

Recognising Illocutionary Forces of English Imperatives by Iraqi EFL Learners: A Pragmatic Study

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English imperative sentence is used to perform a variety of illocutionary forces in different contexts. Recognising these illocutionary forces may be problematic to L2 learners of English. This study investigates the Iraqi EFL learners' recognition of the various illocutionary forces that are performed by the English imperative sentence. A Multiple-Response questionnaire was designed to include all the types of imperative illocutionary forces discussed in the literature and their respective individual forces. These types were Obligatory wilful directives, Non-obligatory wilful directives, Non-Wilful-Directives, and Non-Directives. The questionnaire consisted of 30 different everyday-life situations, each of which contained an imperative utterance. For each situation, some illocutionary forces were given as choices to select. One hundred Iraqi undergraduate EFL learners took part in the experiment whose performance was compared to that of 12 English-native-speaker participants. Results showed that learners were not as efficient as native speakers in recognising the illocutionary forces performed by English imperative sentences, especially the indirect forces. This finding applied to all the types mentioned above of imperative illocutionary forces. Learners have not reached the native-like level in this regard. However, the only exception was the case of 'ordering/commanding' force, which is the direct force of the English imperative sentence, wherein learners were as adequate as native speakers in recognising it.

Keywords: *Illocutionary forces, English imperatives, EFL learners, L2 pragmatics, recognition.*

Introduction

English imperatives have long been studied within different fields of linguistics, including pragmatics, and analysed from various theoretical perspectives — generative grammar (e.g. see Lees, 1964; Katz-Postal, 1964; Thorne, 1966; Han, 1998), descriptive studies (e.g. Bolinger, 1977; Davies, 1986; Takahashi, 1994), pragmatic speech acts studies (e.g. Sadock, 1974; Green, 1975; Downes, 1977). However, English imperatives, based on the literature survey we did, have not been duly researched within second language pragmatics except a few attempts (e.g., Tsykina, 2016). The present study contributes to plugging this gap by investigating the Iraqi EFL learners' perception of the different illocutionary forces performed by English imperatives. First, let us probe the form, functions, and characteristics of English imperatives mentioned in the literature.

Theoretical Background

Quirk et al. (1985) list imperatives within the four major sentence types in English (other types being declarative, interrogatives, and exclamatory). “Imperatives are sentences which normally have no overt grammatical subject, and whose verb has the base form” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 803). Similarly, Biber et al. (1999) argue that imperative sentences are formally characterised by the lack of the subject, use of the base form of the verb and the absence of modals as well as tense and aspect markers. For example:

(1) Give me my bag.

Takahashi (2012) contends that the imperative sentence is characterised by three features: hypotheticality, non-past and second person. Hypotheticality means that “an imperative involves its speaker presenting a possible situation to the addressee(s)” (Takahashi, 2012, p.31). In other words, by uttering an imperative, the speaker proposes a situation or a state of affairs that has not been realised yet and would like the addressee to bring about that state of affairs in reality. Non-past indicates that the act performed by an imperative is either realised in the present or future. An imperative cannot refer to a situation in the past time. Finally, as the imperative is used with no overt subject, the second person (usually the addressee) is implicitly understood to be the subject of the imperative sentence. To illustrate these three features, consider the following example:

(2) Make me a sandwich.

When uttering this utterance, the state of affairs it refers to (sandwich making) has not been materialised yet in the outer world (i.e., the action is still hypothetical). In addition, the action of making a sandwich is implemented in either the present or the future time. It has not been realised in the past; otherwise, the speaker would not utter the imperative. Thirdly, the speaker directs the utterance to somebody else other than herself. But, it would be pointless to

direct the utterance towards an absent third person who cannot comply with the imperative. This would leave us with one possibility. That is, the utterance is said to the second person (the addressee).

English imperatives are pragmatically used to perform a range of different illocutionary forces. The next section displays and discusses this range of functions.

Classification of Illocutionary Forces of English Imperatives

Illocutionary forces that can be performed by English imperatives are mainly dichotomised into two major categories: Directives and non-directives.

Directives

Directives are one of the five major categories of Searle's classification of illocutionary forces. Searle (1979, p.13) describes 'directives' as "attempts by the speaker...to get the hearer to do something". Likewise, Quirk et al. (1985, p.804) state that 'directives' "are primarily used to instruct somebody to do something". A directive expresses a proposition representing a potential situation; realising or actualising that situation constitutes compliance with the directive (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). English Imperatives are characteristically used as directives. Their directive forces can be subcategorised into two types as follows.

Wilful-Directives

This subcategory is characterised by the fact that compliance with the imperative is for the speaker's interest rather than the hearer. Thus, the speaker would have a (strong) desire that the imperative force is fulfilled. Wilful directives are further classified into 'obligatory wilful directives' and 'non-obligatory wilful directives' (see Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Takahashi, 2012).

Obligatory wilful directives

In this group, the speaker requires the addressee to comply with the imperative force either by law, power, the speaker's control of the situation, etc. This group comprises the following illocutionary forces.

Orders/Commands

Ordering and commanding are the typical direct illocutionary forces that are associated with the imperative sentence in English (see Yule, 2014; Ingeish & Hassan, 2009). Lyons (1977)

argues that *Order* and *Command* are often used interchangeably to describe the same directive force. Both terms refer to the same fact. That is, by means of uttering an order/command, the speaker requires the addressee to act as a result of the former's belief, in virtue of his/her authority over the latter, their issue constitutes a sufficient reason for the addressee to comply (Al-Hindawy, 1999). For example:

- (3) Wake up, John. (a father to his son)
- (4) Attack now! (an officer to his squad)

However, Searle and Vanderveken (1985) maintain that the main difference between 'order' and 'command' is the kind of authority/power the addresser has over the addressee. An order does not require an institutional authority to be issued. In example (3) above, the father makes an order to his son, relying simply on the higher-ranked position he has in the family relations and structure. On the other hand, issuing a command requires the addresser to be in a higher position. It has power over the addressee that is institutionally sanctioned (e.g., an army officer is commanding his soldiers, example (4) above).

Demands

Demanding someone to do something is to tell her to do it with a greater degree of strength than simply telling or requesting (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p.948) differentiate between command and demand. They argue that in the case of a command, the speaker needs institutionalised authority to tell the addressee to do something. Demand does not have this kind of backing, but the speaker nevertheless forcefully insists on compliance. For example:

- (5) Release our leader from prison.

Insult

Imperative sentences can express rudeness. The addresser, due to the authority she has over the addresser, may insult the addressee she is talking rudely. Example:

- (6) Push off! (The imperative)
- (7) Shut up! (Alexander, 1988, p.185)

Prohibition

Prohibition is used to express the speaker's desire to prohibit someone from doing something or to stop someone from doing some action (Allan, 1986). He argues that in the case of prohibition, there is a superior authority for the speaker over the hearer, and the hearer has no space of optionality to do or not to do the required action. For instance:

- (8) Don't talk.

Threats

The lexicographer, Hornby (2005, p.1599) defines threat as a statement in which the addresser tells the addressee that he/she will punish or harm him/her, especially if the addressee does not do what the addresser wants. Moreover, Quirk et al. (1985) argue that an imperative clause joined by the coordinator *and* to the following clause is used to convey a threat as in:

(9) Touch my daughter and you're dead!

Non-obligatory wilful directives

In this group of imperative directives, the addresser would like the addressee to comply with the intended imperative force. However, the addressee is not required to do so due to the lack of the addresser's power/authority over the addressee or the great social distance between the interlocutors. This group includes, among others, the following illocutionary forces.

Challenges

When using an imperative, the speaker may prescribe with her sentence some future course of action for the hearer. The "prescription" notion sounds general enough to cover an interpretation that the imperatives may be used to issue challenges (Davies, 1986) as in:

(10) Catch me if you can

(11) All right then, if you're so clever, prove it to me.

Exhortations

An imperative may be used to denote exhortation. It is an act of trying hard to persuade somebody to do something (Hornby, 2005; Kamal, 2019). For example:

(12) Make me proud of you (Harnish, 1994, p.38)

Pleas

Huddleston and Pullum (2002) argue that pleas are wilful directives. As it is the case with 'request', the addresser gives the addressee the option of not complying. However, when performing a plea, the addresser is asking for something in a stronger and more serious and emotional way than the case of request. Very often, it will be assumed that the addressee would do what she is asked for. For example:

(13) Give me one more chance, I beg you.

For Davies (1986), imperatives may convey humble requests or helpless pleas, where it is not the addresser but the addressee who has the power to decide, as in:

(14) Do help me, please.

Requests

Green (1975, p.121) defines request as “the method used in polite society for getting someone to do something”. Moreover, a request, as a directive force, can be refused or granted by the addressee (Lyons, 1977). The addresser gives the addressee the option of not complying with the required act. For example:

(15) Answer the phone, please. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p.948)

The use of the discourse marker *pleases*, as a pragmalinguistic particle, can help a lot in recognising that what is being performed is a request. *Please* is a hedging device used for mitigating the force of an imperative utterance and making it more polite. And that fits more with the case of requesting.

Supplications

Supplications are forms of prayers, where one party humbly or earnestly asks another one (usually a human being to God) to provide something, either for the being who is doing the supplications or on behalf of someone else. For imperative sentences, they can be used to denote a humble supplication and prayer of an inferior being to an infinitely superior one, as in:

(16) “Our Lord forgives us our sins and anything we may have done that transgressed our duty, establish our feet firmly, and help us against those resist faith” (Holy Quran/Al-Imran Sura /verse 147, Translated by Ali 1937, p.160).

The verbs “forgive”, “establish” and “help” are not to order Allah (God) to do something. Rather, they are prayers for the Lord, who has the absolute power, to grant all that is beseeched from him. Thus, one can say that supplications are pleas in religious contexts.

Non-Wilful-Directives. Unlike wilful directives, the compliance with the imperative force in this subcategory is generally for the addressee’s benefit rather than the addresser. It includes the following illocutionary forces (see Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Takahashi, 2012).

Advertisements

Dyer (1982, p.2) defines advertising as “a means of drawing attention to something, notifying or informing somebody of something”. In this context, Davies (1986) points out that the addressee is the general public rather than a specific individual. The force of the imperative is to draw attention to the existence of something which people might not be aware of:

- (17) Win up to \$1000 in this week’s competition.
- (18) Enjoy the natural orange tasting.

Advice

Bach and Harnish (1979) propose a definition for *advice* as a non-wilful directive in which the addresser does not express the desire that the addressee performs a certain action. Rather, she/he expresses the belief that doing it is a good idea. Compliance is not for the addresser’s benefit but generally for the addressee’s. For example:

- (19) Take plenty of exercises if you want to stay slim.

Directions

An imperative sentence can also be non-wilfully used in English for directing somebody to somewhere. It is obvious that such use is for the addressee’s benefit. Consider the following examples:

- (20) Take the first road on the right after the post office.
- (21) Take the second turning on the left and then turn right (Alexander, 1988, p.185)

Instructions

Instruction is “a message describing how something is to be done” (Retrieved from Advanced English Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2008). Huddleston and Pullum (2002) state that instructions are non-wilful directives. Compliance is primarily in the addressee’s interest rather than the addresser’s, but it is presented as a necessary step for the achievement of the relevant goal. For example:

- (22) Take two tablets with a glass of water. (Leech et al. 2001, p.211)

Invitations

Imperatives that imply invitations can be seen as attempts to get the hearer to carry out an action which is assumed to be beneficial to her (Allan, 1986). Example:

- (23) Come and have dinner with us soon.

Offers

According to Trosborg (1995), offers are illocutionary acts in which the addresser volunteers to help the addressee in what she considers her in need. For instance:

(24) Have another cookie. (Leech et al., 2001, p.338)

Promises

A promise can be universally understood as a commitment to do something (Egner, 2002). For Hayakawa (1978), promise as a speech act is one of the directive utterances that the speaker could utter something about the future, and she/he is typically obliged to be as certain as possible. Usually, the benefit of the promised action would be for a party other than the speaker (e.g. the addressee). An Example could be the following:

(25) Finish your homework and I'll give you some ice-cream. (Quirk et al., 1985, p.832)

Recommendations

A recommendation is an official advice given to someone about what to do. A recommendation is a kind of non-wilful directive, i.e., compliance is not something for the addresser's benefit (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). For example:

(26) Keep your options open.

Suggestions

Rintell (1979, p.99) states that "in suggestion, the addresser asks the addressee to take some action which the addresser believes will benefit the addressee, even one that the addresser should desire". Example:

(27) A: what shall I do today?

B: Go shopping, have a meal out, visit the museum, do whatever you want. You have a day off today.

Warnings

Huddleston and Pullum (2002) consider warning as one of the non-wilful directives that can be performed by English imperatives whose benefit is primarily for the addressee. Compliance with the warning force is not obligatory and left up to the addressee. The imperative form is the most common device used to express warning (Quirk et al., 1985). For example:

(28) Be careful! The jungle is too dangerous for you.

However, we also believe that *warning* can be a **wilful directive** when the benefit of the required action goes to the addresser herself. Wilful directive relies on the strength of desire the addresser has towards the required action. For example:

(29) Be careful! You will damage my flowers!

(30) Be careful! You will get us killed all!

Non-Directives

Non-directive imperative forces differ from the directive ones in that they do not instruct the addressee to do something (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005). The situations of the non-directives are generally assumed not to be at the addresser's control. They include:

Expressing Conditions

When the imperative clauses are the first element in a coordination construction, it may imply a condition as in the following example (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005, p.171):

(31) Invite one without the other and there'll be trouble. (If you invite one without the other, there'll be trouble)

Expressing Irony

According to Brown and Levinson (1978, p.226), irony may be defined as “a rhetorical device which consists of implying the opposite of what is said literally”. In certain cases, the occurrence of an imperative sentence with *and*-clause may denote the meaning of irony as in:

(32) Rain rain and make our day even better! (while going out for a picnic)

Expressing Rejections

An imperative sentence may denote incredulous rejection (Quirk et al., 1985, p.832) as in the following example:

(33) Oh, come now. [You don't really mean that.]

Expressing Wish

English imperatives can be used to express certain kinds of wish towards the addressee (Wilson and Sperber, 1988, p. 4). Example:

(34) Sleep well.

(35) Get well soon.

Here, the speaker is not instructing the hearer to sleep well or recover, but he is expressing a kind of hope for that.

Imprecations

Imprecation is the act of calling down a curse that invokes evil and usually serves as an insult (Retrieved from Advanced English Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2008). Quirk et al. (1985) assert that the imperative sentences can be used to express imprecation as in:

(36) Go to hell!

Permissions

Radden and Dirven (2007) point out that permissions express the addresser's directive attitude towards the addressee's potential action, which she "enables" to occur by abandoning her power to prevent it. An act of permission is thus, typically based on the speaker's authority. Davies (1986) argues that the imperatives which express granting permission are mainly used by persons of authority when speaking to subordinates, such as a father to his son, or an employer to his employee, as in:

(37) a. Peter: Can I open the window?

b. Marry: Oh, open it then. (Wilson and Sperber, 1988, p.3)

(38) Help yourself to any book you need. (Davies, 1986, p.41)

Self-Deliberations

Quirk et al. (1985) argue that imperative sentences can be used to express self-deliberation as in:

(39) A. Where are you going?

B. Let me see now. I think I'll go home.

In the example above, when *B* says "Let me see now", she hangs on for a moment to think about her preferred option of destination. Then, she expresses it plainly in the next sentence "I think..." By saying "Let me see now", *B* **deliberates with herself** about the destination she intends to go next.

Showing Indifference/Resentment

An imperative can sometimes be used to show the speaker's indifference about something. Consider the following examples:

(40) Well, tell her if you want to—it's all the same to me.

(41) Take it or leave it—it's my final offer. (Takahashi, 2012)

Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p.931) name this imperative force as *acceptance* and consider it as “the weakest kind of directive”. Surprisingly, they also argue that this use of imperatives expresses the speaker’s indifference. We agree with them in this latter view; however, we are not happy with the term and description they provide. We believe that this use of English imperatives may express the speaker’s indifference or, perhaps, the speaker’s resentment about something. For example, the force of the (41) above is that “I don’t care at all whether you take it or leave it”. Such use of English imperatives is not directive at all. That is why we name this force as “showing indifference” instead and place it within the non-directive forces.

Imperatives within L2 Pragmatics

In our survey of the literature, we found that little has been written within L2 pragmatics about imperatives and the scope of illocutionary forces they perform. This renders imperatives a fertile area of research in interlanguage pragmatics that is mostly untrodden yet. In this section, we review some L2 studies that have tackled imperative forces.

Tsylina (2016) investigated the perception of Russian imperative structures that perform various direct speech acts by two groups of L2 learners of Russian. Both groups had English as their L1. But, they differ in that Group 1 (10 learners) learned Russian as a foreign language inside instructional classrooms. In contrast, Group 2 (10 learners) are balanced bilinguals who learned Russian as a second language constructionally from birth. The study focused on the learners’ perception of the pragmalinguistic forms of four Russian aspectual imperative structures (imperfective/perfective positive imperatives and imperfective/perfective negative imperatives) and how learners correlate these forms with a variety of imperative speech acts. The study compared the learners’ perception of that of a control group which comprised 20 Russian native speakers. An acceptability judgment task was used to rate the pragmatic appropriateness of a range of imperative forms within constructed contexts of situations. Results revealed that both learners’ groups behaved native-like in their perception of imperfective/perfective positive imperatives and both deviated from the native level as regards imperfective/perfective negative imperatives. However, Group 2 was rather closer in their perception of the latter negative category to the native level.

Tsylina’s study ignored the sociopragmatics of the investigated imperatives and concentrated on pragmalinguistics. “The only variable that they [i.e., learners] had to rely on was the appropriateness of the verbal aspect to the speech act (pragmalinguistic level)” (p.36). The study was also restricted to probing direct imperative speech acts only rather than the range of direct and indirect imperative speech acts which the current study aims at investigating. Another study with a similar purpose (i.e., investigating the range of imperative forces) is Ingeish and Hassan (2009). They conducted a comparative study to probe the range of speech

acts that can be performed by imperatives in English and Arabic and reveal the similarities and differences between these two languages in this regard. The research found more than 20 different speech acts conveyed by imperative forms in these two languages and uncovered some similarities and a number of differences between the two languages. However, the study did not deal with the subject-matter from an L2 pragmatics perspective as the current study is doing.

Other studies focused on one or two imperative forces and how L2 learners recognise or produce them. For instance, Torghabeh and Rabieefar (2015) investigated the production of the speech act of ordering by Iranian EFL learners of English at the university level. By using a DCT containing 20 different situations, the study compared the use of ordering of 120 Iranian EFL learners to that of 30 American English native speakers. Results showed that both groups preferred to use 'Mood derivable' strategy (i.e., the direct strategy of ordering by using the base form of verbs such as "Come here") for producing this speech act in most of the given situations.

AL-Hindawy (1999) investigated Iraqi EFL learners' production and recognition of L2 commands and requests. To this end, he employed two groups of EFL learners at the university level which represent two levels of L2 proficiency (low and advanced): undergraduate learners (40 participants) and postgraduate learners (30 participants). In addition, he also measured the English native speakers' production of those two speech acts (5 participants). The author used a recognition judgment task containing 38 situations in which different directives are used to test the recognition ability. Learners were asked to read the situations and recognise the commands and requests used in them. As for the production side, he provided the participants with a DCT wherein a number of situations are listed. Participants were asked to imagine themselves in these situations and issue the proper command or request.

Results showed that Iraqi EFL learners, especially the undergraduates, were more influenced by the pragmalinguistic realisations of utterances than the sociopragmatic factors in their recognition of English commands and requests. Moreover, their recognition of requests was better than that of commands, and direct commands were realised better than indirect commands. In general, postgraduate learners were more capable of recognising those two speech acts than undergraduate learners which indicates a role for L2 proficiency in the recognition process. Regarding production, learners showed inadequate awareness of the English commanding strategies in comparison with the native speakers. In most cases, learners preferred using the direct strategy of command only. Finally, learners also showed traces of L1 pragmatic transfer in the commands they produced.

As the above literature review shows, investigating the range of speech acts performed by imperatives is still a highly-under researched topic, especially in L2 pragmatics. A few studies have tackled this issue, and most of them focused on specific imperative speech act(s) rather than the full range of them. The current study contributes to plugging this gap in L2 pragmatics research by investigating the Iraqi EFL learners' recognition of English imperative illocutionary forces. Iraqi EFL learners have not been employed much in L2 pragmatics research worldwide, and this adds more value to the present study.

Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Can the Iraqi EFL learners recognise the different illocutionary forces performed by English imperatives?

Sub-question:

- 1a. Can Iraqi EFL learners recognise the following categories and subcategories of imperative forces on the same level: Wilful directives, Obligatory wilful directives, Non-obligatory wilful directives, Non-wilful directives, and Non-directives?
2. If so, to what extent the Iraqi EFL learners approach the native-speaker level in recognising those imperative forces in general? And in which (sub) categories of the analysed forces they approach the native-level more?

Methods

Participants

The study involved a total of 112 participants who took part in the experiment. This total comprised 100 Iraqi EFL undergraduate students from two Departments of English including College of the Education, the University of Kufa and the University of AL-Qadisiyah respectively (Iraq). They were all seniors, 65 females and 35 males, and their ages ranged from 21 to 24. All of them were approached in person. In addition, 12 American English native speakers were recruited via email correspondence. They were working or studying at Salem State University, MA, United States. They were nine females and three males and their age range between 38-56 years. More than 60 email invitations were made, but only 12 people responded and agreed to do the experiment. These native speakers served as a control group for the experiment. All the participants were recruited by using a *convenience sampling* method (i.e., recruiting only the conveniently reachable sample of the intended population) which is one type of non-probability sampling and the most common method in L2 research (see Dörnyei, 2010).



Materials

The materials of this study were 30 imaginary situations constructed by the researchers. Every situation had an imperative utterance said by one interlocutor and directed to some hearer. The situations are various in terms of the environments they represent (e.g. military situations, academic situations, bank environment, etc., see Appendix A).

Instrument

A multiple-choice questionnaire was designed by the researchers to measure the participants' recognition of imperative illocutionary forces. The questionnaire consisted of an introduction and two parts. The introduction briefed the reader with the questionnaire and what is required in it, and it also contained some instructions about how to respond. Part 1 contained the experimented items which were 30 in number. This part was divided into three columns. The first column contained the constructed brief situations of the experiment. The second one included the imperative utterances that are said in those situations. The last column comprised multiple choices. For each item, a set of four choices which represented four possible illocutionary forces from which the participant must select one only that most suits the utterance and the situation in question. In addition, a fifth blank choice was given in case the participant is not convinced with all the four choices. The second part required the participants to provide information about their age, gender and L2 proficiency for statistical purposes. The questionnaire was submitted to a jury of experts from Salem State University, MA, the USA as well as experts from the Department of English/College of Education/University of Al-Qadisiyah to verify its validity. It was also approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the latter university.

Procedure

The questionnaire was printed out and distributed to the EFL learners who took part in the experiment. Two sessions were held for doing the questionnaire — one in the University of Kufa and the other in the University of Al-Qadisiyah. First, the participants were orally briefed with the nature of the experiment and how to respond to the questionnaire items. Then, they were kindly asked to provide their answers. The answer time ranged from 25-32 minutes. Regarding the native speakers, they were all sent the questionnaire as MS Word file attachments along with a covering letter asking them to do the questionnaire kindly. They were asked to use either the highlighting or underlying functions built-in the MS Word software to indicate their choices. In addition, they were also asked to do the questionnaire in one session and time themselves while doing it. After providing their responses, they saved the changes and emailed the file back to the researchers. Answer time for this group ranged from 20-25 minutes.

For randomisation purposes, three versions of the questionnaire were prepared, which have the same 30 items but with different orders. The randomised versions were distributed randomly on the participants in both the experimental group (Iraqi EFL learners) and the control group (American English native speakers). Finally, the questionnaire was piloted beforehand with three EFL learners and three native speakers to verify its feasibility and highlight and overcome any problems before conducting the main experiment.

Data Analysis

After collecting data from the participants, we compare the performance of the experimental group (Iraqi EFL learners) with that of the control group (English native speakers) for any differences which were ultimately found between the two groups. A chi-square test was applied to the data using SPSS software to find out whether the differences were statistically significant. First, the Chi-square value was calculated for the difference found as regards the total items of the questionnaire. Afterwards, the questionnaire items were sorted and categorised into subgroups relying on the answers of the English native speakers that were used as a yardstick. That is to say; if the majority of the native speakers in a certain questionnaire item agreed upon choosing one specific illocutionary force from the options set, this item becomes associated with that force and identified with it. For example, if in item 1 of the questionnaire the majority of native speakers chose 'ordering' as the performed illocutionary force, this item was considered as performing the imperative force of 'ordering' and was listed under the '**obligatory wilful directives**' accordingly.

By adopting this procedure, all the questionnaire items were listed under their relevant subgroups. Relying on the literature review above, the subgroups were as follows.

1. Obligatory wilful directives: containing the forces of *Ordering/Commanding, Demanding, Insulting, Prohibiting, and Threatening*.
2. Non-obligatory wilful directives: containing the forces of *Challenging, Exhorting, Pleading, Requesting, and Supplicating*.
3. Non-Wilful-Directives: containing the forces of *Advertising, Advising, Directing, Instructing, Inviting, Offering, Promising, Recommending, Suggesting, and Warning*.
4. Non-Directives: containing the forces of *Expressing Conditions, Expressing Irony, Expressing Rejections, Expressing Wish, Imprecating, Giving Permission, Self-Deliberation, Showing indifference/resentment*

Chi-square was also counted for the datasets of all these subgroups individually. In addition, the learners were classified according to gender into 'Male group' and 'Female group'. Chi-square analysis was also applied to test the performance difference between the gender groups. All results are mentioned and discussed next.

Results and Discussion

The results obtained from data analysis provide strong evidence that the Iraqi EFL learners' recognition of illocutionary forces performed by English imperatives is different from that of English native speakers. This outcome applies to all the questionnaire items as a whole and all the subgroups of items. Their Chi-square results were all statistically significant [Total items of the questionnaire $\chi^2(5) = 19.09, p = .002$; Obligatory wilful directives $\chi^2(5) = 29.97, p < .001$; Non-obligatory wilful directives $\chi^2(5) = 11.41, p = .04$; Non-Wilful-Directives $\chi^2(5) = 11.85, p = .03$; Non-Directives $\chi^2(5) = 29.77, p < .001$]. Native speakers showed more agreement of choices than EFL learners whose choices were more heterogeneous. As for gender, results reveal no significant difference between male and female EFL learners regarding the recognition of the analysed illocutionary forces [$\chi^2(5) = 5.46, p = .36$].

Regarding the answers of the study research questions, the aforementioned results indicate that Iraqi EFL learners cannot recognise the different illocutionary forces done by English imperatives properly— both as regards all the questionnaire items in general and the individual subgroups separately (Research Question 1). However, the only exception was the case 'ordering' and 'commanding' wherein the learners perfectly recognised these two illocutionary forces. Perhaps, this is because these are the direct forces associated with English imperative sentence and because of the straightforwardness of the situations in which they occurred within the questionnaire. As for Research Question 2, the same results above reveal that the Iraqi EFL learners' recognition of the forces in question still lags far behind that of the English native speakers. They have not reached the native-like level yet in this regard on the level of both the questionnaire items in general and the abovementioned subgroups individually.

A number of reasons can be considered to justify this big difference in recognition of imperative forces between the native speakers and Iraqi EFL learners. First, the learners used in this study are all studying English as a foreign language at home. None of them is studying abroad in an English speaking environment, and none had contact with English native speakers before. Furthermore, what they are learning in classrooms is mainly the formal style of language with a concentration on grammar. The informal style of English is not allocated much teaching time; Conversation classes, which expose students to the mainly informal language, are highly limited in terms of time, material and the undergraduate years they are taught in (i.e., Conversation course is taught in two years only out of four years of B.A. study). In addition, not all the conversation textbooks used are up to date. Another reason is that pragmatics, including Speech Act Theory, is not instructional taught at the undergraduate level at all. Thus, students are not familiar with notions such as 'illocutionary force' or 'speech act' and do not know how they are used. All the above reasons, among others,

contribute to bringing about this big difference in recognition between the learners in question and English native speakers.

Conclusion

The study has provided evidence that Iraqi EFL learners cannot recognise the illocutionary forces performed by English imperatives as properly as English native speakers. The learners have not reached the native-like level in this regard. However, the only exception is the case of ordering/commanding illocutionary force (i.e., the direct force of imperative sentence) in which the learners were as competent as the native speakers in recognising this force. This indicates that learners are more familiar with the direct illocutionary forces of L2 English imperatives than the indirect ones. Learners have proved to have weak recognition of all the categories of imperative forces discussed in the literature review: Obligatory wilful directives, Non-obligatory wilful directives, Non-Wilful-Directives, and Non-Directives. This may be due to a number of reasons the main of which are: (1) the lack of exposure to L2 input as all the EFL participants were studying English at home with much concentration on formal language; (2) the lack of teaching (L2) pragmatics to the EFL learners in question adequately; and, (3) the conversation textbooks used, which mainly teach informal language, are outdated. Moreover, the study found no significant difference between male and female learners as regards the recognition in question. This latter finding confirms the assumption that the weak recognition is a general problem for both genders.

The current study is one of a few studies that employ Iraqi EFL learners in L2 pragmatics research. And, it seems to be pioneering in exploring these learners' recognition of L2 English imperative illocutionary forces. The study contributes to providing a better understanding of how EFL learners recognise L2 illocutionary forces in general and those of L2 English imperative sentences in particular. Thus, the study adds some knowledge to the already existing body of L2 pragmatics research.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Due to the limited time and resources, the study has a number of limitations, some of which were unavoidable, unfortunately. First, the number of native-speaker participants was fairly low (12 participants only). This is because the researchers do not live in an English-speaking community and have no physical contact with them. They could only contact English native speakers by email, and due to the voluntary and volunteering nature of participation; only 12 people were responsive and cooperative with our invitation. Likewise, the number of participants skewed more towards females, causing some gender imbalance because of the voluntariness of participation. Furthermore, the questionnaire was sent to the native speakers as a file attachment by email. They were not monitored while giving answers. Hence, it is not



guaranteed whether they were focused enough on the required task while answering the questionnaire.

The study is limited to investigating the learners' recognition of imperative illocutionary forces and has not considered their production. Moreover, the study used elicited data collected via a questionnaire rather than adopting naturally-occurring data which can reflect the reality better. In addition, the study is limited to dealing with Iraqi EFL learners as the only set of participants.

It is highly recommended to conduct studies for addressing the limitations mentioned above. A study that combines both the recognition and production of imperative illocutionary forces would be worthwhile doing, especially if it considers using naturally-occurring data. We also recommend doing a comparison between the recognition/production of imperative forces in the mother tongue and their counterparts in L2. Such a study would reveal any possible traces of L1 pragmatic transfer which could account for some of the discrepancies between the native speakers' performance and that of the learners if any. It would also be a good idea to apply similar studies to other EFL learners (such as Japanese or Chinese ones) or learners of L2 other than English and compare their findings to those of the current one. This would enrich our knowledge and give more insight into learners' L2 pragmatic competence. Finally, it would be also useful for pragmatics teachers to design a study with a pre-test for the L2 learners' recognition/production of (imperative) illocutionary forces in the target language followed by a certain kind of treatment (e.g. implicit/explicit instruction of the required speech acts). Then, teachers make a post-test to measure the learners' improvement as regards the tested speech acts.



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Appendix A

This appendix contains the multiple-choice questionnaire which was submitted to the participants. It contains a short introduction for the purpose of the questionnaire followed by a set of instructions on how to answer it. Participants are also provided with an answer example. The questionnaire contains thirty items each of which consists of a short context of a situation, an imperative sentence said in that situation and a set of five options to select from.

File: [Appendix A](#)

OR: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328957101_Appendix_A_The_Questionnaire