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**Conversational Implicature: Its Recognition and Production  
by University Students**

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**Abstract**

Conversational implicature is considered as one of the essential ways of communication. This study, however, aims at finding out university students' recognition and production of conversational implicature. To achieve the aims of the study, two types of multiple-choice discourse completion tasks are used in collecting the data, and a quantitative research methodology is used in analysing these data. The sample of the study included 100 male and female students studying at the English department, college of education for humanities, university of Wasit. The test was carried out electronically by using online educational platforms such as Google Classroom and Free Conference Call on 30 of March 2020. To achieve the aims of the study, it has been hypothesized that university students can recognize and produce conversational implicature. The study has come up with the results that university students are unable to recognize and produce Conversational Implicature.

**Key Words: Conversational implicature, recognition, production.**

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1 A Plagiarized paper from the Thesis Entitled "Conversational Implicature and Explicature: Their Recognition and Production by University Students".

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**الحواريات الضمنية: إدراكها وإنتاجها من قبل طلبة الجامعات****المستخلص**

تُعتبر الحواريات الضمنية طريقة أساسية للتواصل. الحواريّة الضمنيّة تُشيرُ الى الطريقة غير المباشرة في التعبير عن الآراء، الأفكار، المعلومات و المعارف. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى البحث عن قدرة طلبة الجامعات العراقية في إدراك وإنتاج الحواريات الضمنية . استخدم في هذه الدراسة نوعين من اختبارات متعددة الخيارات لجمع البيانات وقد تم تحليل تلك البيانات بطريقة التحليل الكمي. إن العينة التي تم دراستها في هذه الرسالة تتكون من ١٠٠ طالب و طالبة من الذين يدرسون في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة واسط. وقد تم تأدية الاختبار بشكل إلكتروني باستخدام منصات التعليم وذلك في ال ٣٠ من مارس ٢٠٢٠ م Google Classroom.

**Free Conference Call الإلكترونيّة**

من أجل تحقيق أهداف الدراسة، قد تم وضع بعض الفرضيات منها: إن طلبة الجامعات لديهم القدرة على إدراك وإنتاج الحواريات الضمنية. وقد توصلت الدراسة، بعد تحليل البيانات، إلى إن طلبة الجامعات لا يمتلكون القدرة على إدراك وإنتاج الحواريات الضمنية.

**1. Introduction**

Learning a foreign language should be for communication. Although, communication can be achieved by different ways including; sign language, facial expressions, gestures...etc. still, speech has the supreme position among these ways of communication (Eckard & Kearny, 1981). Speech is one of the productive skills of language through which ideas, information, feelings, knowledge, and experience can be exchanged. (Burns & Joyce, 1997).

Cameron (2001) and H. Brown (2004) state that through the speaking process meaning can be expressed either indirectly or directly. Expressing the meaning indirectly is the situation where the speaker doesn't explain everything directly but leaves some information implied to be interpreted by the listener, while directly means stating the message explicitly without leaving anything to the imagination and interpretation of the listener. In pragmatics, however, indirect communication is called conversational implicature.



Mey (2001, p. 46) states that conversational implicature "is the way we understand an utterance in conversation following what we expect to hear". Birner (2013, p. 62) argues that one of the main characteristics of conversational implicature is that "its contribution to the meaning of the utterance is not truth conditional", that is to say, if the implicature did not hold, this will not affect the truth of the statement. And the other characteristic "is that the implicature is context-dependent", this feature means that the implicature varies according to the context in which it occurs.

Iraqi university students are said to be ignorant of such way of communication. Those students face some difficulties in processing conversational implicature. They have been focusing on linguistic competence rather than communicative competence. For ages, those students have been learning syntactic structures grammatical forms, and lists of vocabulary. Pratama, Nurkamto, Rustono, and Marmanto (2017) conducted a study entitled "Second Language Learners' Comprehension of Conversational Implicatures in English" based on Bouton's (1994) and Roever's (2005). The study revealed that the students have obvious difficulty in this linguistic area and have failed in processing it.

Unfortunately, this type of implicature is rather neglected since in the process of language learning and teaching, most of the time, linguistic competence is emphasized. The inability to notice implicatures will result in various forms of pragmatic failure and miscommunication. Bouton (1994, p. 157) stated that "A little attempt is made in the English as a second/ foreign language classroom to make learners aware of implicature as a tool of communication or to give them practice at using it in English".

Students learning English as a foreign language, however, should put the purpose of communication in mind if they want to acquire communicative competence in the target language. Those students are going to be judged, in real-life situations, upon their mastery of this essential skill (Richards,1990). EFL students are said to be unable to recognize or produce conversational implicature. Thus, the current study will investigate university students' recognition and production of this linguistic area.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Conversational Implicature

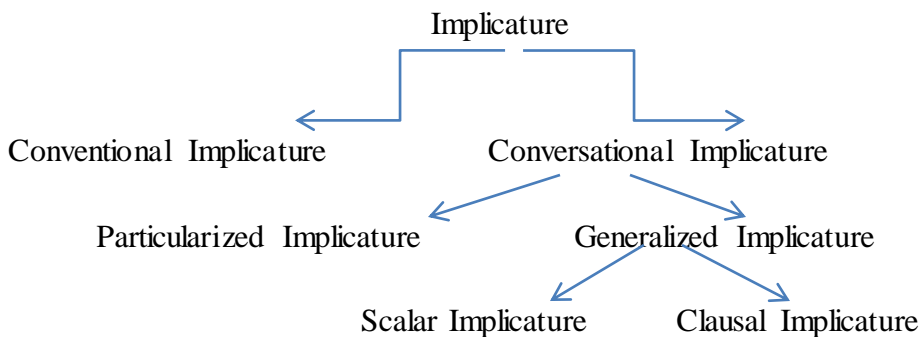
Grice (1975) says that conversational implicature is one of the types of implicature which can be comprehended and interpreted if and only if the participants in a certain interaction can understand the context of the speaker's utterance.

Black (2006, p. 25) argues that conversational implicature is regarded as the combination of language and the context of the situation in which that language is used. One utterance, when found in different occasions, might not give rise to an implicature, or it might suggest different implicatures. That is to say, conversational implicature is rooted in the context of the situation in which it is found, to be truly understood, its interpretation must be based on that context.

Mey (2001, p. 45,46), in the same vein, defines conversational implicature as the part of the meaning that is left implied in any conversation, it refers to something left for the interpretation of the participants involved in actual language use. Simply, it can be said that it refers to the way we understand a speaker's utterance in a particular conversation according to what is expected to be heard.

#### 2.1.1. Types of Conversational Implicature

Grice (1975) distinguishes between two types of conversational implicature; these are Particularized Implicatures and Generalized Implicatures. The former, on the other hand, has two sub-types of implicature; Scalar quantity implicature and clausal implicature.



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**Fig.2.1. Types and Sub-types of Implicatures.****2.1.1.1. Particularized Conversational Implicatures**

Birner (2013) defines particularized implicature as “they are unique to the particular context in which they occur.” That means the implicature can't be generalized to other contexts and its meaning is restricted to that specific context in which it is found, in other words, if it comes in another context it will have a different interpretation.

(1)- *John: are you coming to the party tonight?*

- *Clare: I have an exam tomorrow.*

By saying yes or no Clare's answer would have been a relevant response to John's question. However, Clare's response cannot be taken to be irrelevant. Having an exam tomorrow means that Clare has to work hard tonight and has no time to go to the party. In this situation, both John and Clare must have mutual background knowledge for Clare's reply to be taken as relevant and has a serious contribution to the conversation at hand.

**2.1.1.2. Generalized Conversational Implicature**

Birner (2013, p. 63) says that generalized conversational implicature can be defined as “the one which can be generally attached to the form, and therefore does not need to be computed anew with each relevance utterance.”

(2) *Some of the students have passed their final exams.*

In this example, the clause (*some of the students*) gives rise to the reference that (*not all of the students*). In this example, there is nothing about students, the form of their exam, or anything else that leads to the interpretation of this reference. The interpretation is based on the use of the word *some*. Actually, in most cases, the word *some* when used in a certain text implicates not all. So, we say that the kind of implicature from *some* to not all is a generalized one. In other words, it is the one that has come to be found when the word 'some' is used. In this kind of implicature, no certain type of shared knowledge is required between the interlocutors for the interpretation of the additional and intended meaning, that is to say, this type of conversational implicature is context-independent and we can generalize our interpretation of the selected words' intended meaning to most if not all of the other contexts in which they appear. (Yule, 1996)

### 2.1.1.3. Sub-types of Generalized Conversational Implicature

Levinson (1983, p. 132), following Gazdar (1979), distinguishes between two sub-types of generalized conversational implicature these are scalar quantity implicature and clausal quantity implicature.

#### 1. Scalar Quantity Implicature

Levinson (1983, p. 133) States that “A linguistic scale consists of a set of linguistic alternates, or contrastive expressions of the same grammatical category, which can be arranged in a linear order by degree of informativeness or semantic strength.” To make things more clear, scalar quantity implicature can be seen to arise from particular words which are used to communicate information through expressing some kind of a scale of values.

(3) - *All the students left the school.*

- *Some of the students left the school.*

Levinson (1983) however, states that the quantifiers (*some* and *all*) create some kind of scale implicature because any sentence like first one above entails the second, to be more precise, if the sentence is true then second is also true but not vice versa.

#### 2. Clausal Quantity Implicature

Clausal quantity implicature, on the other hand, occurs when the interlocutors in a conversational activity use some stronger and weaker linguistic expressions. Gazdar (1979 cited in Levinson 1983, p. 136) argues that clausal implicature can be stated as; “if a participant in a conversation uses an expression which fails to commit him to some kind of embedded meaning, in preference to another stronger expression that is available which would commit him, then he might be taken to implicate that he is not in a position to make the stronger statement.

(4) *I think James is absent.*

This implicates that it is possible that, as far as the speaker knows, James is not absent. But if he is completely sure that James is absent, then he could have said the following instead:

(5) *I know James is absent.*



### 2.1.3. Grice's Viewpoint of Conversational Implicature

Grice (1913-1988) is the main scholar and philosopher who studies implicature and brought it to the attention of other linguists and philosophers. His work on conversational implicature and its generation was first presented in 1967 in a series of lectures at Harvard University and published as a theory in 1975. This theory made an influential framework in the way implicature should be thought about (Grice, 1975).

The essential idea of this theory is that the relationship between the utterances and their implicature is not an arbitrary one based on the intention and convention of the speaker, but this relationship is a rational one that stands on general principles of cooperative behavior. Grice (1975, p. 20) states that "an implicature arises when an utterance would be uncooperative if taken literally, violating one or more maxims about how a cooperative speaker should convey information". The presumption of cooperation is something essential to communication, that is why Grice argues that a speaker's utterance must be conveying an additional meaning and the speaker is referring to some implicated meaning rather than the literal one.

Grice (1975) asserts that we can calculate implicatures from general cooperative principles. He does not mean that listeners must go through this process of calculation if they want to comprehend what they hear, but this theory provides a unified account of both particularized, context-dependent implicatures and generalized, context-independent ones. Grice's theory has been the dominant work to implicature in the philosophical literature and has motivated some psycholinguistic works that approached implicature through the process of recovery.

The works that were inspired by Grice's 1975 theory are called 'New-Gricean' theories that confirm when utterances are interpreted by the hearers, those hearers apply some heuristics automatically, these heuristics help in the transformation and enrichment of the explicit or the literal meaning of the utterances in different ways leading to a new kind of meaning which exploits and makes the process of communication more efficient. As the neo-Griceans believe, the generalized conversational implicatures do belong to this kind of meaning while particularized ones do not.



Levinson (1985, p. 83) states that "Grice's theory of implicature is essentially a theory about how people use language." Grice (1975) postulates a rule which controls the course of conversation. He mainly developed his theory to explain and predict conversational implicature. Grice's point of view was to clarify how multiple types of implicature can be used in the interpretation of the proper message in a conversation. With this aim, he assumed a general cooperative principle that consists of four maxims to identify how a speaker can be cooperative in the conversation at hand. As a common knowledge, he confirms that interlocutors in a conversation should follow these maxims if they want to have an efficient and successful interaction.

## 2.2. Recognition and Production

Language is used for communication for expressive and informative purposes. And for such communication to be successful and achieve its aims, language should be recognized and produced correctly. The processes of language recognition and production have been of an essential role for many linguists and scholars working at different fields of linguistics including, Harley (2014), Fromkin (1971) Gaskell & Marslen-Wilson (1997, 1998), Levelt (1989), and others.

Recognition and production processes are stated in this section of the study, as far as these points are concerned: Their meaning, how speech is recognized and produced, levels, and models of recognition and production.

### 2.2.1. Recognition

Crystal (2008, p. 446) defines the term recognition as "the perception and interpretation of the sound sequences of speech." He adds that speech recognition is a process utilized by a hearer to determine the first part of the act of interpretation associated with the process of speech perception.

Traxler and Gernsbacher (2006) elucidate that, in any kind of interaction, when a participant speaks, he anticipates the hearer to figure out the appropriately communicated meaning. For conversers, speech is regarded as a mean or a way through which thoughts, ideas, knowledge...etc. are shared and distributed. According to Traxler and Gernsbacher (2006), the participants in a certain kind of interaction can understand each other's utterances merely by listening to and recognizing the sounds of the words



uttered in that interaction. Based on this standpoint, it can be stated that speech recognition is one of the areas of psychoacoustics in which speech recognition is reduced into sensory resolution and auditory categorization.

Harley (2014, p. 258) argues that "Speech is at the heart of language", but he confirms that recognizing speech is not that easy task that can be done by the perceiver of speech in a particular situation. The reasons that lead to the difficulty of recognizing speech are stated by Harley (2014) who claims that an utterance said by a speaker does not stay available for the addressee for a long time, but it will be there for a very short time since the speaker is speaking fluently and continuously. Keeping in mind that the word uttered is available for a short time, means that the addressee has only a single chance to determine and recognize it. In addition to that, listeners usually find it difficult to segment the words uttered into their constituent sounds because speakers are not talking like a robot, word by word, they speak quickly and fluently so that their words often interfere with each other making it difficult, if not impossible, to recognize the boundaries between words.

Harley (2014) however, says that despite the above-mentioned difficulties, hearers usually have a brilliant ability to recognize spoken utterances. That is because recognition is an instinctive activity, nine times out of ten, it occurs easily and without any noticeable effort or challenge. Harley (2014) adds claiming that the context has a very fundamental role in speech recognition. Words are better recognized if they come within a specific context, and their recognition is easier than those that come in isolation and out of context. Context, here, refers to the linguistic context, the knowledge that is derived from the preceding and following words surrounding the one being recognized, or the context of the situation which includes general information and experience from the social life of the perceiver.

### 2.2.2. Production

Harley (2014) argues that speech production is much less investigated than recognition process, simply, because production is a difficult and complicated process to be dealt with. It is difficult because it starts with our thoughts and it is not an easy task to control those thoughts through experimentation. Crystal ( 2008, p. 447 ) defines production as "a term for the activity of the respiratory, phonatory, and articulatory systems during the



speech, along with the associated neural programming required for their co-ordination and use.”

Bussmann (2006, p. 651) describes the production as a “term referring to the processes involved in producing language, predominantly used in connection with the production of spoken language.” The processes that they talk about in this definition involves four steps; first planning the utterance where the speaker has to decide and select the words that he is going to say. Second, retrieving the word in which the speaker recalls the words, that he is going to say, from his mental lexicon. Third, integrating the words into sentences. Fourth, enunciating those sentences and controlling the production. Bussmann (2006, p. 651) adds saying that “evidence for such processes comes from hesitation phenomena, pauses, speech errors, anacoluthon, and self-repair.”

Levelt (1989) elucidates that the speech production process involves three stages that include conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. Conceptualization is the process whereby a speaker has to make up his mind and arranges the message he wants to share and the idea that he wants to express. While, formulation refers to the process in which the speaker transfers his thoughts and ideas into lexical forms, in this process the speaker searches for, in his mental lexicon, the suitable words that help him formulating his message. And articulation is the last step in speech production in which the message is revealed and clearly stated by verbal communication.

Harley (2014) states that in the conceptualization step of speech production, speakers usually think of a certain purpose or intention and then they pick out the pertinent information from their mental lexicon. The output of this step is called the preverbal message. Conceptualization requires some kind of relation between the semantics of the words in the speaker’s mental lexicon and the outside world. When the speaker conceptualizes his message, he must make sure that his message will be recognized or understood by his audience.

Levelt (1989) identifies two types of planning within the conceptualization process including macroplanning and microplanning. Macroplanning refers to the act of determining a particular message and recalling the relevant



information from the memory. While microplanning, on the other hand, refers to the act of allocating the true propositional form to the identified information and determining the purpose behind using the utterance in mind.

Levelt (1989) remarks that the second step in speech production is the formulation process which, on the other hand, involves two main components, lexicalization and syntactic planning. Lexicalization is the act of choosing the suitable words that can be used to express the message in the speaker's mind, while syntactic planning is the act of constructing sentences by putting the chosen words together in certain word order.

The last step of speech production identified by Levelt (1989) is the articulation process in which what is in the speaker's mind is turned into sounds uttered in the proper form and condition, said in the suitable rapidity, and with the right prosody. The speaker has to produce speech sounds in the right sequence and identifies the movement of his muscles that are used in the articulation process.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the study is Iraqi university students in the English department during the academic year 2019-2020.

The sample of this study comprises 100 male and female students that are randomly selected from the 4<sup>th</sup> year college students at the English department College of Education for Humanities Wasit university during the academic year (2019-2020). To avoid previous experience which may affect the findings of the study, teachers and repeaters are excluded.

#### 3.2. Instrument

A quantitative study is employed in the current study to investigate university students' recognition and production of conversational implicature.

To achieve the aims of the study, two types of multiple-choice discourse completion tasks are used. The first is the conversational implicature recognition instrument that measures the students' recognition of conversational implicature. Jianda (2006, p. 4) defines such type of discourse completion task as "test items where the test taker is required to choose the correct response from the several given options". (See table 1)



**Table 1: Sample of Conversational Implicature Recognition Instrument.**

John: Harry, are you coming to the party tonight?  
Harry: I have an exam tomorrow.  
a. Harry is coming to the party.  
b. Harry is too busy and has no time to go to the party.  
c. Harry has an exam and wants John to help him.  
d. Harry is afraid that he may not pass his exam.

The second is the conversational implicature production instrument that investigates students' production of conversational implicature. Jianda (2006, p. 4) states that this type of test can be defined as "a written questionnaire including several brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialogue with an empty slot for the speech act understudy". (See table 2)

**Table 2: Sample of Conversational Implicature Production Instrument.**

A close friend of yours asks you to read his composition to give your opinion about it. You think the composition is not good at all it is full of grammatical mistakes, it is not interesting, and the message is not clear. You don't want to discourage your friend, but you also don't want to lie about the quality of the composition.  
Your Friend: What do you think of my composition?  
You: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Data Analysis

##### 4.1. Frequency and Percentage of Iraqi University Students' Answers to Question One.

The first question is intended to measure the subjects' responses at the recognition level. The frequency and percentage of the subjects' answers to the items of the first question are presented on the following table.

(See table 4-1)

**Table 4-1: Frequency and Percentage of the Students' Responses to Question one.**

No. of item	No. of Correct response	Percentage	No. of Incorrect responses	Percentage
1	27	27	73	73
2	21	21	79	79
3	26	26	74	74
4	11	11	89	89
5	16	16	84	84
6	32	32	68	68
7	34	34	66	66
8	33	33	67	67
9	37	37	63	63
10	35	35	65	65
11	43	43	57	57
12	41	41	59	59
13	39	39	61	61
14	40	40	60	60
15	42	42	58	58
Total	477	31.8	1023	68.2

It can be realized, from the results on the table(4-1), that the total number and percentage of the correct answers are (477, 31.8 ), correspondingly while the total number and percentage of the incorrect answers ( including unanswered ones) are (1023, 68.2 ) respectively. From the results on the table above it can be seen that Iraqi university students are incapable of recognizing conversational implicature due to their incorrect responses which exceed that of correct ones and as shown in the table above.

#### **4.2. Frequency and Percentage of the Iraqi University Students' Answers to Question Two.**

The second question in the test is dedicated to measuring the students' conversational implicature at the production level. The frequency and percentage of the subjects' answers to the items of the question are shown on the following table. (See table 4-2)

**Table 4-2: Frequency and Percentage of the Students' responses to Question two.**

No. of item	No. of Correct response	Percentage	No. of Incorrect responses	Percentage
1	11	11	89	89
2	13	13	87	87
3	17	17	83	83
4	15	15	85	85
5	18	18	82	82
6	21	21	79	79
7	14	14	86	86
8	16	16	84	84
9	22	22	78	78
10	19	19	81	81
11	17	17	83	83
12	12	12	88	88
13	15	15	85	85
14	24	24	76	76
15	23	23	77	77
<b>Total</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>17.13</b>	<b>1243</b>	<b>83.87</b>

From the results presented on the table (4-2), it can be determined that the total number and percentage of the correct answers are (٢٥٧, 17.13 ), correspondingly whilst the total number and percentage of the incorrect answers (including unanswered items) are (1243, 83.87 ) respectively. From the results presented in the table above, it can be seen that incorrect responses exceed the correct ones. So, it can be realized that Iraqi university students are unable to produce conversational implicature because the table shows that the percentage of the incorrect responses outweigh that of the correct ones.

#### 4.3. Discussion and Conclusion

The study hypothesizes that “University students can recognize and produce conversational implicature”. From the results presented on tables (4-1 and 4-2) which are based on the students' responses to the test questions, used to test students' recognition and production of conversational implicature, it can be concluded that Iraqi university students are unable to recognize or produce conversational implicature. In their responses to the first question, which is used to test their recognition of conversational implicature, they failed to recognize the implied meaning of most of the items of the question. The students were found to recognize the literal meaning of the items. While their responses to the second question, which is presented to test their production of conversational implicature, show that they have also failed, to a great extent, to produce it. They have been found to use utterances without implicature or any additionally conveyed meaning.

Students' failure in recognizing and producing conversational implicature is attributed to linguistic factors, cultural factors, and personal factors.

First, the linguistic factors refer to the phonological, semantic, syntactic, and textual factors that have an obvious influence on understanding the target language and its meaning. Phonological factors refer to the differences in sounds and pronunciation between English as a foreign language and Iraqi university students' Arabic native language. Differences in sounds and pronunciation cause difficulty in recognizing the meaning of an utterance in general, not only its implied meaning, since depending on the form of the utterance is not always appropriate for interpreting its meaning. Semantic factors, on the other hand, refer to word for word translation which doesn't work when interacting with others because the majority of English words are context-dependent (eg. the word *bank* meaning *the financial institution*, and *bank* meaning *the side of the river*), these are homonyms and their meaning depends on the context in which they are used (Liu 1991; Tan 1990).

Syntactic factors, alternatively, have an obvious impact on recognizing and producing conversational implicature since the word order varies between English and Arabic.

While the textual factors refer to the thematic organization, coherence, and cohesive relationships among the parts of a text. The thematic



organization is important in providing a structural framework that shows how the message of the text is stated along with the text and if we miss a single sentence, the whole text will be misunderstood (Nida 1993). While cohesion and coherence refer to the semantic relationships between the parts of the text. Such relationships play a vital role in recognizing the target language and also should be taken into consideration in language production. Understanding these relationships within a text helps in recognizing the message and the meaning of a text in general, not only the implied meaning (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Second, cultural factors play a vital role in the way language is used in each community. Each community has its way of formulating, recognizing, and experiencing a reality (Gorlée, 1994). Bassnett (1992, p. 14) states that "language is the heart within the body of culture", meaning that language cannot be truly recognized or produced in isolation from the culture of its community.

Third, personal factors, as the name implies, are concerned with the students' knowledge and experience of the target language (Gorlée, 1994). Some students are found better than others in recognizing and producing conversational implicature, they are found to have experienced the target language outside the classroom through watching movies, being in contact with some English native speakers on social media, and reading recently published authentic works focusing on how English is communicatively used. And, still the majority of students who are proved to be ignorant in most of the factors mentioned above which caused their failure in recognizing and producing conversational implicature. Thus, it can be concluded that Iraqi university students are found unable to recognize and produce conversational implicature and this leads to the refutation of the hypothesis of this study.



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