيفية تأثير المعايير الاجتماعية والثقافية وأدوار الجنسين على استخدام اللغة بشكل هادف، وتأثيرها على تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ينصح المعلمون بفهم كيفية تأثير الجنس على مهارات التواصل لتلبية احتياجات طلاب اللغات من الذكور والإناث.