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Investigating Iraqi EFL University Students' Ability to Interpret Ambiguity in Elliptical Constructions

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A B S T R A C T

Ambiguity is a linguistic phenomenon that often arises from grammatical structures such as comparative elliptical constructions, which can create difficulties for students of English as a foreign language. This study aims to identify and compare Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity arising from comparative elliptical constructions, as well as their ability to interpret ambiguity at both the recognition and the production levels. The study sample comprises 202 fourth-stage Iraqi EFL university students from Departments of English at the Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities during the academic year 2025–2026. The present study adopts a descriptive quantitative research design and uses a diagnostic test to collect data. The findings reveal that Iraqi EFL university students have a low ability to interpret ambiguity arising from comparative elliptical constructions, and students perform better in recognition tasks than in production tasks, which means that identifying ambiguous constructions is easier than producing possible interpretations for them.

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استقصاء قدرة طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسيّ اللغة الإنكليزية لغةٍ أجنبية على تفسير الغموض في التراكيب الحذيفة

فرح سالم عبدالرحمن/ طالبة دراسات عليا

دنيا طاهر حميد/ جامعة تكريت \ كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

الخلاصة:

يُعَدّ الغموض ظاهرةً لغويةً تنشأ غالبًا عن تراكيب نحوية مثل التراكيب الحذيفة المقارنة. الأمر الذي قد يسبب صعوبات لدى طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية لغةٍ أجنبية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد ومقارنة قدرة طلبة

الجامعات العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية لغةٍ أجنبية على تفسير الغموض الناشئ عن التراكيب الحذيفة المقارنة وكذلك تقصي قدرتهم على تفسير الغموض على مستويي الادراك والإنتاج. تتكون عينة الدراسة من (٢٠٢) طالبًا وطالبةً من طلبة المرحلة الرابعة في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في كليتي التربية للعلوم الإنسانية في جامعتي تكريت والحمدانية خلال العام الدراسي (٢٠٢٥–٢٠٢٦). ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، اعتمدت الدراسة الحالية المنهج الوصفي الكمي، واستخدمت اختبارًا تشخيصيًا أداةً لجمع البيانات. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن طلبة الجامعة العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنكليزية كلغةٍ أجنبية يمتلكون قدرةً محدودة على تفسير الغموض الناشئ عن التراكيب الحذيفة المقارنة. كما بيّنت النتائج أن أداء الطلبة في مهام الادراك كان أفضل من أدائهم في مهام الإنتاج، مما يشير إلى أن إدراك التراكيب الغامضة أسهل من إنتاج تفسيرات محتملة لها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استقصاء، الغموض، التراكيب الحذيفة المقارنة، التفسير، دارسيّ اللغة الإنكليزية لغة اجنبية.

يعبر الباحث عن شكره وامتنانه لمكتبة جامعة تكريت لرفد البحث بكل ما هو جديد ومعتمد في الحقل المعرفي الخاص بالبحث.

Section One:

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

Bucaria (2004) shows that ambiguity is inherent in language. The issue of ambiguity (from the Latin adjective ambiguous, i.e. uncertain) has long attracted the attention of researchers in fields such as psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, and cognitive psychology. It is not only a subject of academic investigation, but also a phenomenon experienced by ordinary language users in everyday communication. Ambiguity in oral language does not cause permanent damage to communication since the opportunity exists to clarify possible sources of ambiguity. Written language ambiguity becomes more problematic because no chance is given to the reader to interact immediately with the author. For this reason, ambiguity is often considered an obstacle to communication, especially in the written medium.

Ambiguity refers to the presence of multiple meanings and is mainly classified into two types: lexical and structural ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity comes into being when two or more of the meanings of a single word. Structural ambiguity means a single syntactic structure has more than one meaning. Despite its importance,

structural ambiguity has received limited attention in classroom practice, and it seems to be little used by classroom teachers (Haugh, 1968).

Ellipsis is of great interest to specialists because it represents an unusual structural situation. The phenomenon of ellipsis has "meaning without form", which goes against the mapping, algorithms and rules that allow us to map sounds and gestures onto their respective meanings. Ellipsis seems to overshadow the basic question of the form-meaning relationship, and the usual mechanism for grasping meaning from its form is bypassed in the interpretation of elliptical constructions. Since language is a correlation of syntactic forms with meaning, and there is a systematic mapping from form to meaning in human language, but in elliptical constructions, the usual form-meaning connection is partly bypassed (Hardt 1993).

Simatupang (2007) states that ambiguity in comparative constructions arises when shortened comparative clause forms allow more than one interpretation because the reduced element may function either as the subject of the comparative clause or as the object of the verb. Recognising such ambiguity depends on linguistic knowledge. So, it remains challenging for EFL students, who may struggle to recognise and avoid ambiguous comparative structures in writing.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The present study aims to identify and compare:

1. Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity arising from comparative elliptical constructions at the Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities.
2. Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity at both the recognition and the production levels at the Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities.

1. 3 Questions of the Study

To achieve the aims, the following questions are suggested:

1. Are there statistically significant differences among Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity arising from comparative elliptical constructions at the Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities?
2. Are there statistically significant differences among Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity at the recognition and the production levels at the Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities?

1.4 Limits of the Study

The current study is limited to

1. Fourth-stage Iraqi EFL university students/ Departments of English/ Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya universities during the first course of the academic year 2025-2026.
2. One specific type of linguistic structural ambiguity examined in this study involves comparative elliptical constructions, specifically the clausal ellipsis type in comparative clauses, where verb phrase (VP) ellipsis occurs inside than-clauses, which commonly occurs in general written texts. Other types of ellipsis and ambiguity are beyond the scope of the present study.

Section Two

Theoretical Background and Previous Studies

2.1 Definitions of Basic Terms

2.1.1 Investigating

Investigating is about looking for facts, especially those that are hidden or need to be clarified in a complex situation. Investigating usually aims to admit how or why something happened (Leonard & More, 1978).

2.1.2 Interpret

It is the act of explaining, clarifying, or showing an understanding towards something. Interpretation requires understanding the piece of music, text, language, or idea, and then explaining it (Corsellis et al., 2001).

2.1.3 Ambiguity

Ambiguity is an essential element of daily life communication. It is the flexibility of mind and the highest level of our interpretative cognitive functions. Whatever its type, there is always more than one interpretation of a sentence, an utterance, a gesture or even a situation (Zabotkina, Bottineau, & Boyarskaya, 2021).

2.1.4 Ellipsis

Ellipsis refers to the systematic omission of linguistic elements whose form and meaning are recoverable from context (Quirk et al.,1985).

"The term ellipsis, from Greek élleipsis, most generally refers to the omission of linguistic material, structure, constructions and sound. In each of the elliptical linguistic material is omitted, deleted or simply left unpronounced"(Winkler, 2005, P.16).

2.1.5 Comparative Constructions

Comparative constructions are linguistic structures used to express a mental act of comparison in which two or more items are evaluated in terms of similarity or difference along a gradable property. Through these constructions, items are placed on a scale, allowing language users to express either inequality or equality (Treis, 2018).

2.2 Interpretation

Yule (2020) showed that semantics is the study of meaning, which is concerned with words, phrases, and sentences. He indicated that ambiguity is a basic characteristic of language and that interpretation of it depends on both the speaker's intended meaning and the listener's ability to infer that meaning. Since many sentences may be structurally correct, but they do not make sense, for example: -

- The hamburger ate the boy.

  NP V NP

This sentence has a well-formed structure, so the oddness of this sentence does not derive from its syntactic structure, but from its semantic ones. This sentence is syntactically good, but semantically odd. While the sentence as in:

- The boy ate the hamburger.

is perfectly acceptable both syntactically and semantically. This proves the close relationship between linguistic form and meaning, and each one complete each other.

Finally, from a cognitive-psycholinguistic perspective: “Whatever ambiguity type, there is always more than one interpretation, more than one understanding of a sentence, an utterance, an image, a gesture or even a situation. In the neurological sense, the processes which enable the brain to select a one-way path to produce the mind-experienced awareness are perception and interpretation”. Ambiguity is not about undecidability in interpretation; it is about a choice or choices, which are based on the mental ability to perceive and interpret a complex environment without experiencing the subjective difficulty of having to solve problems and find solutions. (Zabotkina et al., 2021, pp. 201–202).

Anderson (2024) said that interpretive skill involves a range of capabilities that allow individuals to comprehend and articulate what they see, hear, or read. This includes the ability to break down complex ideas and present them clearly and suitably. This skill is necessary not only for professional purposes but also in daily communication to build deeper and clearer connections between individuals.

(https://focuskeeper.co/glossary/what-is-interpretive-skills)

2.3 Concept of Ambiguity

The concept of ambiguity has kept its significance throughout the years, and its importance has increased in modern English. It is difficult to define a concept that has more than one meaning; a term that is not obvious, and a word that can be understood in multiple ways. Ambiguity is a concept that's hard to define and grasp because it is complex. However, it is an important part of human language and happens in all language contexts. There have been many attempts to explain what ambiguity is (Nuhiu & Ejupi, 2015).

Ambiguity, the property of a lexical item having more than one meaning, is a basic notion in semantics, syntax and pragmatics. Lexical/semantic ambiguity refers to the presence of two or more possible meanings for a single word, such as:

- I’ve brought the seal.

In the above example, the multiple meanings of the word seal result in several interpretations. The word seal, as a noun, could refer to “a sea animal that eats fish” or to “an official design or mark, stamped on a document to show that it is genuine and carries the authority of a particular person or organisation. So, ambiguity in linguistics lies in the coexistence of two possible interpretations of an utterance. One term can have different senses and a double interpretation (Serakioti & Stefaneas, 2022).

2.4 Typology of Ambiguity

Some authors classify the ambiguity as monotypic, which essentially restricts ambiguity to one major type, even if it has sub-cases. Traditional approaches tended to restrict ambiguity to the lexical level, especially in cases of homonymy and polysemy, distinguishing only lexical ambiguity. While other authors classified it as a dual typic, which they identified as two main types of ambiguity, this is the most common classification. Hurford and Hesley (1983), who classified ambiguity into lexical and structural ambiguity, and Strazny (2013) said that if it is due to words, it is called lexical ambiguity; if it is due to sentence structure, it is called structural ambiguity. Recently, Yule (2020) reinforced this by distinguishing only lexical ambiguity (a single form with multiple meanings) and structural ambiguity (a sentence with more than one syntactic analysis).

The rest of the other authors identify it as multiple, three or more types of ambiguity. Like Bucaria (2004) and Wang and Gou (2018), they maintained that there are lexical, syntactic, and phonological ambiguities. In a broader view, Crystal (2003) identified four types of ambiguity: structural, transformational, multiple (involving both lexical and structural ambiguities), and lexical. In the broadest view, Kaufer (1983) is the one who identifies more types of ambiguities (five types): syntactic, lexical, ambiguity of illocution, ambiguity of perlocution, and ambiguity of use/mention

Despite the various classifications of the term (ambiguity), two major and most common types, along with their subdivisions, can be observed in English, namely lexical ambiguity (semantic) and structural ambiguity (syntactic). So, the present

study will focus specifically on structural ambiguity, since comparative elliptical constructions are classified within this type.

2.4.1 Lexical Ambiguity

Individual words may be ambiguous. For example, the word pupil can refer to either a pupil of a school or a pupil of the eye. Because such words have no internal constituent structure, sentences containing such words cannot be structurally ambiguous. Instead, a sentence is said to be lexically ambiguous (OSU, 1998).

Although George Yule (2017) did not explicitly use the term lexical ambiguity, he instead mentioned lexical relations as a central aspect of meaning in the lexicon. These lexical relations act as the primary sources of lexical ambiguity, usually divided into four categories: homophony, homonymy, polysemy, and synonymy. Each one shows a different relation between form and meaning.

2.4.2 Structural Ambiguity

Structural ambiguity occurs when a phrase or a sentence has more than one grammatical structure, such as this phrase contains one sequence of words, but the mind can build two different meanings: -

English history teacher → [English history] teacher. Or English [history teacher].

This phrase is ambiguous because it allows more than one grammatical structure, and each structure represents a different meaning. e.g., '[English history] teacher', i.e. (Someone who teaches the subject of English history)**.** and 'English [history teacher]', i.e. teacher's nationality (an English teacher who teaches history). The ambiguity does not come from vocabulary; it comes from how the words are grouped syntactically in the listener's mind (Khawalda & Al-Saidat, 2012).

Stageberg (1968) argued that awareness of ambiguity is pedagogically useful for English teachers. He said that among the areas of applied linguistics that can be useful to English teachers, structural ambiguity has been recently investigated, and it seems to be little used by classroom teachers. In the present study, the classification proposed by Norman C. Stageberg (1958) has been adopted because he directly addressed Elliptical Construction as one of the structural ambiguity situations and considered it as 'especially troublesome' (Stageberg, 1958, p. 484).

Table (1)

The Structural Ambiguity Situations

NO.	Pattern	NO.	Pattern
1	Adjective + noun in possessive case+noun.	11	Series of words + modifying word or word-group.
2	Adjective + noun + noun.	12	Modifier + subject of sentence.
3	Modifier (noun or adjective) + noun.	13	Modificand + intervening material +modifier.
4	More or most + adjective + noun	14	Modificand + modifier + modificand.
5	Noun + noun + noun.	15	Verb- adverb, or preposition.
6	Adjective + series of nouns.	16	Dual parallel structure.
7	Noun + series of adjectives.	17	Modificand + two modifying word groups.
8	Modifier + past participle + noun.	18	Elliptical constructions.
9	ing verb + noun.	19	Movable adverbial modifiers.
10	Adjective + noun + conjunction + noun.	20	Reference of pron., relatives, and demonstratives.

(Stageberg, 1958, p. 484)

Situation 18: Elliptical Constructions.

Sometimes the omission of words from a structure will result in ambiguity. Elliptical constructions mean the words are omitted because they are understood from context. However, this omission can sometimes create structural ambiguity, since the reader may supply different missing elements. This problem is especially common with comparative forms such as *than*. For examples:

- It is more important for me to enter activities in high school than college.

This sentence is ambiguous because it is unclear whether than college compares entering activities or entering college.

2.5 Concept of Ellipsis

The term ellipsis comes from the Greek: ´ elleipsis, “omission,” defined as picking out constructions that lack an element that is recoverable or inferable from the context.” (Lappin & Fox, 2015)

The term ellipsis has been applied to a wide range of phenomena across the centuries, from any situation in which words appear to be missing to a much narrower range of particular constructions. Ellipsis continues to be of central interest to theorists of language because it challenges the normal link between form and meaning. In

elliptical structures, part of the form is absent, yet the meaning is still understood. i.e. In ellipsis, there is meaning without form (Merchant, 2016).

Ellipsis in theoretical linguistics referred to a situation where part of a sentence is omitted because it would repeat information that is already understood. For example:

- Tim is sleeping and Lucy is too.

The verb sleeping is not repeated in the second part of the sentence. However, the meaning is still clear because we understand it as Lucy is sleeping. In such a structure, the sentence has two parts connected by the conjunction *and*. These parts are called conjuncts. The first conjunct provides the information (the antecedent), and the second conjunct contains the ellipsis where some words are omitted. Even though the verb is missing in the second part, listeners or readers automatically interpret the full meaning based on the first part of the sentence (Bevis, 2018).

2.6 Typology of Ellipsis

There is no single universal typology of ellipsis; the literature presented various classifications developed within different theoretical frameworks (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Merchant, 2004; Saleem, 2021; Quirk et al .1985).

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) distinguish three main types of ellipsis: nominal, verbal, and clausal ellipsis, treating ellipsis as a cohesive device that contributes to textual interpretation.

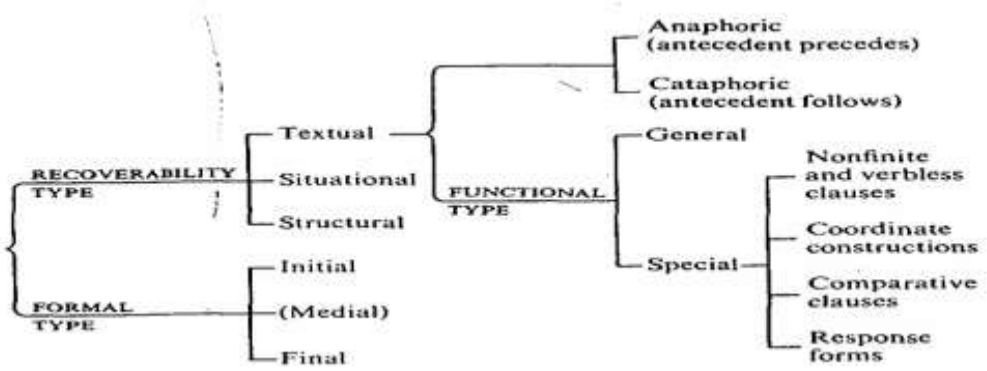
Merchant (2004) analyzes ellipsis in terms of specific syntactic processes such as VP ellipsis, NP ellipsis, sluicing, gapping, and related deletion phenomena. These insights provide a holistic understanding of the ellipsis phenomenon in language.

Saleem (2021) distinguished between syntactic, phonological, and semantic ellipsis.

Finally, the present study adopts the classification proposed in descriptive grammar by Randolph Quirk et al. (1985). This classification is presented in *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* and is built on the earlier framework outlined in A University Grammar of English (1973), which provides the theoretical background for the present study.

Figure (1)

The Classification of Ellipsis



Quirk et al. (1985, p. 894).

2.7 Ambiguity Through Ellipsis in Comparative Sentence.

Quirk et al (1973, p.331) explained the ellipsis mechanism in comparative sentences as 'Ellipsis of a part of the subordinate clause is likely to occur whenever that part is a repetition of something in the main clause. Since it is normal for the two clauses to be closely parallel both in structure and content, ellipsis is the rule rather than the exception in comparative constructions.'

Quirk et al. (1985) explained the ambiguity through comparative ellipsis. They said that when normal ellipses have taken place, ambiguity can arise as to whether a remaining noun phrase is subject or object of the ellipted clause. For example:

- He loves the dog more than his wife.

It could mean either than his wife loves the dog or than he loves his wife.

In English comparative constructions, ellipsis often occurs in addition to Comparative Deletion. Through ellipsis, parts of the comparative clause are omitted so that only the contrastive element remains visible. This process is commonly realized as VPE, where the verb phrase is deleted because it can be recovered from the preceding clause. However, the deleted material may sometimes be larger than the verb phrase, although the basic mechanism of ellipsis remains the same. As a result, structural ambiguity may arise because the deleted material can be reconstructed in different ways. For example: I like ambiguity more than most people.

Most people may function either as the subject of the omitted clause or as the object of the verb. This ambiguity occurs because English does not provide clear case

marking to distinguish the grammatical role of the noun phrase following than (Bacskai-Atkari, 2018).

2.8 The Influence of Linguistic Ambiguity on EFL Students' Interpretation Performance in Learning Classes

Hassan & Abbas (2023) suggested that linguistic ambiguity can significantly influence learners' interpretation performance in EFL classrooms. When students are able to tolerate and process ambiguous language structures, they are more capable of interpreting meaning, connecting contextual clues, and understanding complex linguistic forms.

Khalifah, Altakhaineh, and Zibin (2025) investigated the impact of language proficiency on EFL learners' ability to identify and comprehend complex linguistic features, focusing on ellipsis. In the context of EFL, proficiency can significantly influence a learner's ability to engage with the language in real-world situations. While beginning learners may struggle with foundational elements like verb tense and word order, more advanced learners can focus on higher-level skills such as interpreting tone, understanding implied meaning, and using cohesive devices that connect ideas across sentences and paragraphs. These higher-level skills contribute to fluency and the ease with which learners can comprehend and produce language in diverse contexts.

2.9 Previous Studies

Previous studies on Iraqi EFL students have examined various ambiguous constructions, such as adverbial clauses, prepositional phrase attachment, relative clauses, and lexical ambiguity, including comparative clauses. Previous studies on ambiguity among EFL students have mainly assessed students' ability to recognise, translate, or resolve ambiguous sentences through tests rather than students' comprehension of comparative elliptical ambiguity at the interpretive level. As Hameed (2023) did, this study aimed to assess and compare Iraqi university students' ability to interpret lexical and structural ambiguity and assessing Iraqi university students' ability to interpret structural and lexical ambiguity at both the recognition and the production levels. The sample comprised 303 fourth-year EFL students

(males and females) from the Colleges of Education at Tikrit, Kirkuk, and Al-Anbar Universities during the 2021–2022 academic year. The study tool was a diagnostic test designed to measure students' ability. The results showed that Iraqi EFL students face noticeable difficulty in interpreting both lexical and structural ambiguity, and overall, students' ability to interpret ambiguity was low.

Section Three

Methodology and Procedures

Research design determines how the required data are collected and analyzed and explains how these procedures help answer the research questions (Boru, 2018).

The design of the present research is descriptive quantitative research, which has been used to collect the data. The reason for choosing this research design is to investigate students` ability to interpret ambiguity in comparative elliptical constructions at Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities.

3.1 Population and Sampling

Shukla (2020) defines population as a set or group of all the units on which the research findings are to be submitted.

The population in the present study is 202 undergraduate college students from the departments of English, College of Education for Humanities at Tikrit, and Al-Hamdaniya Universities for the academic year 2025-2026.

A sample is a group of people, objects, or items that are taken from a large population for measurement. So, to get accurate results, sampling is done (Bhardwaj, 2019).

The sample of the study from Al-Hamdaniya University is 57, consisting of 31 males and 26 females, whereas Tikrit University is 145, consisting of 69 males and 76 females. The total number of the sample is 202 students, and it has been chosen intentionally and randomly.

Table (2)

The Population and Sample of Students in the Study

University	Population	Involved in the pilot study	Involved in the Sample	Percentage
Tikrit	**145**	٣٥	١١٠	**75.8%**
Al-Hamdaniya	**57**	١٩	٣٨	**66.6%**
Total	٢٠٢	٥٤	١٤٨	**73.2%**

3.2 Test Construction

Brookhart and McMillan (2019) state that the construction of the test needs to stick to a methodical approach. i.e. test construction should follow a clear, systematic process rather than being developed randomly. The construction of the test involves planning the test, preparing the items and instructions, putting them together, and reproducing the test (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

The test is designed to investigate Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity in comparative elliptical constructions on both the recognition and the production levels, and it consists of three questions. The first and second questions investigate students' recognition level. While the final question investigates students' production level. To achieve the aims, a diagnostic test has been constructed.

3.3 Face Validity

Face validity refers to the extent to which a test appears appropriate to test administrators, educators, and test-takers (Heaton, 1988). To ensure the face validity of the test, it has been submitted to a jury of instructors and specialists in English language teaching and Linguistics. The jurors have reviewed the instrument and stated that it is appropriate and valid. Their modifications have been taken into consideration

3.4 Content Validity

Content validity refers to the case in which the test will measure what it is supposed to measure. It examines whether the test measures the characteristics or abilities aimed to be measured or not (Hughes, 1989). In other words, content validity is a

systematic investigation of the content of the test to be sure whether it covers the content of the material, and the behaviors aims to be measured.

3.5 Reliability of the Test

"The test may be reliable if the subject's scores remain stable over time; if the scores regularly fluctuate, the test then is unreliable" (Fosgerau & Karlström, 2010, p.38). Reliability is an important characteristic of a good test. Alpha-Cronbach's formula is used to measure the reliability of the test. The coefficient value is found to be 0.88, which is considered acceptable. To ensure the inter-rater reliability, the scoring committee scored the test. It includes: instructor Raghad Noori Salih (M.A), Abed Nihad Abed (M.A), and the researcher.

Section Four

Analysis of Data and Discussion of Results

4.1 Identifying the Difference Between Theoretical Mean and Iraqi EFL University Students' in the Elliptical Constructions at Two Universities

To verify the first question, which states, "Are there statistically significant differences among Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity arising from comparative elliptical constructions at the Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities?" . The mean scores of the students' elliptical constructions in the test is 34.33, and the theoretical mean is 50 with a standard deviation of 22.90, respectively. The T-test formula for one sample is used. The calculated t-value is 9.721, which is found to be higher than the tabulated t-value, which is 1.972 at the (0.05) level of significance when the degree of freedom is 201 .

These results indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the theoretical mean and students' elliptical constructions test at the two universities in favour of the theoretical mean. Thus, according to these results, the students of the two universities showed a significant weakness in the elliptical constructions test.

Table (3)

The Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and One-Sample T-Value of the Students' Elliptical Constructions Test at the Two Universities

Group	No. of students	Mean	SD.	Theoretical Mean Score	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
					Calculated	Tabulated		
Both Universities	202	34.33	22.90	50	9.721	1.972	201	0.05

4.2 Comparison Between the Mean Scores of the Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities at Elliptical Constructions Test

In order to find the mean scores of the Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya universities at the elliptical constructions test, all mean scores are obtained and compared. Statistics show that the mean scores of the Tikrit University is 29.37 and that of the Al-Hamdaniya University is 46.94. By using the t-test formula for two independent samples, the calculated t-value is found to be 5.218, while the tabulated t-value is found to be 1.972 at the degree of freedom 200 and level of significance (0.05). This indicates that there is a significant difference between the two universities in the elliptical constructions test, in favour of Al-Hamdaniya University, as shown in Table 4.

Table (4)

The Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Two Independent Sample T-Value of the Students' Elliptical Constructions Test Between the Two Universities

Groups	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
				Calculated	Tabulated		
Tikrit	145	29.37	19.79	5.218	1.972	200	0.05
Al-Hamdaniya	57	46.94	25.49				

4.3 Identifying Iraqi EFL University Students' Ability to Interpret Ambiguity at both the Recognition and the Production Levels at Two Universities

In order to verify the second question, which states *"Are there statistically significant differences among Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity at the recognition and production levels at the Colleges of Education for Humanities at Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities?"* The mean scores of the students' performance at the recognition and the production levels in the elliptical constructions are calculated and compared to determine whether there is a significant difference between them. The results indicate that the mean score at the recognition level is 23.02, while the mean score at the production level is 11.84. The t-test formula for two paired samples is applied, revealing that the calculated t-value is 9.801, which is higher than the tabulated t-value of 1.972 at 201 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 level of significance. This indicates a significant performance difference between the two student levels, favouring the recognition level.

Table (5)

Students' Mean Scores, Standard Deviation, and Paired Samples T-Value of the Two Universities' Performance at the Recognition and the Production Levels

Group	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
Recognition	202	23.02	8.85	Calculated	Tabulated	201	0.05
Production	202	11.84	17.78	9.801	1.972		

4.4 Comparison of Tikrit University Students' Performance at the Recognition and the Production levels

The mean scores of the Tikrit University students' performance at the recognition and the production levels in the elliptical constructions are calculated and compared to determine whether there is a significant difference between them. The results indicate that the mean score at the recognition level is 21.37, while the mean score at the production level is 8.63. The t-test formula for two paired samples is applied, revealing that the calculated t-value is 11.012, is higher than the tabulated t-value is

1.976 at 144 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 level of significance. This indicates a significant performance difference between the two student levels, favouring the recognition level.

Table (6)

Students' Mean Scores, Standard Deviation, and Paired Samples T-Value of Tikrit University Performance at the Recognition and the Production Levels

Group	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
Recognition	145	21.37	8.07	Calculated	Tabulated	144	0.05
Production	145	8.63	15.27	11.012	1.976		

4.5 Comparison of Al-Hamdaniya University Students' Performance at the Recognition and the Production levels

The mean scores of the Al-Hamdaniya University students' performance at the recognition and the production levels in the elliptical constructions are calculated and compared to determine whether there is a significant difference between them. The results indicate that the mean score at the recognition level is 27.22, while the mean score at the production level is 20.00. The t-test formula for two paired samples is applied, revealing that the calculated t-value is 2.653, which is higher than the tabulated t-value of 2.000 at 56 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 level of significance. This indicates a significant performance difference between the two student levels, favouring the recognition level.

Table (7)

Students' Mean Scores, Standard Deviation, and Paired Samples T-Value of Al-Hamdaniya University Performance at the Recognition and the Production Levels

Group	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
Recognition	57	27.22	9.42	Calculated	Tabulated	56	0.05
Production	57	20.00	21.00	2.653	2.000		

4.6 Discussion of the Results

The current study investigates Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity in comparative elliptical constructions at Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities. The results of the current study illustrate Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity in comparative elliptical constructions.

The results for the first question related to identifying the difference between the theoretical mean and Iraqi EFL university students' scores in the elliptical constructions at Two Universities. The results indicate that the mean score for the students on the test is 34.33, whereas the theoretical mean is 50. By applying the t-test formula for one sample, the calculated t-value (9.721) is higher than the tabulated t-value (1.972) at the 0.05 level of significance with 201 degrees of freedom. This result indicates a statistically significant difference between the students' mean score and the theoretical mean. This suggests that Iraqi EFL university students show limited ability in interpreting ambiguity in comparative elliptical constructions.

Moreover, the results related to the comparison between the mean scores of Tikrit and Al-Hamdaniya Universities in the elliptical constructions test. The findings show that the mean score of Tikrit University students is 29.37, while the mean score of Al-Hamdaniya University students is 46.94. By applying the t-test formula for two independent samples, the calculated t-value (5.218) is higher than the tabulated t-value (1.972) at 200 degrees of freedom and the 0.05 level of significance .This shows a significant difference between the two universities; the Iraqi EFL university students at the College of Education, Tikrit University, are poor in their interpretive ability, but have higher average test scores at the University of Al-Hamdaniya, which means that students at Al-Hamdaniya University perform better than those at Tikrit University.

The results of the second question related to identifying Iraqi EFL university students' ability to interpret ambiguity at both the recognition and the production levels. The findings reveal that the mean score at the recognition level is 23.02, while the mean score at the production level is 11.84. By applying the paired samples t-test,

the calculated t-value 9.801 is higher than the tabulated t-value 1.972 at 201 degrees of freedom and the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the recognition and the production levels, in favour of the recognition level. This result suggests that Iraqi EFL university students find it easier to recognize ambiguous elliptical constructions than to interpret them. Whereas the results related to the performance of students at each university separately. The results of Tikrit University show that the mean score at the recognition level is 21.37, while the mean score at the production level is 8.63. The calculated t-value 11.012 is higher than the tabulated value 1.976 at 144 degrees of freedom, indicating a statistically significant difference in favour of the recognition level.

Similarly, the results of Al-Hamdaniya University show that the mean score at the recognition level is 27.22, while the mean score at the production level is 20.00. The calculated t-value 2.653 is higher than the tabulated value 2.000 at 56 degrees of freedom, indicating a statistically significant difference in favour of the recognition level as well. The results reveal that students at both universities perform better at the recognition level than at the production level.

Section Five

5.1 Conclusions

The present study has come up with some conclusions, which are:

1. Iraqi EFL university students have limited ability in interpreting ambiguity arising from comparative elliptical constructions, indicating that such constructions represent a difficulty for students.
2. Students perform better in the recognition tasks than in the production tasks, suggesting that identifying ambiguous constructions is easier for students than producing possible interpretations of ambiguous sentences that contain comparative elliptical constructions.
3. There is a significant difference between the two universities in the overall performance, with students from Al-Hamdaniya University performing better than those from Tikrit University in interpreting comparative elliptical constructions.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. EFL teachers should pay greater attention to the phenomenon of ambiguity arising from grammatical structures in general, and from comparative elliptical constructions in particular, during grammar instruction.
2. Classroom activities should include various examples of ambiguous sentences to train students to recognize and interpret different possible meanings.
3. Curriculum designers should include more exercises and materials related to ellipsis and ambiguity in English language textbooks used in Iraqi universities.

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