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Using verbal cues to understand literary texts among university students studying English as a foreign language

A B S T R A C T

The present study aims at finding out the effectiveness of using Circumlocution strategy on EFL university students' comprehension literary texts, finding out the effect of using circumlocution strategy on the elements of comprehension: a. Literal; b. Reorganization; c. Inferential; d. Evaluation and e. Appreciation, the difference between the experimental group's achievement in word recognition and comprehension of literary texts in the posttest. The sample involves 54 students from the second year at Kirkuk university college of basic education, distributed into two groups, experimental and control with 27 students for each group. The experiment lasted for two months, during the academic year 2025-2026. The results show significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group who is taught by using the Circumlocution strategy at the posttest.

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استخدام استراتيجية التلميح اللفظي على فهم النصوص الأدبية لدى طلبة الجامعة دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية

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الخلاصة:

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى الكشف عن استخدام استراتيجية التلميح اللفظي في فهم طلبة الجامعة من دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية للنصوص الأدبية، والكشف عن أثر استخدام هذه الاستراتيجية في عناصر الفهم

وهي: الحرفي، وإعادة التنظيم، والاستنتاجي، والتقويمي، والتذوقي. تتكوّن عينة الدراسة من ٥٤ طالبًا من المرحلة الثانية في كلية التربية الأساسية/جامعة كركوك، موزعين على مجموعتين: تجريبية وضابطة، بواقع ٢٧ طالبًا لكل مجموعة. استغرقت التجربة شهرين خلال العام الدراسي ٢٠٢٥-2026، أظهرت النتائج وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط درجات المجموعتين التجريبية والضابطة لصالح المجموعة التجريبية التي دُرست باستراتيجية التلميح اللفظي في فهم النصوص الأدبية في الاختبار البعدي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجية التلميح اللفظي، اختبار تحصيلي، حرفي، إعادة تنظيم.

1.1 Statment of the Problem

English literature is an important part of studying English and has several benefits for students. It helps students speak English like a native speaker, gives them the tools to communicate their ideas clearly, and exposes them to the subtleties of modern English. Students learn about the language system, such as how to use idioms and speak correctly. In the end, English literature helps students become better at what they do by encouraging creativity, critical thinking, and analytical skills (Obediat, 1997). Teaching literature is still a key part of higher education around the world, a required course, and an important part of liberal arts curricula. Its indisputable worth comes from how it helps people learn and improve their language skills. Literature is different from other subjects in a university curriculum; thus, teachers need to be able to adapt their methods to fit different conditions and goals. Teachers need to stop using old-fashioned practices and stop using preconceptions in the classroom that slow down growth (Zhen, 2012).

Khatib, Derakhshan, and Rezaei (2011) assert that, despite its potential shortcomings, literature can function as a motivating force for language acquisition and instruction, as it offers a variety of contrasting styles and

registers that are seldom found in other text types. Literature has been a subject of study in many nations; nevertheless, it has not been prioritized in the EFL classroom until lately. There have been a few research on how to teach literature to EFL students. They say that while teaching English literature in places where people don't speak it as their first language, both teachers and students have problems because of disparities in history, culture, race, and language. Teaching literature can be hard because it uses formal language, complicated words, and strange grammar rules. The researcher observed a significant issue in universities: students' proficiency in reading and comprehending of literary texts is inadequate. In this regard, information has been gathered over several years indicating that many students in Iraqi universities are not proficient in word recognition and comprehension of literary texts. This necessitates the identification of alternative tactics, such as the Circumlocution strategy, to facilitate students in achieving a level of mastery.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The study aims at:

1. Finding out the effectiveness of using Circumlocution Strategy on EFL university students' comprehension of literary texts.
2. Finding out the effect of using Circumlocution Strategy on the elements of comprehension: a. Literal; b. Reorganization; c. Inferential; d. Evaluation and e. Appreciation.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

The hypotheses of the current study are :

1. There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group, which is taught by using Circumlocution Strategy, and that of the control group, which is taught using the conventional method in comprehension of literary texts of at the posttest.

2. There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of students of the experimental group in the elements of comprehension of literary texts a. Inferential b. Evaluation c. Reorganization d. Literal e. Appreciation at the post test.

1.4 Limits the Study

This study is limited to:

1. Second-year EFL University students/ Department of English/ College of Basic Education at Kirkuk University during the first semester of the academic year 2024-2025.
2. Literary text (The Old Man and the Sea) by Hemingway (1961).

1.5 Value of the Study

The value of the current study can be summarized as follows:

1. This study offers practical insights for EFL teachers by explaining how to implement Circumlocution strategy in university classrooms, thereby enhancing their teaching comprehension of literary texts.
2. The result of this research is expected to be able to promote students' skills in comprehension of literary texts.
3. It benefits university students by creating positive learning situations, as it is intended to enhance critical thinking and develop analytical skills, raising their recognition and comprehension of literary texts.

2. Theoretical Background

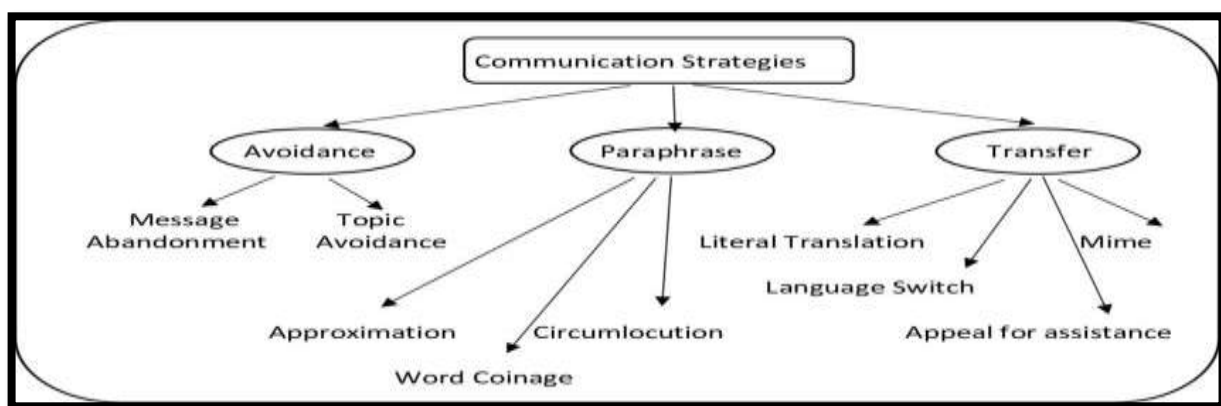
2.1.1.1 Concept of Circumlocution Strategy

Circumlocution strategy is seen as a communication strategy. Experts delineate communication strategies from many perspectives. Ellis (2008) asserts that communication strategies can be delineated from two distinct perspectives. Ellis developed interactional and psycholinguistic definitions to delineate communication strategies based on two experts. Tarone (1980) describes a

communication strategy as the collaborative efforts of two interlocutors to establish a shared meaning in contexts when their intended meanings appear to be unaligned. Communication strategies are perceived as instruments employed in the negotiation of meaning, wherein both interlocutors endeavor to reach consensus on the communicative objective.

On the other hand, Faerch and Kasper (1980) delineate communication strategies from a psychological perspective. They characterize communication strategies as the speaker's deliberate strategy for addressing challenges in the exchange of ideas. In the Faerch and Kasper model, communication strategies are seen as strategic plans. Language learners employ communication strategies due to deficiencies in their target language resources or inability to retrieve those resources. From the aforementioned descriptions, the researcher can deduce that communication strategies are the speaker's attempts to maintain dialogue when encountering difficulties with the target language resources. The primary objective of communication strategies is to address communication issues. Students frequently encounter challenges in articulating their intended concepts due to their restricted proficiency in the target language. According to Torone (1980), there are three categories of communication strategies, namely (1) **paraphrasing**, (2) **transferring**, and (3) **avoiding**. See figure1.

Figure 1 Communication Strategies as Adapted from Torone (1978),



Paraphrasing is categorized into approximation (utilizing a single vocabulary item or structure from the target language that the learner recognizes as incorrect, yet possesses sufficient semantic similarities to fulfill the speaker's intent), word coinage (the learner invents a new term to express a specific concept), and circumlocution (the learner articulates the attributes of the object or action instead of employing the correct target language item or structure). Furthermore, **transfers** are categorized into literal translation (the learner translates verbatim from the native language), language switch (the learner employs the native language term without translation), appeal for assistance (the learner requests the correct term), and mime (the learner utilizes non-verbal strategies instead of a lexical item or action). Moreover, **avoidance** is categorized into topic avoidance, when the learner deliberately refrains from discussing concepts for which the target language item or structure is unfamiliar. and message abandonment (the learner initiates discourse on an idea but is unable to proceed, halting mid-utterance). In the aforementioned statements.

2.1.4.1 Literature and Literary Text

Literature is intrinsically connected with our language and culture and reflects a mirror image of real-life situations and social contexts. They believe that literature fosters an understanding and appreciation of cultures and ideologies, which are different from a learners' native culture. The inclusion of reading in the classroom would therefore help educate students on different cultures and worldviews so that they can approach global issues from a different perspective. Literature is often said to be "the window to the world"(Sidhu, et al.,2010).

A literary text is a genre of literature that transmits a message artistically and creatively. Literary texts focus on both content and form. The authors of this kind of texts use a stylistic language and idiosyncratic style to present reality or

tackle phenomena. Although literary texts have one common. objective and work in the same way, there are different types of literary texts. Such these types are the narrative text, literary description, literary recount, personal response text, and finally the review text (Ait, 2019).

2.1.4.2 Types of Literary Texts

literary texts can be categorized in many ways. The major genre classifications of literary texts can be divided into three groups: poetry, prose, and drama (Kohzadi et al., 2014).

2.1.4.2.1 Poetry

According to Chen, (2019) Poetry is a form of literary text that uses language to evoke emotions and create imagery. It often employs rhythm, rhyme, and figurative language to express ideas and experiences in a concentrated and impactful way.

2.1.4.2.2 Prose

Prose is a form of spoken or written language which comprises both fiction (e.g. myths and legends, fables, parables, and short stories) and nonfiction (e.g., essays, biographies, and autobiographies) (Hirschberg, 2009).

2.1.4.2.3 Drama

Drama is literature designed to be performed by actions. Like fictions it may focus on a single character or a small number of characters and it enacts functional elements as if they were happening in the present, to be witnessed by an audience (Kohzadi et al., 2014).

2.1.4.13 The Relationship between Circumlocution Strategy and Teaching Literary Texts

Circumlocution strategy, which involves describing a word or concept instead of using it directly, can be quite effective for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students, especially when dealing with literary texts.

Circumlocution strategy pushes students to describe words they might not know. For example, instead of saying "tree," a student might describe it as "a tall plant with a trunk and leaves." Students learn to identify synonyms and related terms, which broadens their vocabulary range. This exploration is particularly useful in literary studies where nuanced language is common (Salazar,2006).

Literary texts often contain complex themes and ideas. Circumlocution helps students to break these down into manageable parts, enhancing understanding. By describing elements of the text, students learn to infer meaning from context, which is crucial for comprehending literary nuances. The strategy encourages students to articulate their thoughts without relying on memorized vocabulary. This practice can lead to greater fluency and confidence in speaking. When writing about literary texts, students can avoid repetitive language by using circumlocution to express ideas in multiple ways, leading to more sophisticated writing (Wardana, et al., 2023). Circumlocution strategy requires students to think critically about how to convey meaning. This analytical approach can deepen their understanding of themes, characters, and literary devices. Students learn to interpret text and make inferences, skills that are essential for literary analysis. Literary texts often reflect cultural values and norms. Circumlocution encourages students to explore these cultural elements by describing them, leading to a richer understanding of the text (Baradeyah, and Farrah,2017).

Activities that involve circumlocution can enhance peer interaction. Students can describe concepts to one another, facilitating discussion and cooperative learning. Teachers can provide specific prompts that require students to use circumlocution. For example, asking students to describe a character's emotions without naming them. Engaging students in role-playing activities where they must use circumlocution to communicate can enhance their comfort with the strategy. In conclusion the circumlocution strategy is an effective pedagogical

tool in teaching EFL university students' literary texts. It enhances vocabulary, comprehension, speaking and writing skills, critical thinking, and cultural understanding (Ur, 2012).

3. Methodology

3.1 Experimental Research Design

The researcher follows the experimental design. According to Zubair, (2023) is a “conventional technique to undertaking quantitative analysis or evaluating an idea (or procedure or practice) to see if it affects an outcome or dependent variable”. The experimental design is a blueprint of the procedures that enable the researcher to test his hypotheses by arriving at valid conclusions concerning the relationship between dependent and independent variables

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population of the present study represents 79 second year college students who are studying in morning study in department of English during the academic year 2025/2026. Whereas, the students chosen for the pilot study are 25 students. While the smaller group which is selected from the population to present it is called a sample (Bachman, 2006). The sample of the present study involves 54 of second year college students who are randomly selected from department of English at college of basic Education at the University of Kirkuk. Group A of second year has been chosen as the EG and group B as the control CG. Each group consists of 27 students.

3.3 Test Construction

To achieve the aims of the study, achievement test is designed to collect the data.

3.3.1 Achievement Posttest

The post-test instruction is used to discover the results. The test has been constructed based on (Barrett,1986) models, that have been chosen at the beginning of this research to measure whether there are statistically significant differences between CG and EG. It consists of three questions as follow:

Question one: it is a multiple choice (recognition question) and it consists of five items. It requires students to choose the correct answer. The question is out of fifteen marks, each item takes three marks.

Question two: it is short answer question (production question) and it consist of three items. The question is out of twenty-one marks; each item takes seven marks.

Question three: it is a short answer question (production question). It consists of two items. It requires students to give symbol for them. The question is out of fourteen marks each item takes seven marks. See table 4.

Table 4 Table of Specification of the Achievement Posttest

Level		Content	Items	Behavioral objectives	Bloom Taxonomy	Scores
Recognition	Q1	Write the item number and the correct option's letter	1	To demonstrate literal comprehension by recalling the meaning of "salao.	Remembering	15
			2	To reorganize key events from the narrative to demonstrate understanding of sequence.	Understanding	
			3	To analyze character motivation and infer deeper meaning from narrative elements.	Analyzing	
			4	To evaluate the character's actions by making reasoned	Evaluation	

				judgments and justifying their views.		
			5	To synthesize and create personal meaning from the story’s themes and morals.	Creating	
Production	Q2	Mention the themes of the following ideas	1	To appreciate and create an interpretation of how human dignity and perseverance are represented in the story's themes.	Creating	21
			2	To connect and harmony between humans and nature; empathy toward living creatures and interconnectedness of all life.	Analyzing	
			3	To evaluate and critically analyze the symbolism of struggle and suffering as a metaphor for human dignity and personal identity.	Evaluation	
	Q3	Give symbol for each underling words of the following points	1	To reorganize and understand symbolic meanings of specific phrases within Santiago’s memories.	Understanding	14
			2	To recall literal details and recognize symbolic implications of sharks as antagonists in the story.	Remembering	
Total						50

4.Results

4.1 Presentation of the Results

The student's responses to the test items have been analyzed statistically as follows:

4.1.1 Results Related to the First Hypothesis

To analyze the data related to the first hypothesis specifically: *There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group, which is taught by using Circumlocution Strategy, and that of the control group, which is taught using the conventional method in comprehension of literary texts of at the posttest*, the independent sample test has been used. Therefore, the first aim of the study namely: *Finding out the Effectiveness of using Circumlocution Strategy on EFL university students' comprehension of literary texts.*, will be achieved. According to the following results in table ٢, the mean scores of the experimental group in the posttest is 31.18 and standard deviation is 11.34. While the mean scores of the control group are 22.07 and the standard deviation is 11.75. The calculated t-value 2.898 is higher than the tabulated t-value 2.00 with a degree of freedom 52 at a level of significance (0.05). And from this it can be concluded that *there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group, which is taught by using Circumlocution Strategy, and that of the control group, which is taught using the conventional method in students' comprehension of literary texts at the posttest*, for the benefit of the experimental group. So, the first hypothesis is also rejected.

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviation, and T-Values of the Two Groups in Students' Comprehension of Literary Texts at the Posttest

Group	N.	Mean	S.D.	T-Value		DF	Level of Sig.
				Calculated	Tabulated		
Experimental	27	31.18	11.34	2.898	2.00	52	0.05
Control	27	22.07	11.75				

4.1.2 Results Related to the Second Hypothesis

To verify the Second hypotheses which is, " *There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of students of the experimental group in the elements of comprehension of literary texts a. Inferential b. Evaluation c. Reorganization d. Literal e. Appreciation at the posttest* ". A one- way ANOVA is used in the posttest to see whether there are any significant differences in the mean achievement scores of the experimental groups. The researcher used a one-way analysis of variance, as shown in the table 7 below:

Table 3 One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Among Elements of Comprehension of Literary Texts

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F-value		Sig.
				Calculated	Tabulated	
Between Groups	21.230	4	5.307	0.604	2.5	0.05
Within Groups	1141.704	130	8.782			
Total	1162.933	134				

Table 3 shows that the computed F-value is 0.604 lower than the tabulated F-value 2.5 at the 0.05 level of significance and DF = 4-130. This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between experimental groups students' mean scores *in the elements of comprehension of literary texts a. literal*

b. situational c. contextual at the post test at the posttest. The second hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4 *Comparisons of Means Among the Elements of Comprehension of Literary Texts (Scheffe^a)*

Groups	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05
		Mean scores
Inferential	27	5.44
Evaluation	27	5.74
Reorganization	27	6.11
Literal	27	6.22
Appreciation	27	6.59
Sig.		0.73

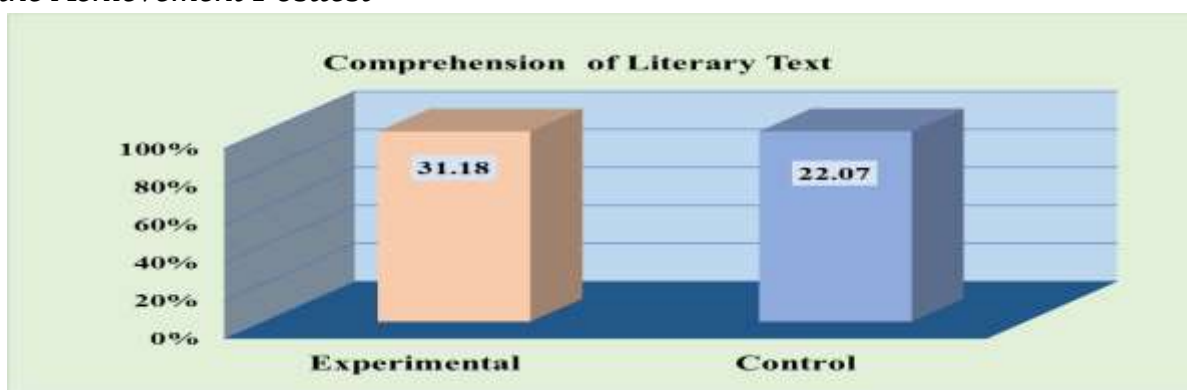
According to table ٤, the comparisons of means shows that the mean scores of the experimental group in the posttests at Inferential 5.44, Evaluation 5.74, Reorganization 6.11, and Literal 6.22, and Appreciation, 6.59 with harmonic mean sample size = 27. These results indicate that *appreciation element* has the highest mean score.

4.2 Discussion of the results

The results of the third hypothesis demonstrate a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the posttest of literary text comprehension. The experimental group, which was taught using the circumlocution strategy, achieved a higher mean score 31.18, than the control group taught through conventional methods 22.07, as show in figure 3. Based on these results, the third null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis which asserts that the circumlocution strategy significantly enhances students' comprehension of literary texts. The superior

performance of the experimental group suggests that the circumlocution strategy effectively promotes deeper comprehension by engaging students in active meaning negotiation. When students attempt to describe unknown words, ideas, or expressions using their own linguistic resources, they are encouraged to process textual content more critically and infer meaning from contextual cues. This interactive process likely facilitated a better grasp of underlying themes, implicit meanings, and stylistic features within the literary texts. The circumlocution strategy provides a scaffold for such interpretive processes, as students learn to discuss and reason about meaning collaboratively.

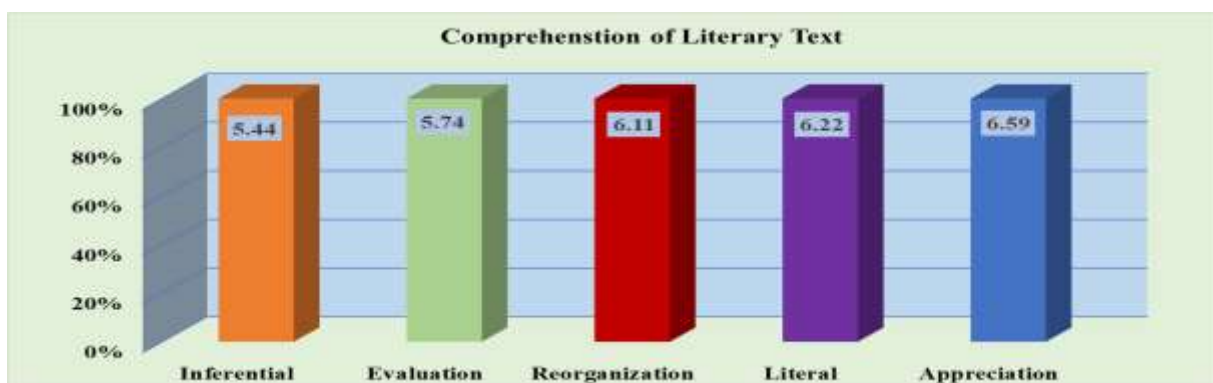
Figure 3 Mean scores of the Two Groups in Comprehension of Literary Text at the Achievement Posttest



The findings of the fourth hypothesis indicate that there are no statistically significant differences among the mean scores of the experimental group in the five elements of comprehension of literary texts Inferential, Evaluation, Reorganization, Literal, and Appreciation in the posttest. The computed F-value 0.604 is lower than the tabulated F-value 2.5. This means that the differences in students' mean scores across the various comprehension elements are not large enough to be considered statistically significant. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which states that there are no significant differences among these elements, is accepted. Although no statistically significant differences were

detected among the five elements, the descriptive mean scores offer valuable pedagogical insights. The mean scores show slight variations, with Appreciation 6.59 yielding the highest score, followed by Literal 6.22, Reorganization 6.11, Evaluation 5.74, and Inferential 5.44, as illustrated in figure 4. The relatively balanced mean scores suggest that the circumlocution strategy had a general, consistent effect on students' comprehension across all elements rather than enhancing one specific aspect disproportionately. The higher mean in the appreciation element indicates that students may have developed a better ability to respond emotionally and intellectually to literary texts, appreciating themes, tone, and style.

Figure 4 Mean scores of the Experimental Group in the Elements of Comprehension of Literary Text at the Achievement Posttest



5. Conclusions

The present study has come up with some conclusions, as follows:

1. Circumlocution Strategy, which involves describing or explaining a concept rather than naming it directly, can significantly enhance comprehension and word recognition of literary texts at an advanced level.
2. The higher mean scores of the experimental group provide compelling evidence that utilizing the Circumlocution Strategy can significantly improve students' comprehension and analytical skills in literary studies

3.Circumlocution Strategy has a role in creating an atmosphere of enjoyment and confident in the classroom through activities and works to attract attention among students.

4. Circumlocution Strategy addresses diverse learning needs, empowering students to navigate complex vocabulary and themes, leading to greater confidence and competence in their literary studies.

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