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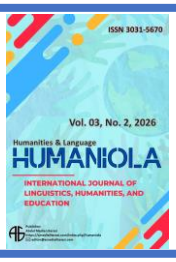

Pragmatic Failure in Arabic-English Translation: Evidence from Iraqi EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the pragmatic failure in Arabic–English translation among Iraqi EFL learners. It investigates whether these learners can translate Arabic speech-act expressions into pragmatically appropriate English equivalents. A total of sixty-six undergraduate students at the Faculty of Languages, University of Kufa, participated in this study. The data were gathered using a written translation test consisting of 20 Arabic utterances. These Arabic utterances included common speech acts such as requests, compliments, invitations, apologies, and advice. All responses were evaluated for how well they reflected pragmatic appropriateness. According to the study's results, Iraqi EFL learners were generally successful in translating conventionalized expressions such as apologies, compliments, and expressions of gratitude. However, Iraqi EFL learners showed a number of serious problems in expressing certain speech acts indirectly and in using politeness strategies. These speech acts include requests, refusals, and invitations. The majority of incorrect translations were due to many learners not following English conventions of indirectness and politeness and instead applying the conventions they had learned in Arabic to their English translations. The study highlights the need to develop learners' pragmatic competence through instruction and translation training, thereby enabling them to produce successful translations that preserve communicative function rather than lexical equivalence.

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1. Introduction

Translation is commonly viewed as more than simply substituting one linguistic unit for another. An early linguistic approach to translation stressed structural similarities in languages; it defined translation as the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language (Catford, 1965). These structural views have been found to be inadequate. Subsequently, focus was placed upon achieving functional equivalence. Nida (1964), for example, developed the idea of "dynamic equivalence". Pragmatics refers to how speakers use linguistic elements to communicate meaning in specific social contexts, including speaker attitude, the speaker's interpersonal relationship with the addressee, politeness strategies, and the speaker's assumptions regarding shared knowledge (Levinson, 1983). Therefore, translation requires interpreting the communicative intent behind the source message. Interpreting and producing pragmatic meaning in a foreign language context can pose

significant challenges for learners. Grammatically correct statements that nonetheless sound unnatural or inappropriate to native speakers of the target language (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Learners' difficulties are particularly apparent when dealing with speech acts such as requesting, refusing, apologizing, and complimenting.

Although the importance of pragmatic competence has long been acknowledged, foreign language instruction typically focuses on developing students' grammatical, lexical, and reading comprehension skills. However, an expression cannot be translated literally. Therefore, examining how learners interpret and produce speech acts in translation. Accordingly, the present study examined the pragmatic failures of Iraqi EFL learners in translating Arabic speech-act expressions into pragmatically appropriate English acts.

The current research paper addresses the following research questions:

1. To what degree are Iraqi EFL learners able to translate Arabic speech acts into English that are pragmatically appropriate ones?
2. Which types of speech acts are most difficult for Iraqi EFL learners to translate from Arabic into English?
3. What are the patterns of pragmatic failure found in learners' English translations of Arabic speech acts?
4. To what extent do literal translations result in pragmatic inappropriateness?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Translation and Equivalence

The historical concept of "equivalence" has always been central to the study of translation. The concept, however, has taken many forms. Early translations were based on replacing material in one language with corresponding material in another (Catford, 1965), and thus the primary concern of early translators was the correspondence between the two languages' structures (the 'grammatical units'). It is true that such an approach often resulted in a structurally analogous sentence that still failed to convey the same meaning as the source text. Nida (1964) introduced the term "dynamic equivalence," which posits that the ultimate goal of the translator should be to create the same effect for his/her readership as the source text created for its own. Thus, Nida's (1964) position changed the focus of the translator's efforts from the surface features of the source text to its deeper, functional aspects. In other words, the translator's work should consist of creating the same meaning for the target audience as existed in the source text. Functionalists have built upon Nida's (1964) work and have viewed translation as a means of achieving specific communicative ends (Nord, 1997). From this viewpoint, the type of equivalence a translator achieves will depend on the intended use of the translation. Since the context of the translation will determine how it is used and interpreted, the translator will need to infer the pragmatic intentions behind the source text and then recreate them using the norms of the target language. Hatim and Mason (1997) further developed the communicative model of translation by incorporating discourse analysis into translation theory. Hatim and Mason (1997) argue that translating involves negotiating between the meanings of the text and the cultural and social contexts of both the source and target texts. As such, simply maintaining the propositional content of the original text is insufficient; the interpersonal meaning of the communication must also be transferred.

2.2 Pragmatics and Speech Acts

Pragmatics examines how we construct meaning through the interaction among our words, the situation, and who is saying them (Levinson, 1983). Semantics looks at stable meanings embedded in language, and Pragmatics looks at how these meanings are inferred from social and situational elements of communication. Therefore, when people communicate, they depend upon both the "what" they say and the "how" and "why" they say it (Taulia et al., 2024, 2025; Zahara & Hidayati, 2025).

Speech Act Theory provides a framework for examining communicative intentions. Austin (1962) proposed that utterances perform actions rather than merely describe the state of affairs. Every utterance has three parts: locutionary (the literal expression), illocutionary (the intended function), and perlocutionary (the effect the utterance has on the listener); Searle (1969) developed categories of speech acts, including directives, expressives, and commissives, where he emphasized that speech act structures are social action encoding mechanisms. Research on cross-linguistic comparisons demonstrates that the realization of speech acts differs across cultures. The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) demonstrated systematic variation in the realization of requests, apologies, and refusals across languages in terms of directness and mitigation. These variations are culturally determined rather than by grammatical structure. To master speech acts in the second language, students need to know which forms correspond to which communicative functions in the target language. If learners rely on their own native language conventions, they will use forms of utterance with an intended function that is misunderstood. Thus, the performance of speech acts represents one of the most important domains in which Pragmatic Competence is observable.

2.3 Politeness Across Arabic and English

Politeness Theory is a framework that describes how speakers use language to help maintain their social relationships. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), all communication includes some attempt by the speaker to preserve an individual's "face", the person's desired image of themselves as seen by others. To protect an individual's face when communicating a request or refusal, speakers will use a variety of strategies to minimize the potential threat to that face. Brown and Levinson also describe two dimensions of face: positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to the desire for approval and inclusion; Negative Face refers to the desire for independence and freedom from imposition. Different cultures and different languages vary in how much each dimension is emphasized. For example, although both cultures value independence, English tends to emphasize Negative Politeness (indirectness, hedges, options) in its communication, whereas Arabic tends to emphasize Positive Politeness (expressions of solidarity, intensification, relational closeness).

However, these cultural and linguistic differences do not mean one culture/language is more polite than another. They simply represent different social norms and conventions of communication. When speakers and listeners cross language boundaries, differences in what is considered polite or impolite can be misinterpreted. What was intended as a friendly comment can be viewed as intrusive. A direct statement of fact can be perceived as distant. Therefore, in translation, it is important to recognize that "structural equivalence" does not always result in "pragmatic equivalence". To ensure that the translation reflects the cultural and linguistic norms of the target language, the translator must adjust the politeness strategies used in the source

language to align with those norms. Students who have learned Arabic and are translating directly into English tend to continue using solidarity-based patterns, creating translations that are perceived as too direct, emotional, etc.

2.4 Pragmatic Failure

The distinction between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure was made by Thomas (1983), who identified both as causes of "pragmatic failure," which refers to a breakdown in communication resulting from the misuse of language in context. Pragmalinguistic failure is defined as the inability to map appropriate linguistic forms onto intended pragmatic functions. An example of this is when a speaker attempts to translate an imperative literally into another language, resulting in the speaker being perceived as having used the linguistic form for authority rather than politeness.

Sociopragmatic failure is defined as the inability to correctly identify the social norms governing how people interact. This can include issues of formality and the extent of directness permissible. These two failures are closely linked yet analytically distinct. Pragmalinguistic failure concerns the connection between the formal properties of language and their functional implications. Sociopragmatic failure concerns the identification of the social relationship being communicated through language. Both forms of failure occur frequently in second-language acquisition due to reliance on internalized norms of the first language.

3. Theoretical Framework

Beginning with an integrated approach that combines functional translation theory and interlanguage pragmatics, this study needs to use this framework, as it cannot explain the problem (pragmatic failure in translation) through linguistic theory alone. Translation involves reconstructing communicative intent across languages, and pragmatic failure occurs when the relationships among form, meaning, and social interpretation are disrupted. As such, two theories are required for the analysis: one on translation equivalence and another on pragmatic interpretation. In addition to the study's theoretical requirements, the analytical model comprises four distinct components. These include: Functional equivalence; Speech-act realization; Politeness strategies; and Pragmatic failure classification. Each of these components will address a different level of communicative meaning, including from the textual function to sociocultural interpretation.

3.1 Functional/Pragmatic Equivalence in Translation

Nida's (1964) view of equivalence has been influential in modern translation studies. He advocated for dynamic equivalence as an ideal for translators. Dynamic equivalence implies that the translation produces the same reaction in the target-reader as the source-text produces in the source-reader. In other words, Nida (1964) recognized that different language systems have distinct grammatical structures that cannot be preserved when translating from one language to another. Therefore, he proposed that the primary goal of a translator should be to achieve a "dynamic" or functional equivalent. Building upon Nida's (1964) work on equivalence, House (2015) expanded the scope of equivalence. She proposed that the evaluation of the quality of a translation should be based on the pragmatic function that the translation serves. House (2015) also proposed that translations can be categorized as either overt or covert. An overt translation is a translation that preserves the informational content of

the original. A covert translation is a translation that changes the informational content of the original. House (2015) argues that the most important factor in determining whether a translation is successful is how well it meets the pragmatic requirements of the target-discourse community. If a translation preserves the informational content of the original but fails to meet the pragmatic requirements of the target-discourse community, then it has failed to fulfill its communicative purpose. House's (2015) ideas about equivalence are built upon her view of translation as re-contextualization. Instead of simply transferring sentences from one language to another, the translator reconstructs them to meet the expectations of the target language. As a result, House (2015) views pragmatic equivalence as a key aspect of translation competence. The difficulties involved with achieving pragmatic equivalence in learner translation arise primarily because students tend to equate equivalence with lexical correspondence. Students will often attempt to translate a sentence word-for-word, rather than focusing on creating a functional equivalent. The differences in pragmatic conventions between languages make it difficult to create a functional equivalent through literal translation. As a result, the current study assesses whether learner translations preserve the communicative functions of the originals, rather than whether they structurally resemble the originals.

3.2 Speech Act Theory

The fundamental device used for identifying the communicative function of an utterance is Speech Act Theory. Austin (1962), in his theory of how utterances can be seen as performing actions, provided the basis for Searle's (1969) classification of action types. These classifications include directive and expressive action types. To successfully translate an utterance, one must preserve the illocutionary force of the utterance and therefore focus on preserving the illocutionary force of the utterance, rather than the grammatical form. The relationships between form and function are systematic in cross-linguistic contexts. A particular grammatical form in a given language may be a realization of a request while being a realization of a command in another language. As such, translation is a process of mapping from one speech act realization to another, as opposed to substitution of grammatical forms. Direct Realization (e.g., imperative), Conventionally Indirect Realization (e.g., modal question), Non-Conventionally Indirect Realization (e.g., hint). Learners often assume that when two languages have the same grammatical form, they will express similar intentions. This assumption is generally incorrect. For example, although the same grammatical form may be socially acceptable to use to make a request in one culture, it may be seen as impolite or aggressive in another. Social norms regarding what is polite or impolite in communication influence which structures can be used to communicate which intentions. In turn, social norms directly contribute to the potential for speech-act misinterpretation, a major contributor to pragmatic failures in translation. Each utterance of the current study was categorized based on its intended speech act. After categorizing the utterances based on their intended speech acts, each was evaluated to determine if the illocutionary force of the original utterance had been preserved.

3.3 Politeness Theory

While Speech Act Theory helps identify what communicators intend to say, Politeness Theory explains how they express their relationship to one another. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), all forms of communication involve

maintaining "face," i.e., a person's positive and negative self-image. Positive face represents an individual's desire to receive approval; Negative face represents an individual's need to maintain autonomy. Speech acts can potentially damage both types of face and thus are subject to mitigating strategies. Preferred mitigation strategies vary across languages. Generally, when interacting with others in English, speakers rely on negative politeness by being indirect and using hedges. In contrast, in Arabic, there is an emphasis on positive politeness through involvement and the expression of emotional support. Because of these differences in preferred mitigation strategies, translation becomes challenging. Although the communicative intentions behind two speech acts may be the same, the type of linguistic strategy used to achieve those communicative goals will be different. When Arabic-based politeness norms are transferred into English, students may produce communications that are perceived as too direct or excessively emotionally charged. Likewise, if students omit the required mitigation, the resulting communication may be perceived as authoritative or rude. The problem is not one of syntactic error but rather one of miscommunication due to a difference in the communicative conventions. Therefore, politeness theory provides the interpretive layer explaining why a structurally correct translation may still be inappropriate.

3.4 Pragmatic Failure Model

Thomas (1983) has identified two types of pragmatic failure: Pragmalinguistic failure in which the learner uses an inappropriate linguistic form that conveys a different force than was intended in the source language. Thus, the learner understands the intent behind the message; however, they select the incorrect linguistic structure for the target language. Sociopragmatic failure refers to the case where the learner makes an error regarding what constitutes appropriate communication in terms of social norms, i.e., the degree of formality and/or directness. The distinction is important because it differentiates the linguistic mapping issue from the cultural interpretation problem. Both can occur simultaneously in translation. For example, a learner may translate a sentence exactly as it is translated (and thus have a form mismatch), while also making an incorrect assessment of politeness requirements (i.e., a norm mismatch).

3.5 Previous Studies

Thomas's work in 1983 really gave shape to the idea of pragmatic failure in second-language use. She broke it down into two main types: pragmalinguistic failure, when someone uses the wrong language forms, and sociopragmatic failure, when the problem stems from a misunderstanding of social norms. This distinction has been widely adopted, and researchers now often use it to explain why learners sometimes string together grammatically correct sentences yet still miss the mark in real communication.

Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's 1989 study on cross-cultural pragmatics showed that speech acts such as making requests or offering apologies are not universal but vary from one language to another. Directness and politeness are not just random; they are shaped by culture. So when learners carry over speech act strategies from their native language, it often leads to pragmatic failure.

Recent work by Qassim and Abbas in 2021 zooms in on Iraqi EFL learners. These learners often use Arabic pragmatic rules when refusing in English. Their refusals come across as too blunt, with not enough softening. The researchers pointed to both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer as key reasons why learners stumble in communicating speech acts appropriately.

Looking at things through the lens of interlanguage pragmatics, Kasper and Rose (2002) make a strong case: pragmatic competence does not merely follow grammatical competence. Their research points out that learners can nail grammar but still miss the mark when it comes to using language appropriately, especially with tricky speech acts like making requests or turning someone down politely.

Generally speaking, these studies show that pragmatic failure is a persistent issue in speech act performance, mainly driven by cross-linguistic differences and first-language transfer. Nevertheless, most of this research focuses on spoken or elicited production, leaving translation-based pragmatic performance underexplored. The present study investigates learners' ability to translate common speech-act expressions into English and reproduce pragmatically appropriate English equivalents of these expressions.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The current study employed a descriptive-analytic methodology that used both qualitative and quantitative methods within an interlanguage pragmatics paradigm. The purpose of the research was not to assess the effectiveness of a teaching method but to document how learners construct meaning when translating Arabic utterances into English. Thus, this research will be classified as observational rather than experimental. A translation task was identified as the primary means of eliciting data because it provides a controlled context in which the learner is expected to perform the intended communicative function of the original utterance. Unlike in conversational and/or role-playing situations, in which learners can choose to circumvent unfamiliar structures and/or shift topics of discussion, it is impossible to discern whether the learner's deviation results from a lack of pragmatic knowledge or from avoidance of the task. The process of translation forces the learner not only to interpret the original speaker's intentions but also to reproduce the exact speech act. This ability enables researchers to clearly identify the level of pragmatic competence displayed. The research used both qualitative interpretation and quantitative frequency analysis. Qualitative analysis examined the types of pragmatic errors in each response, whereas quantitative analysis provided information on the number of failures across all responses and their distribution among participants and speech acts. Using both qualitative and quantitative analyses is typical in interlanguage pragmatics research, since the ability to communicate pragmatically cannot be assessed solely on the basis of numerical accuracy but must be evaluated through an interpretive lens as well (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Each participant response during the translation task was evaluated based on the intended communicative function of the corresponding Arabic source sentence.

4.2 Participants

Participants consisted of 66 undergraduate students in their second, third, and fourth years of study at the Faculty of Languages, University of Kufa, during the 2025-2026 academic year. All participants were native Arabic speakers learning English as a foreign language in an academic English-language studies program. The participants were selected for three reasons. First, by this time, students will have completed many years of formal English instruction. Second, at this stage of development, students will have gained considerable grammatical knowledge. Third, research has shown that as learners gain more experience with a second language, there is an increase in pragmatic

deviation while a decrease in structural error. Therefore, it is during these more advanced stages of development that researchers identify difficulties related to appropriate use of discourse (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999).

All participation in the study was voluntary during the 2025-2026 academic year. Students' identities were anonymous. Researchers did not collect information about students' names, gender, or age. The study focused on students' linguistic performance, and all data were kept completely anonymous to allow for natural responses.

4.3 Instrument

Pragmatic data for this study were generated by a written translation task developed specifically to elicit speech acts. Twenty Arabic sentences representing various common interpersonal communication functions were used. Each of these sentences was as short as possible and as context-neutral as possible so that they would require pragmatic interpretation by participants but would be minimally ambiguous. These sentences belonged to a variety of speech-act types: requests, apologies, refusals, compliments, offers, and advice/warnings. In constructing each of these sentences, the intent was that literal translation would result in a pragmatic error in English. Thus, it could be determined if learners translate pragmatically or structurally. Participants were told to translate each sentence into natural-sounding English and not to "translate literally". Participants were encouraged to use functional equivalents rather than word-for-word translations; however, examples of how to do so were not provided. The reason for not providing such examples was to limit participants' exposure to potential response models. The instrument was designed to assess three components of pragmatic competence:

1. The recognition of communicative intentions
2. The selection of an appropriate linguistic means to achieve those intentions
3. The adjustment of the learner's use of the target language politeness norms

4.4 Data Collection Procedures

The test was administered, and each participant worked independently; they had no access to dictionaries, computers, phones, etc., nor were they permitted to confer with other students. Thus, all of the student's responses to the test reflected their own internalization of language rules, not reliance on outside reference materials. The purpose of limiting the time available to complete the test was to elicit spontaneous responses. The time limit also made it possible to observe how each student pragmatically interpreted the data (immediately upon its appearance) before allowing them time to revise. Each student was told that the study sought to examine how well people could translate naturally, and that there would be no negative consequences for making errors in completing the test. These statements were intended to minimize test anxiety and, in turn, potentially reduce the student's "over-monitoring" of responses. Immediately upon completion of the test, all of the answer sheets were collected from the students and coded with numbers to protect their identities.

4.5 Coding and Evaluation Criteria

Each of the translations of the learner's utterances will be assessed for its pragmatic suitability for communication, rather than for pure grammatical correctness. Any minor errors that occur in grammar which are non-consequential to how the

speaker wants to communicate will be judged as not having failed. The responses will be divided into two categories:

1. Pragmatically suitable translation:

There is a match between the communicative intent and politeness level of the learner's translation and the corresponding source utterance within English norms.

2. Pragmalinguistic Failure:

A learner uses a linguistic structure that conveys an illocutionary force different from what would be communicated in English. Thomas's (1983) model of pragmatic failure will guide categorization. For each response, the analysis will begin with a qualitative assessment to establish the communicative function of the response and will continue with quantitative evaluation to assess distribution among participants and the number of speech acts. Evaluation of responses will also follow a predetermined format to ensure consistency in assessing them using the previously established criteria for speech act realization and the politeness strategies identified in other studies of pragmatics (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

5. Data Analysis and Results

The objective of this research is to determine how well Iraqi EFL students can express themselves pragmatically appropriately in their own language by translating Arabic speech-act expressions into English. The translation test consisted of twenty Arabic utterances for each of the most common speech acts (requests, compliments, apologies, etc.) to represent common ways of speaking. Each response was rated for pragmatic appropriateness. The responses were labeled as "correct/acceptable", "wrong/inappropriate," or "blank". The data shown in Table 1 demonstrate substantial variation among the items. Thus, some speech acts appear to be much more difficult for learners than others.

Table 1. Distribution of Correct and Incorrect Translations Across the Twenty Test Items

No.	Arabic Utterance	Model Translation	Correct Acceptable	Wrong / Inappropriate	Blank	% Correct
1	هل يمكنك أن تفتح النافذة؟	Could you open the window?	20	45	1	30%
2	أنا آسف على التأخير	I'm sorry for being late.	65	0	1	98%
3	لديك صوت جميل	You have a lovely voice.	65	0	1	98%
4	لا أستطيع مساعدتك الآن	I'm afraid I can't help you right now.	0	65	1	0%
5	شكرًا لمساعدتك	Thank you for your help.	65	0	1	98%
6	تعال إلى بيتنا يوم السبت	Please come to our house on Saturday.	0	65	1	0%
7	ربما يجب أن ترتاح قليلاً	Maybe you should take some rest.	65	0	1	98%

8	لم تكمل واجبك بعد	You haven't finished your homework yet.	64	1	1	97%
9	هل تريد أن أساعدك؟	Would you like me to help you?	63	2	1	95%
10	انتبه، الأرض زلقة	Be careful, the floor is slippery.	63	2	1	95%
11	هل لك أن تعطيني قلمك؟	Could you lend me your pen?	65	0	1	98%
12	عذراً، لم أقصد ذلك	Sorry, I didn't mean that.	65	0	1	98%
13	طعامك لذيذ جداً	Your food is delicious.	64	1	1	97%
14	لا أستطيع الحضور إلى الاجتماع	I can't attend the meeting.	63	2	1	95%
15	أشكرك على وقتك	Thank you for your time.	65	0	1	98%
16	هل ترغب في الانضمام إلينا لتناول القهوة؟	Would you like to join us for coffee?	62	3	1	94%
17	من الأفضل أن تتحدث مع المعلم	It is better to talk to the teacher.	54	11	1	82%
18	هذا الكمبيوتر لا يعمل بشكل جيد	This computer isn't working well.	65	0	1	98%
19	هل ترغب في أن أحضر لك شيئاً؟	Would you like me to bring you something?	65	0	1	98%
20	لا تمشِ هنا، الطريق خطر	You shouldn't walk here; the road is dangerous.	65	0	1	98%

Several items were translated successfully by most participants. Expressions representing conventionalized speech acts, such as apologies, compliments, and gratitude, achieved very high success rates. These expressions include: Item 2 (I'm sorry for being late); Item 3 (You have a beautiful voice); Item 5 (Thank you for your help); Item 11 (Could you lend me your pen?); Item 12 (Sorry, I did not mean that); Item 15 (Thank you for your time); Item 18 (That computer is broken); Item 19 (Will you allow me to get you anything?); and Item 20 (You should not be walking here; the road is dangerous). All of the above had a successful translation rate of about 98%, with nearly all participants producing a pragmatically acceptable translation of each expression. Likewise, Items 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, and 16 also had a relatively high rate of successful translation of the utterance, ranging from 94% to 97%. This indicates that the majority

of the students were able to maintain the intended communicative function of the utterance. Conversely, it appears that certain items present students with considerable pragmatic difficulties. The two most difficult items were Item 4 and Item 6. Each of these items resulted in a 0% successful translation, indicating that none of the students produced a pragmatically suitable form. In addition, the data indicate that Item 1 resulted in a 30% successful translation and 45 incorrect responses. It may be inferred that most students were unable to produce a translation that preserved the utterance's intended pragmatic force. Finally, another moderately difficult item was Item 17, which received an 82% successful translation. As can be seen, many students had difficulty translating expressions of advice.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Correct Translations per Item

Statistic	**Value**
Number of items	20
Students per item	66
Mean correct responses	55.15
Standard deviation	21.37
Minimum	0
Maximum	65

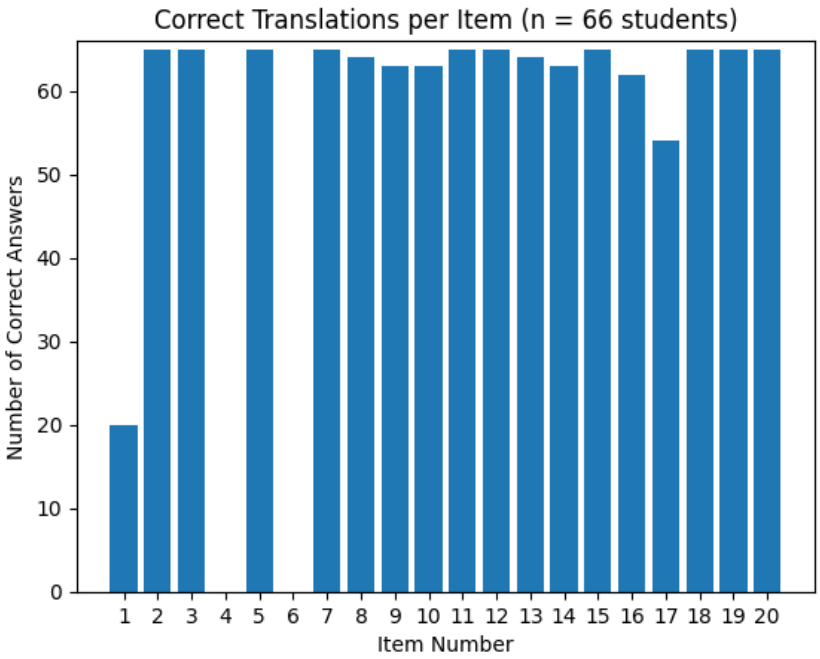

Figure 1. Number of Correct Translations Across the Twenty Speech-Act Items (n = 66)

To start off with, the descriptive statistics show the range of item difficulty. The average number of correct responses for each of the 20 questions was 55.15, and the standard deviation was 21.37. Therefore, there are considerable differences in how difficult some speech acts are to learn compared to other speech acts.

6. Discussion

The analysis of learners' translations shows several patterns of pragmatic deviation. A lot of incorrect answers came from a literal translation strategy,

grammatical errors or because they didn't include the required politeness marker for the English speech act. A large portion of the error occurred in question 1. This question has a polite request (Can you open the window?) in English. The intended English grammar structure uses an indirect request with the modal "could". Most students used the modal "can" instead of "could", although "can" is grammatically correct, using "can" usually changes the degree of politeness and therefore the pragmatic effect of the request. Some students responded with direct imperatives, i.e., "Open the window," transforming the request into a command. These responses do not realize the intended speech act.

Grammatical errors occurred in a few of the responses. For example, in question 2, many students produced the form "I am apologized", adding the auxiliary verb "be" before the past participle. Although the communicative intent of the response is understandable, this is not a grammatically correct structure and therefore does not match the conventional English expression of an apology. Article omission was another common type of error. In question 3, many students omitted the indefinite article when translating "You have a lovely voice." Many students thus produced responses such as "You have a lovely voice." While the intended meaning of the response remains clear, the omission is evidence of structural transfer from Arabic, where articles serve different functions.

However, more serious pragmatic errors occurred in the production of expressions that require mitigation or politeness strategies. For example, in question 4 ("I'm afraid I can't help you right now"), many students produced literal translations of the question, such as "I am not able", "I couldn't", "I don't help you now", or "I can't." Although these responses provide the information requested by the question, they lack the mitigating expression "I'm afraid", which softens the refusal and makes it socially acceptable in English. The absence of this mitigation leads to a pragmatically abrupt statement.

Similar pragmatic errors appeared in responses to question 6 ("Please come to our house on Saturday"). Responses such as "Visit us", "Come", or "I invite you to my house" are either too direct or unnatural in English invitations. The difficulty lies in the fact that invitation conventions differ between Arabic and English. Some responses demonstrated a misinterpretation of the force of speech acts. For example, in question 7 (advising someone to take a break, e.g., "Maybe you should take some rest"), some students translated the sentence as "You should relax." While the response is grammatically correct, it is more direct and lacks the mitigating element "maybe", which softens the advice.

In question 9, a number of students produced responses such as "Want to help?" or "You want me?", which lacked the modal structure necessary to express a polite offer in English. These forms changed the pragmatic tone of the utterance and made it sound like they were incomplete or informal. Another example of pragmatic deviation appears in question 10, where some students translated the warning as "Look, the earth" rather than "Be careful, the floor is slippery." This suggests that some students misunderstood the warning's function. Invitations also caused difficulty. In question 16, responses such as "Do you want to join us?", "May we drink coffee?" or "Would you rather join?" suggest that students are confused about English invitation patterns. Finally, in question 17, many students used expressions such as "You better talk to the teacher" or "Better talk to the teacher." While these forms are available in English, they seem more informal and directive than the intended advice expression "It is better to talk to the teacher."

Overall, these examples demonstrate that many incorrect responses were due to literal translation, structural transfer from Arabic, or lack of knowledge of English politeness conventions. These findings support earlier studies that indicate that pragmatic competence does not develop at the same time as grammatical competence, and that students often employ native-language pragmatic norms when producing speech acts in a second language (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

7. Conclusion

This research has identified several variations in the success of Iraqi EFL learners in translating Arabic speech-act expressions into English. Iraqi EFL learners succeed with formulaic expressions but systematically fail with face-threatening acts that require mitigation. Learners were generally able to translate high-frequency expressions (such as apologies, compliments, and expressions of gratitude) with ease; however, they experienced significant difficulty expressing indirectness and pragmatic mitigation. The most difficult expressions for learners to translate were those that required specific polite English expressions, namely requests, refusals, invitations, and advice. Many times, students used literal translations or direct structures, which changed the expression's purpose from what the speaker intended.

These results indicate the importance of pragmatics in translation. Translating accurately requires knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, as well as sociocultural norms. Therefore, language education should emphasize developing pragmatic awareness and the ability to perform speech acts, in addition to structural accuracy. Further research could investigate pragmatic competence at different levels of learner proficiency or examine pragmatic performance in more natural communication settings, such as conversational or discourse-based translation tasks.

8. Recommendations

The above-mentioned results of this research provide a foundation for the following recommendations:

1. Pragmatic competence should be included in the instruction of English as a foreign language. Instead of focusing solely on grammar and vocabulary, language instruction should also address how to appropriately perform speech acts such as making requests, refusals, invitations, and offering advice in English.
2. Focus on functional equivalence in translation training. Students should be encouraged to pay attention to the communicative purpose of the source utterance (what the speaker intends to communicate) instead of using a literal word-for-word translation.
3. Explicitly teach politeness strategies used in English communication. Examples that demonstrate how politeness is used in indirect forms should be included in teaching materials.
4. Teach using authentic communicative examples. Real-life dialogues and contextualized speech acts should be incorporated in classroom activities to increase learners' pragmatic awareness.
5. Compare pragmatic conventions in both languages. Comparing the pragmatic conventions of both languages could aid students in understanding how cultural values influence how speakers perform speech acts.

6. Evaluate student translations for pragmatic appropriateness. Teachers should assess student translations based on both grammatical accuracy and communicative effectiveness.

9. Suggestions For Future Study

- Compare pragmatic competence across different proficiency levels. Studies examining pragmatic performance across different levels of language proficiency may help determine whether learners' pragmatic performance improves as they progress to higher levels of language proficiency.
- Examine the spoken interaction of learners that produces pragmatic failure. Studies analyzing learners' pragmatic performance in natural conversation or role-play type situations may provide complementary data to the written translation task-based data used in this study.
- Identify types of pragmatic failure. Studies that identify specific error types (pragmalinguistic vs. sociopragmatic) will enable a more detailed analysis of pragmatic failure.
- Conduct comparative studies with students from other language backgrounds. Studies comparing students from other language backgrounds may help determine the effect of first language on pragmatic performance in translation.
- Determine the effects of teaching methods focused on pragmatics. Experimental studies comparing students who receive explicit instruction in pragmatics with those who do not may help determine whether instruction focused on pragmatics enhances learners' translation competence.
- Expand range of speech acts studied. Studies examining other speech acts (e.g., complaint, suggestion, refusal) may provide researchers with a better understanding of the extent of learners' pragmatic competence in translation.

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Appendix

The results of this survey will be used only for research purposes, so please give your answers sincerely. Thank you for your help!

Translate the following into English :

1. هل يمكنك أن تفتح النافذة؟
2. أنا آسف على التأخير.
3. لديك صوت جميل.
4. لا أستطيع مساعدتك الآن.
5. شكرًا لمساعدتك.
6. تعال إلى بيتنا يوم السبت.
7. ربما يجب أن ترتاح قليلًا.
8. لم تكمل واجبك بعد.
9. هل تريد أن أساعدك؟
10. انتبه، الأرض زلقة!
11. هل لك أن تعطيني قلمك؟
12. عذرًا، لم أقصد ذلك.
13. طعامك لذيذ جدًا.
14. لا أستطيع الحضور إلى الاجتماع.
15. أشكرك على وقتك.
16. هل ترغب في الانضمام إلينا لتناول القهوة؟
17. من الأفضل أن تتحدث مع المعلم.
18. هذا الكمبيوتر لا يعمل بشكل جيد.
19. هل ترغب في أن أحضر لك شيئًا؟
20. لا تمشِ هنا، الطريق خطر.

Thank you for your participation