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## An Assessment of EFL University Students' Realization of Various Layers of Meaning

### ABSTRACT

Understanding a foreign language is an important task in communication. One way of understanding it is to know the term "meaning" and its various layers especially, any language consists of a certain levels of meaning which have a lot of common denominators. Meaning is described by many scholars as a very complex phenomenon and a disputable subject which is related to a variety of aspects of human knowledge and experience of life. English language constitutes of many layers such as, literal, denotative, connotative, and interpretative, etc. These levels should be presented in the mind of the learners who are going to learn the highly stylistic and interpretative English texts.

Iraqi learners of EFL mostly face difficulties in realizing the various layers of meaning. Hence, this study is an attempt to assess EFL university students' efficiency in realizing the various layers of meaning through formulating a number of hypotheses to be verified and aims to be achieved. A representative sample of EFL fourth year students is chosen from the College of Education for Humanities during the academic year 2018-2019. An Achievement test is constructed, validated, and applied to the selected sample of students. The collected data has statistically been treated in order to verify the formulated hypotheses and achieving the constructed aims in terms of the obtained results.

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## قياس مدى إدراك طلبة الجامعة دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية - لغة أجنبية - لمختلف مستويات المعنى

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### الخلاصة:

يعتبر فهمنا للغة الأجنبية مهما في عملية التواصل، حيث إن معرفة المعنى وفهم مختلف مستوياتها مهم جدا لفهم اللغة خصوصا وأن كل لغة تتكون من عدة مستويات وصفات مشتركة. وصفت المعنى من قبل الكثير من المختصين على إنها ظاهرة معقدة وموضوع قابل للنقاش كونه يتعلق بمختلف جوانب المعرفة البشرية والخبرة الحياتية. هنالك عدة مستويات للمعنى في اللغة الإنكليزية: التلمحي والاجتماعي والتأثيري والسياقي.

يواجه معظم الطلبة العراقيين صعوبات في ادراك مختلف مستويات المعنى في اللغة الإنكليزية. لذا

تحاول هذه الدراسة قياس كفاية طلبة الجامعة في ادراك مختلف مستويات المعنى من خلال التثبت من صحة فرضياتها وتحقيق أهدافها. اختيرت عينة ممثلة من طلبة جامعة تكريت- كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية - قسم اللغة الإنكليزية - المرحلة الرابعة -للعام الدراسي ٢٠١٨-٢٠١٩ وتم بناء اختبار تحصيلي لمعرفة مدى استيعاب الطلبة لمختلف مستويات المعنى . وبعد استخراج صدق وثبات الاختبار طبق على عينة الدراسة. أخيرا جمعت البيانات المطلوبة وعولجت احصائيا لأجل اختبار صحة الفرضيات وتحقيق أهداف الدراسة في ضوء النتائج التي تم التوصل اليها.

## Section One: Introduction

**1.1 Statement of the problem** English words have many levels of meaning such as, literal, denotative, connotative, interpretative, etc. and these levels should be realized by the learners of English as a foreign language (EFL, for short) who are going to learn the highly stylistic and interpretative English texts. Analysis of meaning is a major practical problem because some of the translators, who are non- native speakers of English, are sometimes confused by the intricacies and ambiguities of the Source Text (Nida, 1964:26).

One of the basic problems is related to meaning forms or layers of meaning where words carry two or more meanings. For examples “ear” is an organ of hearing, and “ear “is a piece of corn. “Red “are a certain colour and also a state of embarrassment when the lexeme is entailed in a suitable expression. Thus, the difficulty lies in selecting the appropriate meaning. Yet, what the words actually mean on the occasion in question could only be determined in context (Thomas, 1995:4). Moreover the difficulty to discriminate between the literal sense and the derived meaning of the words constitute another problem.

Learners cannot distinguish between the meaning of an expression and its reference. Many English sentences can be used to express many different meanings, depending on their context. The sentence “We are here,” for instance, expresses different meanings depending on who asserts it and when and where they assert it. It is laborious to keep writing, “the meaning of a sentence when it is used in a particular context,” and the distinction matters we use assertion to refer to sentences and the meanings that they express (Johnson-Laird and Byrne, 2002: 3).

Metaphors make another source of difficulty for students for they would not easily understand the kind of relationship among meanings referred to in metaphors, where an expression appears to have both literal and some other transferred meanings. Metaphors supply new, context-dependent meanings to

words and phrases; and their uses carry implications beyond literal meaning (Stern 2000: 13).

Learners' misunderstanding of some utterances by taking the wrong sense in addition

To the hesitation between alternative interpretations is found in the confusions and inferences that may contain polysemous and / or homonymous words or expressions. Thus, it is felt necessary to bridge the gap resulting from this ambiguity, as it is problematic (Searle, 1979 and Grice, 1989:110).

As far as the researchers know, EFL university students fail to realize the various layers of meaning and they are unable to recognize the relationship among various forms and meanings especially in certain contexts. Therefore, this study is going to assess EFL university students' efficiency in realizing the various layers of meaning.

### **1.2 Aims of the study: This study aims at:**

- 1- Assessing EFL four year university students' efficiency in realizing various layers of meaning.
- 2- Finding out whether there are any significant differences between students' performance on the various layers of meaning, namely: connotative, social - affective, and contextual.
- 3- Finding out whether there are any significant differences between students' performance at recognition and production levels.

### **1.3 Hypotheses of the study: This study hypothesizes that:**

- 1- There is no significant difference between the obtained mean scores of students' achievement, on one hand and the theoretical mean scores of achievement, on the other hand.
- 2- There is no significant difference among students' mean scores of performance on the various layers of meaning.
- 3- There is no significant difference between students' mean scores of performance at recognition and that at production level of the achievement test.

### **1.4 Value of the study: The value of this study is as follows:**

- 1- The theoretical aspect could provide updated information about meaning and its

Various layers which can be of help to other researchers as it can provide studies for future investigation.

- 2- The practical aspect has a pedagogical value to textbook writers, syllabus designers, teachers and EFL learners by presenting insights about the

problems which Iraqi EFL university students encounter on the various levels of meaning.

3- It may hopefully, help advanced students to overcome the difficulties they encounter in using different layers of meaning and to acquire a balanced usage of meaning in English.

4. It is expected to be of a great value and help for non – native learners of English in reading and writing English. It is also hoped that this kind of study will be valuable to

Researchers who are interested in Semantics (meaning) in particular and English language in general.

**1.5 Limits of the study:** This study is limited to EFL students' efficiency in realizing the various layers of meaning in English texts at the College of Education for Humanities / Tikrit University during the academic year 2018-2019.

### **1.6 Operational Definitions of Basic Terms:**

**1.6.1 Assessment:** It means the procedures of gathering and discussing information to assess the performance of EFL university students on the various layers of meaning.

**1.6.2 Realization:** It refers to the process of students' ability to recognize and produce the various layers of meaning.

**1.6.3 Layers of meaning:** Layers of meaning refer to the different types of meaning which are used within this study, i.e. (connotative, social - affective, and contextual).

**1.7 Plan of the study:** Aims of the study are supposed to be achieved as follows:

1- Surveying the available literature concerning the formation of these semantic entities relying on the written forms of meaning.

2- Constructing an achievement test.

3- Selecting a sample of EFL fourth year university students.

4- Applying the achievement test to the selected sample of students.

5- Analyzing students' errors in terms of the various layers of meaning.

## **Section Two: Theoretical Background**

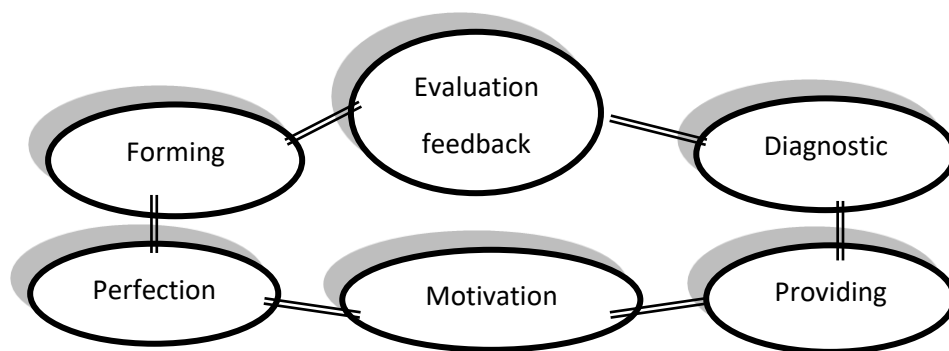
**2.0 Introductory Note:** This section is concerned with the presentation of the theoretical background of the study. It sheds light on the purposes of assessment, its types, and types as well as layers of meaning

**2.1 The Process of Assessment:** Assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain. Whenever a student responds to a question, offers a comment, or tries out a new word or structure, the teacher subconsciously makes an assessment of that performance. Students' reading and listening activities usually require some sort of productive performance that the teacher implicitly judges, however peripheral that judgment may be. A good teacher never ceases to assess students, whether those assessments are incidental or intended (Mansell et al, 2009: 5).

Assessment is essential to allow individuals to get the educational support they need to succeed, to see the effectiveness of different educational methods, and to ensure that education budgets are being spent effectively. Inevitably, assessment also risks marking teachers, learners and institutions as successes or failures. It is probably the most important thing we can do to help our students learn (Mansell et al, 2009: 2).

Teachers are constantly assessing, but the primary purpose of the assessment is to inform better teaching and more efficient learning. Assessment needs to be 'fit-for-purpose' and should enable evaluation of the extent to which learners have learned and the extent to which they can demonstrate that learn (Brown & Smith, 1997: 63). It is important to consider not just *what* to assess and *how* to do assessment (particularly which methods and approaches), but also *why* the rationale view for assessing on any particular occasion and in any context (Brown & Knight, 1994:80).

It is also necessary to think about the agents *who* undertake the task. For example, if a person wants to assess group work, using intra-peer group assessment seems sensible in order to access group process, whereas if we want to assess employability, involving placement supervisors or clients would give us a better understanding of how students engage in a working environment than a hastily scribbled post-hoc work placement report could do (ibid: 82). Assessment can facilitate improvement through a variety of venues when faculty members are directly involved in the development implementation, and analysis of assessment activities. Mariyana (2011: 94) summarized purposes of assessment in the following figure:



**Figure (1): Purposes of Assessment (ibid)**

**2.2 Types of Assessment:** Assessment can be done at various times throughout a programme and a comprehensive assessment plan will include formative and summative assessment as follows:

**First: Formative Assessment:** It refers to “the process used to obtain data for instruction to be used to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their instructional materials “(Carey and Dick, 1981: 158) Formative assessment gathers information regarding the worth of aspects of an instructional sequence in order to make the sequence better (Newton, 2007:152). Formative assessment is often done at the beginning or during a programme, thus providing the opportunity for immediate evidence for student learning in a particular course or at a particular point in a programme. Classroom assessment is one of the most common formative assessment techniques. The purpose of this technique is to improve the quality of student learning and should not involve grading students.

**Second: Summative Assessment:** It is concerned with summing up how much a student has learned at the end of a course and provides information on either student’s accomplishment or programme outcomes (Harlen and James, 1997:365). Summative assessment aims to measure, or summarize, what a student has acquired, and typically occurs at the end of a teaching course. A summation of what a student has learned needs looking back and insuring that teaching process has accomplished objectives, but does not necessarily point the way to future progress. Final exams in a course and general proficiency exams are examples of summative assessment (Richards et al, 1992: 144 and Brown, 2004: 6). Summative assessment is comprehensive in nature, it provides accountability and is used to check the level of learning at the end of the programme. Its characteristics can vary according to the use made of that assessment, and also according to whether it is marked by the teacher or the pupils who are being assessed (Boud, 1994:12). Kiraly(2000:158) suggests that assessment practices should be based on the “professional standards” and a “real world quality criteria” operative in the world of professional translation work.

**2.3 Types of Meaning:** The study of meaning is a multi-dimensional discipline. It is related to a variety of aspects of human knowledge and experience of life. Montague (1968: 68), Kempson (1988:139), Leech (1989:5) and Yule (1996:127) provide a useful articulation of these divisions as: semantics, syntax and pragmatics which may be characterized as follows:

**First: Semantic Meaning:** Semantics is the study of meaning as expressed by words, phrases and sentences in conjunction with their syntactic arrangement. The main assumptions about the meaning of a natural language is that a complete account of sentence meaning is given by recursively specifying the truth conditions of the sentences in the language. The meaning of a sentence is made up of the meaning of words which it contains and their syntactic arrangement in that sentence. Accordingly the semantic component of a grammar is assumed to be a formal rule which assigns propositional contents to a sentence on the basis of the meaning of expressions it contains and the syntactic configuration.

**Second: Syntactic Meaning:** Syntactic analysis of language is usually limited to its objective description of sentences, in relation to the rules of grammar. Such an analysis enables language users to determine the status of an utterance, syntactically. Syntax as an indication is that the speaker is familiar with the internal arrangements of the elements of a sentence, there is no indication that such competence extends to the use or application of these arrangements. Rather an inclusive picture of language competence is obtained by the exploration of the semantic and pragmatic properties of the utterance.

**Third: Pragmatic Meaning:** Pragmatic meaning is concerned with the relations among expressions, the objects to which they refer and the users or contexts of the use of the expressions. Pragmatics refers to the study of meaning in relation to speech situation. General pragmatics is a set of strategies and principles for achieving success in communication by the use of grammar. Grammar is functionally adapted to the extent that it possesses properties which facilitate the operation of pragmatic principles.

Therefore, pragmatic meaning is characterized by the multiple senses that makes it rather difficult to understand, especially for non-native speakers. Variations of sense yield variations of meaning-type. It may result in synonymy, metonymy, hyponymy, etc. as types of utterance meanings. Pragmatics is mainly concerned with the speaker's intended meaning, the invisible meaning and how one can recognize it although it is not actually said (or written).

## **2.4 Layers of Meaning:**

Many scholars have classified “Meaning” into different layers. According to Leech (1974:9) there are seven possible layers of meaning which are described

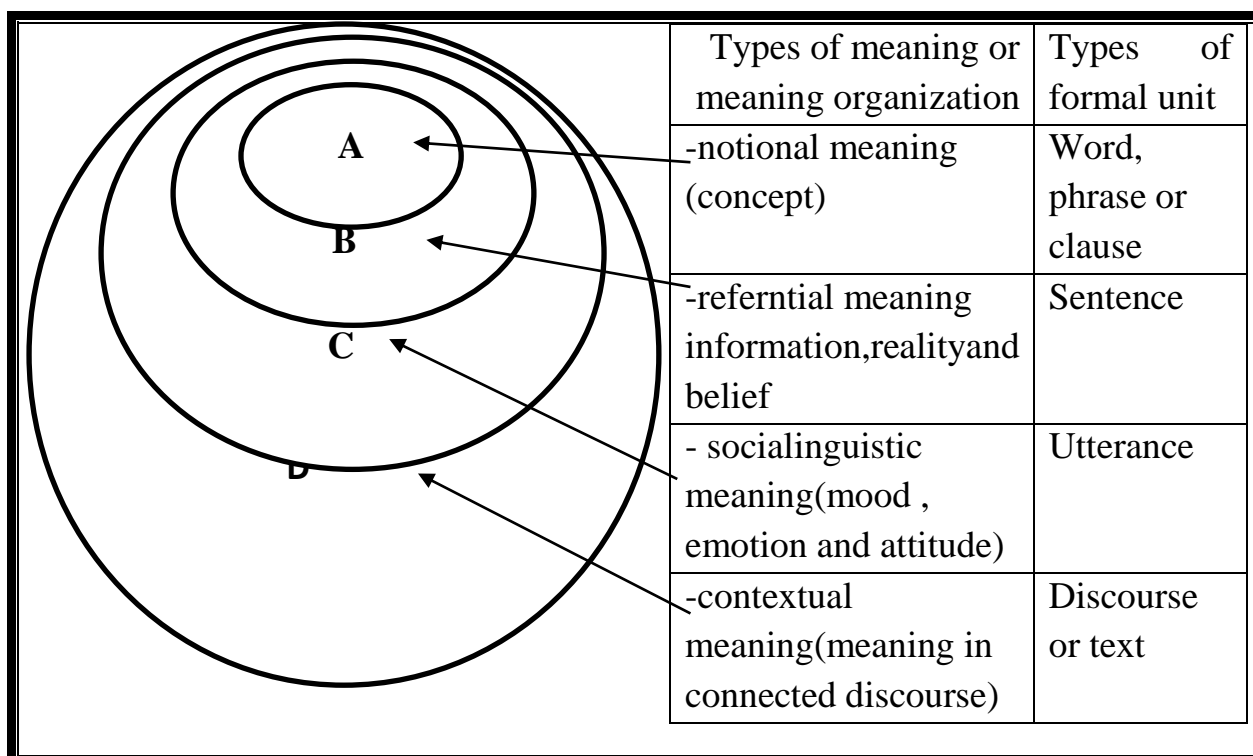
as 1-Conceptual meaning 2-Connotative meaning 3-Social-Affective 4-Associative meaning 5-Reflected meaning 6-Collocative meaning (Contextual) 7-Thematic meaning, as shown in figure (2). Leech and Svartvik (1975:6-7) and Candlin (1976) have studied meaning and stated four Layers shown in figure (3). Leech and Svartvik (ibid) draw four circles, each including the other, representing the different types of meaning and different ways of organizing meaning, as shown in figure (3). The four circles of figure (3) represent a rational progression from the most limited and detailed sphere of meaning to the most inclusive. Traditional studies of language have pointed out that language serves to communicate several kinds of messages, ideas, emotions, and desires. In this view, language has three functions which are called cognitive, effective, and affective, depending on the kind of the message to be communicated (Dinneen, 1967:48).

The current study is going to assess how well fourth year undergraduate students realize the following three layers of meaning; connotative, social- affective and contextual.

1-Conceptual Meaning	Logical, cognitive, or denotative content.
2.Connotative Meaning	What is communicated by virtue of what language refers to
3-Social - Affective Meaning	What is communicated of the social circumstances of language use
4- Associative Meaning	What is communicated of the feelings and attitudes of the speaker/writer
5-Reflected Meaning	What is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression .
6- Collocative (Contextual ) meaning	What is communicated through association with words which tend to occur in the environment of another word.

7-Thematic meaning	What is communicated by the way in which the message is organized in terms of order and emphasis
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**Figure (2): Layers of Meaning**



**Figure (3): Layers of Meaning into Circles (ibid)**

**1. Connotative Meaning:** It includes emotive and affective utterance. For example, the connotations of the lexical item "*December*" might include 'bad weather', 'dark evenings', etc. (for north Europeans, at least), or 'parties', 'Christmas', etc. (Crystal, 2008:103). Language furnishes the means for expressing a wide range of attitudes; this aspect of meaning is called connotation. Another aspect is sense relations: the meaning of any expression varies with context, what other expressions it occurs with and what expressions it contrasts with (Kreidler, 1998:44).

Leech (1981:12) argues that the connotative meaning is the communicative value that an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content. Fromkin et al (2003:578) define connotative meaning as "the evocative or affective meaning associated with a word". Two words or expressions may have the same denotative meaning but different connotations, for example, always manipulates lexical items by investing the

lexical items that bear emotional connotation to affect the hearers' feelings, attitudes, emotions and, judgments (Faraghal,1998:142). The following sentences express the same denotation but different connotation.

*John likes Mary. John loves Mary. John adores Mary. John worships Mary.*

The four sentences have different connotation due to the underlined verbs. Like is the most neutral, casual verb while love is less neutral, adore, on the other hand, has the connotation of passion and worship has more connotation of passion. Similarly verbs such as, stare at and gaze at are synonymous but they have different connotations, stare at suggests hostile and intent looking, while gaze at suggests wonderment or admiration (ibid:143).

**2. Social - Affective Meaning:** It refers to the use of language for social interaction and to maintain social roles. This type of meaning has to be happened in a context that carries social factors which affect the intended meaning of the speaker (Trudgill,2000:102)

Social (or stylistic) meaning conveys the social circumstances of language use. For example, the referential meaning or locutionary force of the utterance. "Are you going to bed now ? " is contained in an open – ended question concerning the immediacy of the addressees departure to bed, but the utterance also has the illocutionary force of suggestion, complaint, order, request or threat, depending on social context constraints such as; the identity and age of the interlocutors, the social relationships between them, the time of day, etc. (Munby, 1978:42). Crystal and Davy (1969 cited in Leech 1981) have recognized the following dimensions of socio-stylistic variations and they are: dialect, time, province, status, modality, and singularity.

According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986: 136), "cultures may vary in the social meaning attached to similar linguistic choices". Pragmatic failure occurs as a result of sociocultural differences and lack of linguistic competence. For instance, if people from two different cultures are shown to be in communicative situation they may face difficulties in understanding and interpreting each other intended meaning unless taking into account the dimension of cross-cultural variation. An example about what Americans would regard as a compliment can be presented as in the following example:

*You look sexy.* When an American young lady hears this sentence, she would gladly accept it and express appreciation of the compliment. Whereas, Iraqi young lady will wrongly take it as impolite and even unpleasant, for she does

not know the pragmatic force of the word “sexy” which in English implies beauty of women (ibid:52).

**3 Contextual and Intended Meaning:** Contextual meaning refers to the meaning in connected discourse with organizational aspect of communication. The question here is ‘How shall we arrange our thoughts, and how shall we bind them together, in order to communicate them in the most appropriate way? Grammar is flexible enough to offer a considerable choice in such matters. This may be called textual or discourse aspect of communication, because it concerns the composition of a whole text or discourse, not just the way we construct a single sentence (Leech & Svartvik, 1975:7).

There are two levels of speaker’s meaning: utterance meaning and force. Neglecting the abstract meaning, moving to what the speaker does mean by certain words on his particular occasion, is called contextual meaning or utterance meaning. ... A far more important source of difficulty in communication is that we often fail to understand a speaker’s intention." Thus, pragmatically ‘force’ refers to the speaker’s intended meaning, which has done communicatively as in this example: *Where is your boat?*

According to Berry (1977:116-125), all levels of language have contextual meaning: lexis and grammar always have contextual meaning which can be subdivided into:

1. *Experiential Meaning:* which refers to the information about the processes of a situation, the participants in these processes, and the relationships between them.

2. *Logical Meaning:* which refers to the information about the way in which mini-situations are related within a maxi-situation. Sometimes experiential and logical meanings are grouped together under the heading “ideational meaning” for example when someone says 'I am busy' after being invited, that means he refused. (Berry, 1977: 118). The meanings of words are not fixed, they vary across contexts. Leech (1981:24) makes a distinction between the intended meaning, which is in the speaker’s mind and the interpreted meaning, which is conveyed to the listener’s mind.

**Conclusion:** It could be concluded that language consists of a certain levels of meaning. Meaning is a disputable, very complex and multi- dimensional discipline which changes according to certain linguistic and extra factors. Thus, the meaning of any sentence depends upon the ways in which its words and phrases can be related to situations in the world. There are three types of

meaning, i.e. semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic and seven layers, i.e. Conceptual, Connotative, Social-Affective, Associative, Reflected, Collocative (Contextual), and Thematic.

### **Section Three: Procedures**

**3.0 Introductory Note:** This section involves a description of population and sampling, the constructed instrument, validating the instrument, its pilot administration, reliability, items analysis, its final administration, and the statistical means used for analyzing the data.

**3.1 Population and Sampling:** Population refers to any set of items or individuals which share some common and observable characteristics and from which a sample can be taken. Whereas, the word sample refers to any small group or proportion of individuals which is selected to represent a population (Best and Kahn 2006: 13).

The population of the current study is represented by the ninety EFL fourth year university students (morning study) at the College of Education for Humanities / University of Tikrit during the academic year (2018-2019). A sample of seventy students has been chosen randomly. Thus, the selected sample represents 75% of its original population. The other twenty students have been involved in the pilot.

### **3.2 Instrument of the Study**

An achievement test, as defined by Lado (1964:369) attempts to measure how much of a foreign language a student knows, has been constructed to fulfill the aims of the study. The test is constructed carefully to match the ability of the students within the semantics area, depending on what they have acquired from their four years of study at the Department of English. Thus, the involved questions are related to each of connotative, social-affective, as well as contextual meaning, as shown in the attached appendix.

Therefore, the instructional material has been specified in terms of its contents and behaviours and six questions are constructed, i.e. three questions aim at assessing subjects' performance at the recognition level and three other questions for assessing subjects' performance at the production level. The three questions of the recognition level include thirty multiple choice. The first question deals with contextual meaning. It includes ten multiple-choice items. Two scores are allotted to each question. The second question deals with social-affective meaning and it contains ten multiple-choice items and one score is allotted to each item. As far as the third question is concerned, it deals with connotative meaning, and it is divided into two parts A and B, where each part includes five items. Two scores are allotted to each item so twenty scores are allotted to this question. Students are asked to answer Part A of

question one by matching the items with their connotative meanings. In Part B students are asked to choose the suitable choices.

Concerning the production level ,it is also divided into three questions (connotative, social-affective and contextual) meaning. The first question deals with contextual meaning. It involves ten items, where two scores are allotted for each item, and students are required to infer the context meaning of each situation. The second question is concerned with social affective meaning. It has ten items and two scores are allotted to each item. Students are required to comment or reply to each item by writing the suitable statement or sentence for each situation. The final question of the production level deals with connotative meaning. It contains five items which can be answered by giving the most suitable connotative meaning of each item. Two scores are allotted to each item of this question, as shown in Table (2).

**3.2.1 Test Validity:** Validity means the degree to which a test or other measuring device is truly measuring what is intended to measure. To ensure content validity, much attention has been given to the content of the syllabus items of the 1st, 2nd , 3rd , and 4th years of the two involved college. It has been put into consideration the plays, short stories, poetry,

**Table (2): The Specifications of the Levels, Contents, Behaviours, and Items of the Achievement Test**

Level	Content areas	Behavioural Objectives	Q. No	No. Of items	scores
Recognition Level	Contextual Meaning	To choose the suitable contextual meaning	1	10	20
	Social-affective Meaning	to choose the suitable social-affected meaning	2	10	10
	Connotative Meaning	A-to match words with their suitable connotative meanings	3 A & B	5	10
		B-to identify the suitable connotative meanings		5	10
Production Level	Contextual Meaning	to give the contextual statement or sentence	1	10	20
	Social-affective Meaning	to state the social affected response	2	10	20
	Connotative Meaning	to give the connotative meaning	3	5	10
Total			6	55	100

Novels, reading passages, and all of the instructional materials that are regarded as sources from which students acquire vocabularies. Hence, all the involved contents and behaviours have been specified and included within the constructed test.

Face validity is "the way the test looks to the examinees, test administrators, educators and the like" (Harris,1969:7). Therefore, face validity is ensured by exposing the test to a jury of specialists in the field of Linguistics and methodology of teaching EFL.

**3.2.2 Pilot Administration of the Test, Items Analysis, and Reliability:** The test has been applied on the twenty students who are selected randomly from the involved population. The purpose behind the pilot administration of the test is to determine its suitability to the learners, to estimate the time needed and to have an idea about the requirements of the final administration of the test.

Discrimination Power Formula has been used to measure the discrimination power of the test items , and Difficulty Level Formula has also been used to measure the difficulty level of the same items. The obtained results indicate that all the test items have acceptable values according to their discrimination power which ranges between (0.31-0.41) and difficulty level of (0.31-0.66).

Reliability as it refers to the consistency of measurement, usually over time, rater or content is obtained by using the Test-Retest method. The same test has been re-administered to the twenty pilot students, within an interval of ten days. The reliability coefficient is obtained by comparing the scores of the first administration to those of the second one. Then Pearson Correlation Coefficient formula has been used to find out the correlation coefficient which is 0.82 and this degree is considered high and acceptable (Brown ,1988:98).

#### **3.2.4 Final Administration of the Test and its Scoring Scheme:**

After verifying the validity, reliability, difficulty level and discriminatory power of the test items , it has been administrated on the selected sample of seventy students on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2019 . The test papers have been distributed and the examinees are told to read carefully the given instructions and state their responses on the test sheets for saving time within a period of 60 minutes . Later on their responses are collected to be checked.

In order to obtain an objective measurement for students' achievement on the administered test, a precise scoring scheme has been developed. Testees' responses on the whole test are scored out of 100, i.e. fifty for the three questions of the recognition level and fifty for the three

questions of the production level. The scores are distributed in such a way as to give scale (0\_1\_2). If the student chooses unacceptable option which represents incorrect(form and function), he/she will take(0), if he/she chooses option with only correct(form) or only correct(function), the given mark will be(1), while the choice with correct (form and function) will take(2) as a full mark, i.e. two scores for each correct item.

At recognition level, the first question includes ten items, each item takes two marks, and its total marks is twenty. The second question consists of ten items, each item takes one mark, and its total mark is ten. The third question contains two parts each part includes five items, and its total mark is twenty. Whereas the production level includes three questions, each of the first and the second questions includes ten items, each item takes two marks, and the total mark is twenty. Whereas the third question includes five items, each item takes two marks, and the total mark is ten.

## **Section Four: Analysis of Data, Discussion of Results, Conclusions and Recommendations**

**4.0 Introductory Note:** This section includes the statistical calculation of the collected data and discussion of the results obtained in order to verify the hypotheses and achieve the aims of the current work. It starts with identifying students' overall performance, then comparing between their performances in the three layers of meaning as well as between recognition and production levels.

### **4.1 Analysis of Data**

#### **4.1.1 Students' Overall Performance on the Three Layers of Meaning**

In order to achieve the first aim of the study, students' mean scores and standard deviation on the three layers of meaning are calculated. They are 40.9 and 16.01, respectively. Then t- value is obtained in order to verify the first formulated hypothesis. The computed t- value is 21.36, whereas the tabulated one is 2.02 at 0.05 level of significance and 69 degree of freedom, as shown on Table (2).

**Table (2): The Mean Scores, Standard Deviation, and T-value of Subjects Overall Performance on the Three Layers of Meaning**

No. of students	Mean Scores	Theoretical mean	SD	T-Value		DF	Level of sig
				Calculated	Tabulated		
70	40.9	50	16.01	21.36	2.02	69	0.05

This means that there is a significant difference between students' overall level of performance which is 40.9 and the theoretical level of performance which is 50 and for the benefit of the latter. This vividly means that students' performance on the area of meaning is below the average level, thus, the first hypothesis is rejected.

**4.1.2 Comparison between Students' performance on the Various Layers of Meaning**

After analyzing data statistically by using T-test of One Sample Formula in order to verify the second hypothesis, it has been found that their mean scores in connotation meaning is 16.37 and the t-value is 19.22 with a standard deviation 5.38 at the level of significant 0.05 and under the degree of freedom 69.

While concerning the social-affective meaning, their mean scores is 11.60 and the t-value is 17.03 with the standard deviation 4.30 at the level of significant 0.05, and under the degree of freedom 69. This means that students' performance in social – affective meaning is lower

Than the other layers. As far as the contextual meaning is concerned, the mean scores is 21.20 and the t-value is 21.32 with the standard deviation 6.28 at the level of significant 0.05 and under the degree of freedom 69, as shown on Table ( 3 ). So students' performance in contextual meaning is better than connotation and social-affective meaning, hence the second hypothesis is rejected.

**Table (3): T-Values, Standard Deviation and Scores of Subjects in Connotation, Social-Affective and Contextual Meaning**

Meaning layer	Mean Scores	SD	Level of significant	DF	T- Value	
					Calculated	Tabulated
Connotative	16.37	5.38	0.05	69	19.22	2.02
Social-Affective	11.60	4.30	0.05	69	17.03	2.02
Contextual	21.20	6.28	0.05	69	21.32	2.02

#### 4.1.3 Comparison between the Performance of the Subjects at the Recognition and Production Levels

The mean scores of the students level of performance at the recognition level is 32.12

**( 4 ): A Comparison between Mean, Standard Deviation, and T-Test Value of Students' Performance at Recognition and Production Levels.**

Level	Mean Scores	SD	T. Value		Sig
			Calculated	Tabulated	
<b>Recognition</b>	32.12	7.80	11.15	2.02	0.05
<b>Production</b>	17.05	8.44			

Whereas at the production level is found to be 17.05. The T-test Formula for the Two Independent Samples is used in order to verify the third hypothesis. The calculated t-value is found to be 11.15 at the level of significant 0.05 and under the degree of freedom 69 which indicates that there is a significant difference between the two levels and in favour of the recognition level. This proves that students' mean scores of performance in recognition is better than that of the production level, as shown on Table ( 4 ), hence the third hypothesis is also rejected.

#### 4.2 Discussion of Results:

The obtained results indicate clearly that 4<sup>th</sup> year university students lack the ability to realize English meaning in addition of the serious difficulties they face in its various layers.

More specifically, students' lack of ability can be seen in their realization of both connotative and social-affective meanings. The sources of those

difficulties can be attributed to certain factors among which is the influence of students' native language. Pragmatic failure occurs as a result of socio-cultural differences and lack of linguistic competence, i.e. those students are studying EFL and most of their understanding sides are affected by the knowledge of their native language, the matter that may cause misunderstanding of the suitable expressions in a given situation.

Another source of students' weak performance is the complexity of the area under study. The study of meaning is a multi-dimensional discipline and it is related to a variety of aspects of human knowledge and experience of life. Some other factors also lie behind students' weakness such as, the little attention paid to the various layers of meaning in the content of the syllabuses taught to them. It seems obviously that Iraqi students lack training in the area of meaning, in general and in realizing its various layers, in specific. One could argue that the best performance of students on the contextual meaning, is due to subjecting students to different and various texts that help them to interpret situations and know well the intended meaning behind the target utterance, i.e. students of the fourth academic year have been studying novels, stories, poems and conversations for four successive years, so they have seen and studied a lot of real life situations of the target language. Moreover, the specified time for lessons may not consent college faculty to focus on the two levels of meaning and the students are not given sufficient opportunities to train on them.

In terms of the two levels of the achievement test, results show that students' performance at the recognition level is better than their performance at the production level. That is because recognition level is perceptual that requires depth of processing and it does not need more mental effort and also because students may be unable to present long and accurate sentences.

**4.3 Conclusions:** The following points are concluded in terms of the obtained results:

1. Iraqi university students' level in realizing English meaning is below average.
2. Students are not highly able or aware to interpret the various layers of meaning when they are assorted in a written text. This is clear in students' failure to determine them.
3. Students' performance in contextual meaning is better than in both connotative, and social - affective meaning.
4. EFL university students' performance in recognizing test items is better than their performance in producing them.

**4.4 Recommendations:** As far as the obtained results and the stated conclusions are concerned, some points are recommended as follows:

1. Iraqi university faculty should pay attention to semantic aspects of English words when they teach short stories, novels, and plays in order to build valuable feedback and to enlarge students' inspiration in EFL texts.
2. Materials and textbooks which are taught at the Departments of English should have visual as well as oral real life situations, which represent the culture of the English language. Also subjecting learners to such kind of situations will help them overcome difficult areas.
3. Assignments, which are given by the university faculty to the learners, should contain the writer's or speaker's intended meaning in different contexts of interactions.
4. EFL learners need not only be made aware of recognizing the lexical words in the speaker's intended meaning, but also they should be encouraged to develop ability to the operational range of these words and in the creation of situational contexts.
5. Learners have to be engaged in productive language use rather than just recognition activities. In other words, they should be creative and productive so as to cover all the types of meaning and able to understand terms, idioms, and the inserted vocabulary.

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## **The Appendix: The Achievement test**

**Note: Read (A,B and C items ) to understand the aim or sense of each layer and to be accurate in your answers.**

**A. Connotation** is the imaginative association surrounding a word.

**B. Social and affective meaning** is the most polite expression among the options, bearing in mind the social circumstances in which the utterance is taking place.

**C. Contextual meaning** is the intended meaning which is included or occurring in normal interactions.

### **A\ Recognition Level**

**Q1/ Choose the appropriate contextual meaning for each of the following situations by putting a tick in front of the correct choice.**

**( 20 m )**

1-The sea looks like her eyes, that means her eyes are:

a-blue eyes    b. gray eyes    c. black eyes

2-Ali is always ready for everything that his friends need. They can rely on him whenever they are in trouble .

a- he is outgoing    b. he is a helpful man    c. he is grateful

3-Someone was good at the exam. His friend said to him " you did it", what does he mean by you did it ?

a-he passed the exam and scored high marks.    b-he will pass the exam next time

c-he thinks that his friend is well at his exam.

4-Salim is in a foreign country now. He is dying to return home.

a-he likes his family and friends b-he is very eager to return home soon c. he is planning to stay in the foreign country.

5-Mazin has many friends . He always visits them and go shopping , so Mazin is a. shy b. outgoing c. bored

6-Their hutch big enough for them to live in. So "hutch" is a. place to live in b. a field c. a valley

7-Ahmad likes trekking mountains and diving into the sea. That means he is interested in a. sightseeing b. cruise c. adventure

8-Marline is at a restaurant and ordered to have two eggs and cheese ; the waiter brought them. Marline said: "Are these really two eggs ? What do you have back there, pigeons ? " So the two eggs are a. too small b. quiet enough for meals c. really big

9-If Sami hadn't forgotten his keys last night, so he wouldn't have had to sleep in the car. So:

a-Sami didn't forget his keys last night, so he didn't sleep in the car. b-Sami forgot his keys last night ,so he slept in the car.

c-Sami has spare keys , but he preferred to sleep in the car.

10-If people drive for too long distance, they get tired. That means:

a-People sometimes drive for too long and get tired. b-When people are tired, they don't drive for too long distance.

c-People are always tired, and they prefer short distance.

**Q2/Choose the social – affective meaning for the following situations. Encircle the correct option. ( 10 m )**

1-When someone speaks about his achievements, in order to please him/her , it would be better to say:

a-Are you sure b-O.K. what else c-Aha , that is really great

2-What would your response be to a close friend who has just failed in the exam.

a-Oh , I'm very sorry for that. b-I advised you to study hard but you didn't. c-That is all right, don't worry.

3-Ahmad hasn't eaten pizza before . you cooked one for him . It is better to tell him :-

a-Wow , taste it you 'll love it. b-It is nice food. C-Everybody loves pizza.

4-Sali, your friend is scared of the next test. What would you say to comfort her.

a-Don't be afraid b-Don't worry you'll do well c-No need to be afraid .

5-What would someone say if he eats tasty cake ?

a-Ooh , this cream cake is delicious b-It looks good c-I like it.

6-If someone gives you a present on your birthday. Your response would be better:-

a-You don't have to b-Oh, thank you. What a beautiful present it is ! c-All right, it is good.

7-Your close friend has just said " Let's go surfing in the sea ". The response of the receiver would be :-

a-Yippee, this is fun. b-O.K. I agree c-Let's go .

8-Our friend scored the victory goal. You want to congratulate him.

a-Nice goal b-I think you were good c-Wow , what a fantastic goal

9-If you want to sleep and your neighbor is listening to music. What would you say politely ?

- a-Don't make noise    b-Please put on your headphones I have a bad headache and I can't sleep    c- What are you doing right now? I can't sleep

10-Salma and her friend Sandy are at the hair Saloon. What is the best comment after having her hair cut :-

- a-Your hair is really fantastic    b-The new hair style really suits you    c-You look unusual today

**Q3/A: Match the following words in list( A) with their connotation meanings in the list (B . (10 m)**

A		B	
1	Restriction	A	Loyalty
2	Rose and heart	B	Love and passion
3	Snake and cup	C	Health
4	Dog	D	Cowardliness
5	Chicken	E	Cage

**B: Encircle the letter of the most appropriate word that gives the connotative meaning and best completes the sentence: (10m)**

- The student has finished his classes and he will go ..... soon. a. house    b. home    c. accommodation
- Nada is..... and she has been in Canada since last February. a. abroad    b. far away    c. distance
- That gentleman is.....he looks neat and dresses well also his face is. a. beautiful    b. nice    c. handsome
- Wait a minute, I'm just ..... my coat. a. wearing    b. putting on    c. taking on
- Suddenly, I..... something strange in the garden. a. looked at    b. viewed    c. saw

**B\ production Level**

**Q1:Complete the following items with statements that cover the contextual meaning and complete the sentences.**

**( 20 m )**

- Smith : hurry up John !  
John: wait a minute I will be ready in a minute. I am putting them on  
What do you think John is doing now ?.....
- Mazin always does his best to convince his teacher , he never delays his work . So this mean that Mazin is.....
- Salwa likes helping people and she never lets her friends if they need her . That means .....
- Scientists usually advice people not to drink sea water since it is .....
- Poor people always need help. This means everybody should.....
- Breakfast is a very important meal so we should .....
- People look at appearance . So we have to be .....
- The most important thing for societies is safety. This means...
- This furniture is too old .You need to .....
- This shirt is very beautiful but it costs 70.000 ID . This means the shirts is .....but it is .....

**Q\2 Fill in the blanks with statements that give " Social- Affective meaning" (20M)**

- I am thirsty .....some water , please ?
- It is raining outside.....an umbrella.

- 3- Coffee makes me warm .....some coffee.
- 4- Driving so fast is dangerous .....or you have an accident one day.
- 5- These bags are heavy .....me in carrying them.
- 6- John is sick .He is in the hospital now.....him today afternoon.
- 7- Your tea is not sweet enough. you ask the waiter to add some sugar . You'd better say .....
- 8- You are advising Mrs. Nada to get fit. You .....daily exercises
- 9- Mr. Steven , your friend has bought himself a new Mobile phone. He showed it to you . You respond to him .....
- 10- Ahmad said to his friend Basim ." I am free this afternoon let's visit our teacher, she is sick" . So Basim's response better be .....

**Q3 \ Give the connotative meaning for the following words or statements as in the given example.(10 M)**

A		B
Example	Lion	Courage and strength
1	War	
2	Dove	
3	Wolf	
4	Child	
5	Moon	