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PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE: REFUSAL SPEECH ACT BY IRANIAN STUDENTS IN SWEDEN

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Abstract

Title: *Pragmatic Competence: Refusal Speech Act by Iranian Students in Sweden*

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Abstract: Understanding cross-cultural differences plays a crucial role in communication and successful cross-cultural communications depends on various factors such as pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Many researchers focus more on the aspect of pragmatics such as speech acts. The present study is a contrastive study of refusal speech act. The aim of this study is to investigate the pragmatic transfer in the speech act of refusal and then find similarities and differences between the speech acts of refusal in response to an invitation, request, offer and suggestion in various social contexts in two languages and cultures. This study was conducted by Iranian students in Gothenburg who utilize both Persian as their first language and English as their second language. 24 Iranian students completed a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) that included 12 situations by submitting written refusals to 3 invitations, 3 requests, 3 offers and 3 suggestions. The data were then coded based on the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al. (1990). The results were compared with the results of another study in which Iranian students were compared with 10 American native speakers of English cited in Abed' study (2011). The results show that in terms of frequency of refusal strategies, both Iranian students and American native speakers of English like to utilize more indirect refusal strategies. The Iranian female students utilized more refusal strategies to show more politeness than the Iranian male students. Furthermore, analysis revealed that both Iranian male students and Iranian female students utilized address terms and that the Iranian female students utilized religious expressions while the Iranian male students did not.

Keywords: Culture, speech act of refusal, pragmatic, pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, politeness theory, refusal strategies

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Literature of Review	3
2.1. Previous Related Studies	3
2.2. Theoretical Framework	7
2.2.1 Culture of Language	7
2.2.2. Pragmatic Competence	8
2.2.3. Speech Act Theory	10
2.2.4. The Speech Act of Refusal	12
2.2.5. Refusal: A Face-Threatening Act	14
3. Methodology	17
3.1. Participants	17
3.2. Instruments	17
3.3. Procedure of Data Collection & Data Analysis	18
4. Results	20
4.1. Refusal Strategies in each Situation	20
4.1.1. Situation 1: The professor's invitation.....	21
4.1.2. Situation 2: The professor's request	22
4.1.3. Situation 3: The professor' offer.....	24
4.1.4. Situation 4: The professor's suggestion.....	26
4.1.5. Situation 5: The close friend's invitation.....	27
4.1.6. Situation 6: The close friend's request.....	29
4.1.7. Situation 7: The close friend's offer	31
4.1.8. Situation 8: The close friend's suggestion	32
4.1.9. Situation 9: The student's invitation	34
4.1.10. Situation 10: The student's request.....	36
4.1.11. Situation 11: The student's offer.....	37
4.1.12. Situation 12: The student's suggestion	39
4.2. Frequency of Other Findings	41
4.3. Refusal Strategies by Gender	42
4.3.1. Direct Refusal Strategy	43
4.3.2. Indirect Refusal Strategy.....	44
4.3.3. Adjunct to Refusal Strategy	46
5. Discussion	48

6. Conclusion	51
References	53
Appendix	57

1. Introduction

English is an international language and a number of reasons such as immigration and trade are leading to its spread and an increase in the number of bilingual English speakers around the world. Like other languages, Persian are very interested in learning English. In fact, learning English is a foreign language in Iran and is utilized to maintain intracultural and intercultural communication. To facilitate better communication, further studies in English, such as the speech act of refusal, can enhance the knowledge of soci pragmatics and pragmalinguistics in the target language (Babai & Sharifian, 2013, p. 802). A refusal is also a threat to the face of both the speakers and the interlocutor, when they respond to a number of other speech acts, including invitation, request, offer and suggestion. To mitigate the insult and save face, refusers often utilize a complex sequence of direct refusal, indirect refusal and adjunct to refusal strategies. The choice of refusal strategies is determined by social variables such as gender and the status of the interlocutor in different cultures and languages.

Research on interlanguage pragmatics, such as the speech act of refusal, examines the performance of English language learners from diverse first language backgrounds. Given gender and social status, the differences in Iranian and American cultures may affect the way their faces are threatened in the speech act of refusal. In other words, the speech acts utilized are different in various cultures and languages. "Thus, the study of second language speech acts is concerned with the linguistic possibilities available in language for speech act realization and the effect of cross-culture differences on second language performance and on the interpretation by native speakers of second language speech act" (Wolfson, 18989, p. 183, cited in Abed, 2011, p. 166). In conversation with native speakers, second language learners may encounter difficulties due to their limited knowledge and unfamiliarity with the rules of effective conversation. Furthermore, the form speech acts varies with the content as well as the degree of directness and indirectness depending on the statu of the interlocutor (Beebe et al., 1990, p. 56). Although the classification of Bebee et al. (1990) has some shortcomings, such as the absence of terms of address terms and religious expressions, it is still widely utilized in research on cross-cultural differences.

24 Iranian students living in Gothenburg- Sweden provided refusal responses for this study. The present study investigated how often Iranian male students and Iranian female students use refusal strategies when refusing invitations, requests, offers and suggestions in English. The results are then compared with those of American native speakers of English

that cited in Abed's study (2011) to find similarities and differences between the two cultures and two languages. Finally, Iranian male students and Iranian female students are compared in terms of their gender and social status in utilizing the refusal strategies. Iranian students, the refusers, deal with three types of interlocutors: professors, a high social status (+Power, +Distance), close friends, an equal social status (-Power, -Distance) and students, a low social status (-Power, +Distance). The research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What is the frequency of using refusal strategies by Iranian students in different situations (invitation, request, offer and suggestion)?
2. Do refusals differ between Iranian students and American native speakers of English in terms of the type and frequency of refusal strategies?
3. Do refusals differ between the Iranian male and female students in terms of the refuser's gender and social status?

The study begins with a review of the relevant literature and then explain the concepts of utilized in the study are presented. Next, the methodology section describes the participants involved, the instruments utilized, the data collection procedures and the analysis of the data in the study. Later, the results and discussion are explained, followed by the conclusion, limitations and recommendations for further studies.

2. Literature of Review

2.1. Previous Related Studies

The study of the speech act of refusal is a major component in the acquisition of pragmatic competence to achieve effective and successful intercultural communication. According to Austin (1962, quoted in Ahangar et al., 2012, p. 4), all utterances, regardless of their meaning, pose particular acts through the specific communicative force of the utterance. So, in cross-cultural interactions, interlocutors' understanding of the refusal speech act expressed by non-native speakers plays an important role in achieving real communication. This review of studies on how to say no is especially important because a lack of knowledge in the refusal speech act might be interpreted as an offensive act between the speaker and the interlocutors. Accordingly, this section aims to examine the interlanguage pragmatics of the refusal speech act that focuses on the utilization of non-native speakers' linguistic strategies as well as the impact of culture, native language, and proficiency levels in the second language to find the differences between sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics. Concerning this study, here are some relevant previous studies.

Beebe et al. (1990) examined the refusal speech act between twenty native speakers of Japanese, twenty Japanese speakers of the English language, and twenty American native speakers of English. Their data were collected by utilizing Discourse Completion Task. The findings show that the American speakers utilized indirect refusal strategies and offer specific details when giving explanation. While the Japanese speakers based on the social status of the interlocutor utilize more direct refusal strategies and give an ambiguous explanation. Moreover, higher Japanese speakers' proficiency in L2 decreased the influence of the native language, however, native Japanese speakers and Japanese speakers of English are different in terms of the order of the semantic formula, the frequency of the semantic formula, and the content of the utterances. It should be noted that the semantic formula is "a word, phrase, or sentence that meets a particular semantic criterion or strategy; anyone or more of these can be used to perform the act in question" (Cohen, 1996, p. 256, cited in Keshavarz et.al 2006, p. 365). Furthermore, the interlocutors of higher social status compared to equal social status utilized fewer direct refusal strategies.

Keshavarz et al. (2006) utilized a semantic formula to examine the pragmatic transfer of Iranian learners of English as a foreign language. They compared the refusal speech acts of one hundred and eleven Iranian learners of English with those of forty Iranian native speakers of Persian as well as thirty-seven American native speakers of English. The participants responded to twelve situations of the Discourse Completion Task, which utilized in refusal speech act studies by Beebe et al. (1990). The data is analyzed utilizing semantic formulas. Researchers found that Iranian learners of English at the advanced level utilized more pragmatic transfer in the refusal strategies than beginners and intermediate level Iranian learners of English and are more similar to the strategies utilized by Iranian native speakers of Persian. In addition, researchers found that the amount of pragmatic transfer in Iranian learners of English related to the eliciting speech act and the importance of native culture. However American native speakers of English utilized direct and indirect refusal strategies.

Abed (2011) focused on politeness strategies to soften refusing. He investigated pragmatic transfer between 30 Iraqi English foreign language learners, 15 Iraqi Arabic native speakers and 10 American native speakers of English. The participants were asked to complete a Discourse Completion Task. The data results revealed Iraqi learners transferred the pragmatic norms from their native language into a foreign language. Also, the Iraqi male learners utilized more refusal strategies than females whose frequency of adjuncts to refusal strategies was higher than those of the males. In addition, Iraqi speakers were found to be more polite when refusing an interlocutor of lower status, while American speakers were elicited when they declined an interlocutor of higher or equal status.

A study by Allami and Naeimi (2011) compared the refusal speech act between 30 Iranian learners of English and 31 native speakers of Persian in terms of frequency, shift and content of semantic formulas based on participants' social status as well as language proficiency level. The Discourse Completion Test was utilized to analyze the data, which included responses to twelve situations with four types of eliciting acts (requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions). Data were analyzed by the taxonomy of refusals' Beebe et al. (1990). The responses were compared with those of thirty-seven American native speakers of English in the conducted study by Kwon (2004). The findings show that Iranian learners utilized pragmatic transfer of native language when they refused their interlocutors. In fact, they employed more indirect refusal strategies and utilized more excuse and reason than the Americans. Also, there are differences between the utilization of the refusal strategies based

on the social status of the interlocutors. They provided more excuse and reason with the high and equal social status compare to low social level interlocutors.

In line with this study, the study by Hassani et al. (2011) looked at how social status and gender influenced the refusal speech act of sixty Iranian students in English as a foreign language at university. The participants responded to Discourse Completion Task in English and Persian with an interval time of two months. The results indicated that thirty males and thirty females in the study, with no significant differences in gender, utilized more indirect refusal strategies in Persian as well as when their interlocutor had a higher social status. They also utilized more indirect refusal strategies with high social status interlocutors compared to equal social status interlocutors.

Babai and Sharifian (2013) studied the refusal strategies in L1 and L2 of Persian-speaking learners of English. The study utilized eighty-six participants to explore pragmalinguistic strategies as well as social variables such as gender and social power differences. Throughout the study, the participants utilized L1 sociocultural norms in their L2 refusal strategies. So, there was no significant difference between Persian and English responses and they utilized indirect refusal strategies such as reasons and explanations. In addition, the interlocutors with the equal and high social status used more indirect refusal strategies compared to direct ones.

Likewise, Tamimi Sa'd and Qadermazi (2014) examined a comparative study on the social variables of gender. Twelve English Foreign Language learners and twelve learners from other faculties responded to the Persian Discourse Completion Task of the refusal speech act, which was adopted by Allami and Naeimi (2011). The results were derived from the refusal strategies of Beebe et al. (1990). The finding showed that the English Foreign Language learners utilized more refusal adjuncts and non-English learners utilized more refusal strategies. Additionally, both males and females utilized similar politeness strategies and there is no statistically significant difference in gender.

Alzebaree and Yavus (2018) examined eighty-three Kurdish EFL undergraduate students and fourteen native English speakers from various English-speaking countries to assess the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence of Kurdish EFL undergraduate students. Researchers utilized a Discourse Completion Task consisting of three suggestive and three refusal situations. After the pilot group gave their responses, twenty final participants

were selected and their responses were analyzed based on the suggestion analytical framework of the Martinez-Flor (2005) and the refusal taxonomy of the Beebe, Tahakashi, and Uliss-weltz (1990). In regards to making suggestions and refusal speech acts, the results reveal that the Kurdish EFL undergraduate students utilized direct and explicit strategies, whereas the native English speakers utilized more polite and implicit strategies.

According to the studies mentioned above, the refusal speech acts are analyzed based on social status, gender, power, and education level. As a matter of fact, previous studies on the speech act of refusal in both Persian and English languages have demonstrated how two different languages tend to employ various refusal strategies. The interlocutors' proficiency level in L2 and cultural knowledge of L2 are very important because an insufficient level of proficiency and knowledge will cause misunderstanding and miscommunication in the target community. When the interlocutor acquires the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence of the L2, the speech act of refusal occurs in the L2 with no pragmatic transfer from the L1. Furthermore, since the studies on speech acts of refusal in Persian seem too limited, this study differs from previous studies examining the refusal speech act and pragmatic transfer From L1 to L2. This study analyzes refusal responses under the influence of social variables, such as age and gender. So, we hope to complete previous studies and to discover any differences and similarities in the utilization of the refusal strategies in the speech act in Persian and English based on gender and power's interlocutor. Hence, in the following section, we have some descriptions of the theoretical concepts and analytical methods utilized in this study to better understand the speech act of refusal.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

There are many studies, which deal with the interlanguage of second language learners, who employ a variety of communicative acts, or speech acts, to access their communicative aims. The purpose of this section is to analyze constitutes language refusal and to discuss the relevant theoretical frameworks that influence it. Therefore, in order to understand the speakers' actual aims, one must be aware of how speech acts are performed in a given speech community. Throughout this section, I review the refusal speech act and the relevant theories on refusal such as the interlocutors' culture, pragmatic competence that is the proper utilization of language for effective communication, speech act theory which considers language as both information and actions at the same time, as well as politeness because the refusal speech act is a face-threatening act to the interlocutors. In fact, these concepts are utilized to examine the refusal speech act of native and non-native English speakers and they must be understood before further discussion can proceed.

2.2.1 Culture of Language

In intercultural communication, the concept of culture and communication in the foreign language and the native language are very broad and vague (Knapp and Knapp-Potthoff, 1987, p.3, cited in Farnia & Wu, 2012, p. 164). The notion of culture is an important aspect in foreign language acquisition. Culture is embedded in the language, so its learners need not only to acquire the lexicon and grammar but also the behaviors surrounding it. Since the functions of behavior in the target language may be fundamentally different from those in the native language, more attention is now paid to the culture of the target language in addition to the form of the language such as grammar and lexis (Chen, 1996, p. 1). In short, "communication is culture, culture is communication" (Hall, 1959, cited in Farnia & Wu, 2012, p. 164).

The term cross-cultural refers to two or more different cultures that are related to each other or included in the multicultural society (Samransamruajkit, 2014, p.10). People in the multicultural society need to communicate with each other, so they use the English language to communicate. According to Samransamruajkit (2014, p.11), multicultural society refers to a community in which its members share their cultures and ethnic backgrounds in order to

achieve their future goals. This is because the people in the multicultural society share some similarities but differ on various issues and use their mother tongue and English language together. Therefore, the multicultural society could be described by a common culture in certain aspects, which brings benefits but sometimes problems and threats (Josefova, 2014, cited in Samransamruajkit, 2014, p.11). The members of the multicultural society in this study include Iranian students in Gothenburg who are living in Sweden to build their future. In order to successfully communicate across cultures, Iranian students have to recognize the meaning of a particular speech act. They should be aware of pragmatic aspects to avoid misinterpretations that will lead to misunderstandings in communication. Next, studies dealing with pragmatic competence, pragmatic transfer and pragmatic failure are reviewed.

2.2.2. Pragmatic Competence

Since communication is the transmission of information between people, the study of language pragmatics plays a crucial role in communication competence. In fact, pragmatic refers to the study of meaning that a speaker conveys and an interlocutor interprets it (Yule, 1996, cited in Alzebaree & Yavuz, 2018, p. 151). According to Crystal (2008, p. 379), in modern linguistics, pragmatics is the study of language from the perspective of users, including their choices, their constraints and their effects on others. Crystal (2008, p. 379) goes on to say, “in a narrow linguistic view, pragmatics deals only with those aspects of context which are formally encoded in the structure of a language; they would be part of a user’s pragmatic competence”. So, pragmatic competence is important within communication. Nelson (2002, as cited in Andama, 2016, p. 11) defines pragmatic competence as “the ability to understand the language given or used in a particular context as well as apply appropriate form of language to achieve the intended purpose”. He (2019, p. 152) states that in order to express an idea, master linguistic knowledge, and cross-cultural pragmatic competence, the second language learners must pay attention to the appropriate form and context of expression, as well as learn linguistic form, functions, culture and situations. So the role of language, especially second language and foreign language, is very important to build bridges between cultures and develop successful pragmatic competence.

Pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics are proposed to derive pragmatic competence and classify the wide range of topics involved. According to Crystal (2008, p. 379), pragmalinguistics is described by some as the more linguistic “end” of pragmatics, where one examines these issues from the standpoint of the structural resources available in a language.

Sociopragmatics, on the other hand, examines the ways in which the conditions for language use arise from the social situation. In other words, English language learners who are learning a second language or foreign language can communicate successfully if they have pragmalinguistic knowledge such as lexis and grammar, and sociopragmatic knowledge such as the culture of the target language. Also, inadequate language proficiency and lack of knowledge about the differences and similarities of pragmatic behavior among speakers of various languages and cultures lead to pragmatic failure, which is the same misunderstanding and miscommunication in the target community (Farnia & Wu, 2012, p. 170).

“Transfer of the norms of one community to another may well lead to pragmatic failure and to the judgment that the speaker is in some way being impolite” (Leech, 1983, p. 281, cited in Abed, 2011, p. 167). In fact, pragmatic transfer refers to the utilization of the rules of one’s speech when interacting in a second language or foreign language (Abed, 2011, p. 167). As described in Keshavarz, Eslami, and Ghahraman (2006, p. 360), learners’ perceptions of the language distance between the native and target languages (Takahashi, 1996), learners’ learning contexts (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987), learners’ proficiency in the second language (Olshtain & Cohen, 1989; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987), instructional effect (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper, 1982), and learners’ time spent in the target language community (Félix-Bradsefer, 2004; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985) can influence pragmatic transfer. There are two types of transfers: positive and negative. ‘Positive transfer or facilitation’ occurs when the two languages share a common language system and the target form is transferred correctly. ‘Negative transfer or interference’ occurs when the two languages do not share the same language system and incorrect transfers occur (Brown, 2007, p. 102ff, cited in Abed, 2011, p. 167).

According to He (2019, p. 152), cultural differences lead to pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication; likewise, Thomas (1983, p. 91) states, “pragmatic failure is an area of cross-cultural communication in which one does not understand what is meant by what is said”. Moreover, the pattern of pragmatic failure in various languages can be related to the pragmatic incompetence of sociocultural differences resulting from differences in manners, values, and social factors such as the place and time of the conversation and the social status of the interlocutors in the language community. Therefore, native speakers are more sensitive to pragmatic failures than to other errors such as phonological, syntactic, and lexical errors (Hassani, Mardani & Vahid Dastjerdi, 2011, p. 38). Since pragmatic failure has been frequently observed in learners of English as a foreign language or second language, there is a possibility of misunderstanding, misconception, and even insult in the interpretation of the

word and its literal meaning (Rintell and Mitchell, 1989, cited in Farnia & Wu, 2012, p. 165). Therefore, having the cultural knowledge of the target language is helpful in acquiring pragmatic competence and avoiding pragmatic failure. To sum up, “pragmatic is the study of speech acts” (Rintell, 1997, p. 98, quoted in Abed, 2011, p. 166) and pragmatic competence is a crucial issue in English studies as a foreign language or second language. Since the speech act of refusal is the subject of this study and is related to pragmatic competence, I will review speech act theory and its classifications to provide a theoretical basis for refusal.

2.2.3. Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory is a branch of pragmatics and the use of language is the functional aspect of achieving the communicative goal (Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2018, p. 151). Since speech acts are universal, the methods of performing speech acts also vary by culture (Vaezi, 2011, p. 214). Oxford philosopher Austin, a British philosopher of language, introduced the concept of speech act theory, which was further developed by the American philosopher Searle. Austin (1962, p. 5) explains that the speech act is “the uttering of sentence [which] is, or is a part of, the doing of an action” and Searle (1969, p. 16, cited in Chen, 1996, p. 7) defines speech acts as “the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication”. Moreover, Bowe (2007, p. 9) states that “cultural differences may arise, and these may contribute to misunderstandings in intercultural communication”. Austin and Searle assist to recognize and perceive aspects of this problem. Therefore, the ability to have a successful performance of the speech acts in the target language requires a combination of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge of the target language (Hassani, Mardani & Vahid Dastjerdi, p. 37). In subsequent, I will further illustrate two classifications of speech acts by Austin and Searle.

Austin (1962, p. 108) explains that there are three types of “the use of a language” or speech act: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. The first type, “locutionary act”, has a good structure and a meaningful expression that allows the interlocutor to understand what the speaker is saying. The second type of speech act, “illocutionary act”, is used when the speaker wants to communicate something with a specific purpose. An illocutionary act refers to the speakers’ desired utterance with the intended purpose of informing, warning, undertaking, promising, apologizing, offering and commanding, which is determined by a certain force. Finally, the “perlocutionary act” refers to the effect of an utterance on the

interlocutor, such as to deter, persuade, convince, surprise or entice they to perform an action. Let us simply take the example of ‘shoot her’ (Austin, 1962, p. 102):

1. The locutionary act: “He said to me, shoot her”. It represents the actual state of affairs.
2. The illocutionary act: “He urged (advised or ordered) me to shoot her”.
3. The perlocutionary act: “He persuaded me to shoot her”.

Similarly, the locutionary act is “He said that ...”, the illocutionary act is “He argued that ...”, and the perlocutionary act is “He convinced me that ...”. Consequently, the illocutionary act is considered the most essential compared to the others because it contains the real message that the speaker wants to convey through the act (Andama, 2016, p. 13).

Searle, who was a student of Austin (Jaszczolt, 2002, cited in Andama, 2016, p. 13), notes that Austin’s classification of speech acts is flawed, because it lacks clear criteria to distinguish one type of illocutionary force from another. Thus, Searle (1976) presents the classification of speech acts into five categories based on other features such as discourse relations and the role of authority: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. “Representatives” refers to the “true and false” purpose of the speakers’ interests based on their beliefs, statements, assertions and claims. Austin’s illocutionary act is representative and differs only in other features of illocutionary force (Searle, 1976, pp.10-11). The second category, “directives”, includes speech acts that aim to make the interlocutor do what the speaker requests, comments, orders, advice, allows, invites, begs, pleads and entreats (Searle, 1976, p. 11). “Commissives”, the third category of speech acts, aims to get the speaker to do something, not necessarily to try or oblige the interlocutor to do it. Examples of this class are promises, threats and commitments. Therefore, favor, shall and intend are not among the commissive verbs (Searle, 1976, p. 11). The fourth category of speech acts, “expressives”, includes verbs such as welcome, apologize, congratulate, regret, condole and thank, which express how the speaker feels about something (Searle, 1976, p. 12). Finally, “declarations” are speech acts by which the speaker makes a statement. The speaker receives a notable point or statement after he or she has made a successful performance (Searle, 1976, p. 13).

According to the above explanations, when the speakers greet, request, apologize, complain, invite, compliment or refuse, they performs speech act. Thus, in this study, the speech act of refusal that is a response refused is discussed. Following are studies dealing with the speech act of refusal and its classification by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz’s (1990).

2.2.4. The Speech Act of Refusal

Refusal is formulated in response to invitations, requests, offers and suggestions and discourse pragmatic studies have examined refusal speech act as a significant issue (Fraser, 1990; Wannaruk, 2008, cited in Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2018, p. 153). In response to an initiating act, a speaker in refusal speech act “[fails] to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor” (Chen et al., 1995, p. 121, cited in Hassani et al., p. 38). If the interlocutor’s expectations are not met, the refusal speech act becomes a face-threatening act for the interlocutor. In other words, in a refusal speech act, the interlocutor learns how to say no to requests, invitations, offers, or suggestions, all of which are known to be face-threatening acts. Therefore, non-native speakers often use indirect strategies that could be misinterpreted as offensive by native speakers (Al-Eryani, 2007, cited in Kazemi Gol, 2013, p. 3). According to Alzeebaree and Yavuz (2018, p. 153), due to the significance of culture in determining the strategies used to express a refusal speech act, a non-native speaker requires pragmatic competence to be polite and avoid insults. So that, in the following, Beebe et al.’s (1990) classification of refusal investigates refusal response.

As stated, there is two ways in which the refusal speech acts can arise: directly or indirectly. The problem occurs when the speech acts are performed indirectly. Therefore, in order to interpret the intended message, interlocutors must carefully analyze the utterances and draw conclusions about their meaning, taking into account the context in which they were made (Andama, 2016, p.15). Beebe et al. (1990, cited in Chen, 1996, p. 8), inferred refusal strategies from the effects of pragmatic transfer from native language to English as a second language or foreign language refusal speech acts in response to requests, invitations, offers and suggestions in various cultures and languages. Moreover, according to Chen (1996, p. 8), several studies conducted by Takahashi and Beebe (1987, p. 133) on the refusal speech act show that indirect refusal differs by languages and cultures and “the inability to say no clearly and politely... has led many non-native speakers to offend their interlocutors”. Beebe et al.’s (1990, cited in Farnia & Wu, p. 174) divide refusal strategies into direct refusals, indirect refusals and adjuncts to refusals.

I- Direct Refusals

A. Performative (e.g., ‘I refuse’)

B. Non-performative statement

1. 'No'
2. Negative willingness/ability (e.g., 'I can't'; 'I won't'; 'I don't think so')

II- Indirect Refusals

A. Statement of regret (e.g., 'I'm sorry...'; 'I feel terrible...')

B. Wish (e.g., 'I wish I could help you....')

C. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., 'My children will be home that night.'; 'I have a headache.')

D. Statement of alternative

1. I can do X instead of Y (e.g., 'I'd rather do...'; 'I'd prefer')
2. Why don't you do X instead of Y (e.g., 'Why don't you ask someone else?')

E. Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., 'If you had asked me earlier, I would have...')

F. Promise of future acceptance (e.g., 'I'll do it next time'; 'I promise I'll...' or 'Next time I'll...' - using 'will' of promise or 'promise')

G. Statement of principle (e.g., 'I never do business with friends.')

H. Statement of philosophy (e.g., 'One can't be too careful.')

I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor

1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (e.g., 'I won't be any fun tonight' to refuse an invitation)
2. Guilt trip (e.g., waitress to customers who want to sit a while: 'I can't make a living off people who just order coffee.')
3. Criticize the request/ requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or opinion); insult/attack (e.g., 'Who do you think you are?'; 'That's a terrible idea!')
4. Request for help, empathy and assistance by dropping or holding the request.
5. Let the interlocutor off the hook (e.g., 'Don't worry about it.'; 'That's okay.' 'You don't have to.')
6. Self-defense (e.g., 'I'm trying my best'; 'I'm doing all I can do.' 'I no do nutting wrong.')

J. Acceptance that functions as a refusal

1. Unspecific or indefinite reply
2. Lack of enthusiasm

K. Avoidance

1. Non-verbal

- a. Silence
- b. Hesitation
- c. Do nothing
- d. Physical departure
- 2. Verbal
 - a. Topic switch
 - b. Joke
 - c. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., ‘Monday?’)
 - d. Postponement (e.g., ‘I’ll think about it.’)
 - e. Hedging (e.g., ‘Gee, I don’t know.’ ‘I’m not sure.’)

III. Adjuncts to refusals

1. Statement of positive opinions/ feeling or agreement (‘That’s a good idea...’; ‘I’d love to...’)
2. Statement of empathy (e.g., ‘I realize you are in a difficult situation.’)
3. Pause filler (e.g., ‘uhh’; ‘well’; ‘uhm’)
4. Gratitude/appreciation (e.g., Thank you’)

In the present study, the above classification of the refusal speech act is utilized to examine the pragmatic competence of Iranian students. It has become clear that refusers prefer to mitigate face threats and save face through indirect refusal strategies. In fact, they intend to be polite and prevent a failure in their communication. For this reason, studies related to politeness are reviewed to know how they may affect refusals.

2.2.5. Refusal: A Face-Threatening Act

In strategies of politeness, the concept of face, especially face-threatening acts, is an important factor for language users. Face is “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Brown and Levinson (1978) state that a refusal poses a face-threatening act to the context of verbal interaction between people. Due to the importance of politeness strategies in communication, the types of behaviors may vary and reflect the society in which they occur.

Figure1

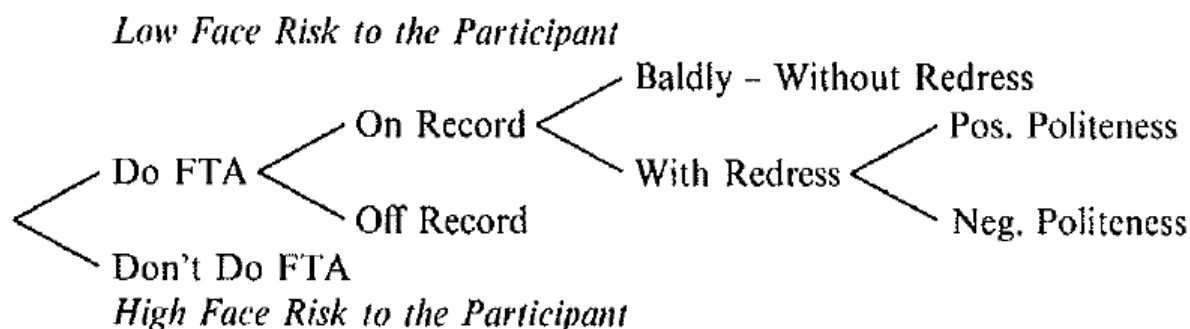


Figure 1 illustrates how Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed to avoid face-threatening acts by utilizing certain politeness strategies in the production of speech acts. First, speakers may refrain from a speech act if it poses a high face risk to the interlocutor. Second, speakers may keep themselves bald on record by expressing the speech acts directly. Third, off-record politeness or conventionalized indirectness is utilized speech act with some degree of ambiguity to avoid threats. Fourth, a positive politeness strategy can be the way a speaker shows solidarity with the interlocutor's positive face-wants. Finally, speakers may utilize a negative politeness strategy to not disturb the interlocutor's negative face-wants and maintain politeness (Gungormezler, 2014, p.7).

“Positive face” and “negative face” are two main strategies that define “face as wants” (Brown and Levinson, 1987, cited in Samransamruajkit, 2014, p.22). Positive politeness strategies include showing “gratitude, thanking, seeking pseudo-agreement, avoiding disagreement, promising, and presupposing”. Negative politeness strategies, on the other hand, utilize “apologizing, being pessimistic, mitigating refusal, setting condition for the past and hedging” in indirect communication (Lee & Park, 2011; Wagner, 2004 and Yang, 2008, cited in Samransamruajkit, 2014, pp.8-9).

Speakers can mitigate threats to face by utilizing politeness strategies and indirect strategies based on social status, such as social distance and power (Brown and Levinson, 1987, as cited in Gungormezler, 2014, p.7). Moreover, power can refer to authority and influence, depending on the context (Liu, 2004, p. 15, cited in Andama, 2016, p. 21). Likewise, power is a definition of the relation between speakers and interlocutors. That is to say, there are three types of power between speakers and interlocutors: high social status (+Power, +Distance), equal social status (-Power, -Distance) and low social status (-Power,

+Distance). In all cultures, both positive and negative faces are considered as face-threatening acts, thus the pragmatic transfer of the refusal speech act from one language to another can be uncomfortable for both the speaker's face and the interlocutor's face. Therefore, both the speaker and the interlocutor must save their face across social status to prevent pragmatic failures in communication. In the following sections, we will see how and to what extent these concepts are utilized in this study.

3. Methodology

This section is about the actions taken to research and study a topic. Thus, we will examine the method utilized in this study, i.e., participants, instruments, data collection procedures and data analysis.

3.1. Participants

The participants were 24 Iranian students living in Gothenburg- Sweden. Of these, 12 were males and 12 were females studying in different fields at the time of participation in this study. They were all enrolled at Gothenburg and Chalmers Universities and spoke Persian as their first language. Their ages ranged from 26 to 42 years with an average age of 36 years for males and 33 years for females. 2 of the 12 Iranian male students were undergraduate students, 7 of them were master's students and 3 of them were Ph.D. students. On the other hand, 2 of the 12 Iranian female students were bachelor's students, 9 of them were master's students and 1 of them was a Ph.D. student. At the time of this study, the duration of their residence in Sweden ranged from 2 month to 10 years.

3.2. Instruments

Two types of instruments were utilized for data collection in this study: A background survey included information on gender, age, level of study and length of residence in Sweden. Participants then completed a background survey and were asked to participate in Discourse Completion Task. Research data were then collected utilizing a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT). In this study, the Discourse Completion Task includes 12 selected situations (see Appendix A) from 16 real life situations utilized in Babai & Sharifian's study (2013). This test was originally designed by Beebe et al. (1990). Babaie and sharifian (2013, p. 814) stated that "all the situations were written down following Brown's (2001, p. 44) guidelines for developing good questionnaire items". In each case, the task was designed to decline

interlocutor with higher social status, equal social status and lower social status. They were divided into four groups: Invitations (situations 1, 5 and 9), requests (situations 2, 6 and 10), offers (situations 3, 7 and 11) and suggestions (situations 4, 8 and 12). Situations 1, 2, 3 and 4 include refusals to a higher status interlocutor (professor), situations 5, 6, 7 and 8 include refusals to an interlocutor of the same status (close friend) and situations 9, 10, 11 and 12 include refusals to a lower status interlocutor (student).

Participants were asked to imagine themselves in the situation described and then write down their responses. According to Beebe and Cummings (1996, cited in Babai & Sharifian, 2013, p. 814). Discourse Completion Tasks are a useful data collection instrument in pragmatic research because they collect a significant amount of data in a relatively short period of time. In addition, Kwon (2004, cited in Babai & Sharifian, p. 813) states that Discourse Completion Tasks are utilized to extract data from multiple participants and to control participant social variables such as age, gender and social status. Although Discourse Completion Tasks have been widely utilized in pragmatic research, they have been criticized for some shortcomings such as response time reflecting spoken responses in real communication

On the other hand, the results of Iranian students were compared with those of American native speakers of English cited in Abed's study (2011). The American participants were 6 males and 4 females. They ranged in ages from 18 to 37 and lived in the United States or Malaysia. Most of them had academic degrees in English, engineering and business administration.

3.3. Procedure of Data Collection & Data Analysis

First, the study was advertised in the Telegram group of Iranian students in Sweden and then the Discourse Completion task was sent to the students who announced their cooperation. In fact, the participants received the task via Google Form. We asked the participants to read the situations and then gave them sufficient time to read and answer. In other words, the data were collected through the English Discourse Completion Task and then completed by a total of 24 Iranian students in Sweden. The responses were coded into various strategies according to Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification. To analyze the DCT data, each expression was separated based on the classification. To facilitate administration and analysis, various

categories were marked by various colors. This method was time consuming. Content analysis was also conducted to learn participants' perspectives on cross-cultural differences and their potential influence on the implementation of refusal. Namely, the classification of refusal strategies by Beebe et al. (1990) is divided into two main contents direct and indirect refusal strategies. Adjunct, on the other hand, cannot be utilized as a refusal on its own and is associated with direct and indirect refusal strategies. And two social variables were examined, namely the gender of the speakers and their social power differences. After establishing the methodology for the study, we can proceed to the presentation of the results in the following section, which provides an example for each situation.

4. Results

In this section, the findings of the Iranian students' responses to the twelve situations described in the methodology section are presented and discussed. The Iranian students utilize direct and indirect and adjuncts to refusal strategies in response to the invitations, requests, offers and suggestions in English as a second language. The data were categorized and then coded on the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990). In subsection 4.1, the type and frequency of refusal strategies in each situation is presented. In subsection 4.2, the frequency of the address terms and religious expression is examined. In subsection 4.3, the type and frequency of refusal strategies (direct refusal strategy, indirect refusal strategy and adjunct to refusal strategy) is explored in terms of gender and across the three different levels of social status including low, equal and high. Furthermore, in section 5, the overall type and frequency of refusal strategies employed by Iranian students (in response to the first research question) are compared to those employed by American native speakers of English (quoted in Abed, 2011) in response to the second research question. Next, the response to the third research question is provided based on the refusers' gender and interlocutors' social status. To put it simply, the data were analyzed based on type, frequency and percentage distribution of refusal strategies utilized as well as the effects of interlocutors' status and relationship distance between refusers and interlocutors.

4.1. Refusal Strategies in each Situation

In what follows, the differences in the Iranian students' responses in response to the research questions are discussed in detail. Situations number 1, 2, 3 and 4 concern the relation between the refusers as a student and their professor that represents a high social status. Situations 5, 6, 7 and 8 have equal social status between the refusers and their close friend who is the same age. The refusers as a teacher in situations 9, 10, 11 and 12 has a low social status compared to their students. It should be noted that in each of the twelve situations in which Iranian students responded to requests, offers, suggestions and invitations with various refusal strategies, one of the 24 responses is mentioned as an example.

4.1.1. Situation 1: The professor's invitation

Situation 1 represents a situation where participants have to deal with a professor whose social status is higher than them. To celebrate the successful completion of the project, the professor invites the students to lunch but the participants must stay at home and care for their mother. In one instance, students decline the professor's invitation as follows:

“Oh, I would love to join you but my mother needs me, I hope you have good time and enjoy”.

According to the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990), this response is comprised of four parts, with each part belonging to a particular refusal strategy:

1. Oh: Pause filler
2. I would love to join: Statement of positive opinions/feeling or agreement
3. My mother needs me: Excuse, reason and explanation
4. I hope you have good time and enjoy: Wish

Table 1 summarizes participants' responses in terms of frequency and percentage. Participants generally states 'excuse, reason and explanation' (27.58%), which is a component of indirect refusal strategies. The majority of participants expressed statement such as "my mother is sick". The second preferred refusal strategy was direct strategies, which is 'non-performative statement'. In this situation, the non-performative statements include 'no' (1.15%) and 'negative willingness/ability' (18.4%). The examples of the negative willingness/ability by the participants are "I can't come", "I can't accompany you for lunch" and "I can't leave her". The next strategy is 'statement of regret' (14.95%), which is indirect refusal strategy. In this strategy, most of the participants utilized statements of "I am sorry" and "unfortunately". This is then followed by 'statement of alternative' (8.24%), 'wish' (5.74%). The example of statement of alternative is "I need to take care of my mom". The statements of wish include "I wish I could join you guys to celebrate together", "I hope you have good time and enjoy" and "I hope you accept my apologies to not joining you for lunch". There is also adjunct employed by the participants, which is 'positive opinions/feeling or agreement' (18.39%). The examples of this strategy include "I am very eager to participate in the celebration" and "I would really like to accompany you and other students for celebration". In terms of 'gratitude/appreciation' (2.3%), the participants utilized the statements of "thanks for the invitation" and "thanks a lot". The instances of the 'pause filler'

(2.3%) are “oh” and “mm”. According to the Table 1, Iranian students utilize indirect refusal strategy more than direct ones.

Table 1

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 1

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
No	-	1	1	1.15
Negative Willingness/Ability	10	6	16	18.4
Indirect Refusal:				
Statement of Regret	7	6	13	14.95
Wish	1	4	5	5.74
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	12	12	24	27.58
Statement of Alternative	2	5	7	8.04
Promise of Future Acceptance	-	1	1	1.15
Adjunct:				
Statement of Positive Opinion	7	9	16	18.39
Pause Filler	-	2	2	2.3
Gratitude/Appreciation	-	2	2	2.3
Total	39	48	87	100

4.1.2. Situation 2: The professor's request

The participant in situation 2 deals with the professor who has a high social status compared to the participant. While the professor asks the participant to give the lecture a week earlier, the participant has to say no such as:

“As I work and study at the same time, it really seems that I couldn't fix the new time. So, please reschedule my lecture time”.

This response is divided into the following strategies in the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990):

1. I work and study at the same time: Excuse, reason and explanation
2. I couldn't fix the new time: Negative willingness/ability
3. Please reschedule my lecture time: Request for help and assistance

Iranian students expressed indirect refusal strategy 13 times, utilizing 'no' 2 times (3.18%) and 'negative willingness/ability' 11 times (17.47%). The instances of this strategy are "I can't make it for next week", "I can't prepare it earlier" and "I won't be able to prepare the presentation". On the other hand, most of the refusers expressed indirect refusal strategies such as 'excuse, reason explanation' (19%), 'criticize the request/requester' (14.29%), 'statement of regret' (12.70%), 'request for help and assistance' (11%) and 'set condition for future acceptance' (7.94%). Iranian students utilized 'self-defense' (4.77%), which is mostly in the form of "I will try as best as I can", "I would try my best to give the lecture any way". It can be seen that Iranian students made use of 'wish' (1.59%), 'statement of alternative' (1.59%), 'promise of future acceptance' (1.59%), and 'hedging' (1.59%) only once in this situation. As shown in Table 2, Iranian students employed adjuncts to refusal strategy. 'Statement of positive opinion' (3.18%) is expressed by "I would like to inform you", "I would like to do so". Similar to the previous situation, Iranian students utilized indirect refusal strategies more than direct ones. Table 2 shows the participants' responses in terms of frequency and percentage.

Table 2

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 2

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
No	-	2	2	3.18
Negative Willingness/Ability	5	6	11	17.47
Indirect Refusal:				
Statement of Regret	4	4	8	12.70
Wish	-	1	1	1.59

Excuse, Reason, Explanation	5	7	12	19
Statement of Alternative	1	-	1	1.59
Set Condition for Future Acceptance	2	3	5	7.94
Promise of Future Acceptance	-	1	1	1.59
Criticize the Request/ Requester	3	6	9	14.29
Request for Help and Assistance	3	4	7	11
Self-defense	2	1	3	4.77
Hedging	1	-	1	1.59
Adjunct:				
Statement of positive opinion	2	-	2	3.18
Total	28	35	63	100

4.1.3. Situation 3: The professor' offer

In situation 3, the participants have forgotten to take the wallet to a book fair. They do not like to accept the professor's offer to pay for an expensive book. Actually, the professor has a high social status and the participants as a student have to refuse the professor's offer. To begin with the analysis, the responses were divide into different parts. For example:

“Thank you for your consideration, but I prefer to buy it later”, each of which corresponds to a refusal strategy in the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990):

1. Thank you for your consideration: Gratitude/appreciation
2. I prefer to buy it later: Statement of alternative

As seen in Table 3 the majority of the participating students expressed 'gratitude/appreciation' (33.93%), which is an adjunct to refusal strategy. The instances of this strategy include “thank you for your offer”, “thank you for your kindness” and “I appreciate your consideration”. This is then followed by 'statement of positive opinion' (5.35%) and 'pause filler' (5.35%), which are components of adjuncts to refusal strategy. The example of statement of positive opinion is “I like your offer” and the instances of pause filler is “oh”. The first preferred indirect refusal strategy turned out to be 'statement of alternative' (19.65%). The statements of this strategy as given by the Iranian students are “I will buy the book some other day”, “ I could borrow it from the library”. The next preferred strategy was 'non-performance statement' of 'no' (10.71%). The final chosen strategy was 'negative

willing/ability' (7.14%), which is a direct strategy. Of the examples of negative willing/ability are "I can't accept it" and "I can not afford that". In the following, the Iranian students utilized 'let the interlocutor off the hook' (5.35%), 'excuse, reason and explanation' (3.57%). The examples of 'let the interlocutor off the hook' include "it's okay" and "you don't need to pay" and the example of 'excuse, reason and explanation' is "I feel more comfortable with not taking it". The Iranian students utilized 'set condition for future acceptance' (1.79%), 'criticize the request/requester' (1.79%), 'self-defense' (1.79%) and 'unspecific or indefinite reply' (1.79%) only once. Thus, the tendency to utilize indirect refusal strategies was more than direct refusal strategies.

Table 3

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 3

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
No	-	6	6	10.71
Negative Willingness/Ability	2	2	4	7.14
Indirect Refusal:				
Statement of Regret	1	-	1	1.79
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	2	-	2	3.57
Statement of Alternative	4	7	11	19.65
Set condition for Future Acceptance	1	-	1	1.79
Criticize the Request/ Requester	1	-	1	1.79
Let the Interlocutor off the Hook	1	2	3	5.35
Self-defense	1	-	1	1.79
Unspecific or Indefinite Reply	1	-	1	1.79
Adjunct:				
Statement of Positive Opinion	2	1	3	5.35
Pause Filler	2	1	3	5.35
Gratitude/Appreciation	6	13	19	33.93
Total	24	32	56	100

4.1.4. Situation 4: The professor's suggestion

Situation 4 shows a high social status where the professor suggests the students a topic as the final assignment. The participants are not interested at all and wish to refuse the professor's suggestion, for example:

“Thanks for suggesting the topic but perhaps I don't have enough background to provide a high-quality essay about it. Would it be possible to write about X”?

This response is divided into three refusal strategies based on the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990):

1. Thanks for suggesting the topic: Gratitude/appreciation
2. I don't have enough background to provide a high-quality essay about it: Statement of negative consequences
3. Would it be possible to write about X: Request for help and assistance

The majority of the Iranian students express 'request for help and assistance' (19.6%), which is categorized in indirect refusal. The refusers utilized 'excuse, reason and explanation' (15.69%) and 'statement of alternative' (15.69%) 8 times, which are both indirect refusal strategies. The instances of 'excuse, reason and explanation' includes “I am more interested in the other topic” and the example of 'statement of alternative' is “I would rather work on the topic I am interested”. The fourth preferred strategy is 'negative willingness/ability' (7.84%). The statement of negative willingness/ability is “I can not succeed in writing this article”. The fifth chosen strategy was found to be 'set condition for future acceptance' (5.88%), which is also indirect strategy. The statement of this strategy as given by the Iranian students is “if you allow me to work on my topic”. This is then followed by 'statement of regret' (3.93%), 'statement of negative consequences' (3.92%), 'criticize the request/requester' (1.96%), 'unspecific or indefinite reply' (1.96%) and 'hedging' (1.96%). In terms of adjuncts to refusal strategy, the participants utilized 'statement of positive opinion' (15.69%) and 'gratitude/appreciation' (5.88%). The example of 'statement of positive opinion' is “It would be great” and the instance of 'gratitude/appreciation' is “thank you for your suggestion”. Similar to the previous situations, Iranian students utilized indirect refusal strategies more than direct ones. Table 4 shows Iranian students' responses in the form of frequency and percentage.

Table 4

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 4

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
Negative Willingness/Ability	3	1	4	7.84
Indirect Refusal:				
Statement of Regret	-	2	2	3.93
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	2	6	8	15.69
Statement of Alternative	3	5	8	5.69
Set Condition for Future Acceptance	2	1	3	5.88
Statement of Negative Consequences	2	-	2	3.92
Criticize the Request/ Requester	1	-	1	1.96
Request for Help and Assistance	6	4	10	19.6
Unspecific or Indefinite Reply	1	-	1	1.96
Hedging	1	-	1	1.96
Adjunct:				
Statement of Positive Opinion	1	7	8	15.69
Gratitude/Appreciation	2	1	3	5.88
Total	24	27	51	100

4.1.5. Situation 5: The close friend's invitation

This situation depicts an equal social status between the participants and one of their close friends, who is the same age. Since the participants feel tired and like stay home, they decline their friend's invitation to the movie. There is one instance of the participants' responses, which is divided into three refusal strategies according to the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990):

"I am not in the mood, may be next time. And I will try to accept your offer next time".

1. I am not in the mood: Statement of negative consequences

2. May be next time: Unspecific or indefinite reply
3. I will try to accept your offer next time: Promise of future acceptance

The majority of Iranian students utilized ‘excuse, reason and explanation’ (14.75%) and ‘request for help and assistance’, which belong to indirect refusal strategy. The statement of ‘excuse, reason and explanation’ is “I’m so tired”. Next, refusers expressed ‘statement of alternative’ (13.11%) followed by ‘statement of negative consequences’ (11.47%). The examples of ‘alternative statement’ are “I really prefer to stay home and rest” and “I have a headache”. On the other hand, the instances of ‘negative consequences statements’ include “I’m not in good mood right now” and “I don’t have the energy to come along”. This is then followed by ‘request for help and assistance’ (6.56%) and ‘unspecific or indefinite reply’ (6.56%), ‘statement of regret’ (4.93%) and ‘promise of future acceptance’ (4.92%), ‘wish’ (3.28%). It can be seen that Iranian students utilized five direct refusal strategies, which are in the form of ‘no’ (3.28%) and ‘negative willingness/ability’ (4.92%). The instance of ‘negative willingness/ability’ is “I can’t come to watch movies”. There are also adjuncts to refusal strategy, which are employed by Iranian students, namely ‘statement of positive opinion’ (8.24%), ‘pause filler’ (1.64%) and ‘gratitude/appreciation’ (13.11%). The examples of ‘positive opinion statement’ and ‘pause filler’ are “I would like to come along” and “oh”, respectively, while the instance of gratitude/appreciation include “thank you for your suggestion”. Table 5 demonstrates Iranian students’ responses in terms of frequency and percentage.

Table 5

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 5

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
No	-	2	2	3.28
Negative Willingness/Ability	3	-	3	4.92
Indirect Refusal:				
Statement of Regret	2	1	3	4.92
Wish	-	2	2	3.28

Excuse, Reason, Explanation	3	6	9	14.75
Statement of Alternative	2	6	8	13.11
Set Condition for Future Acceptance	1	1	2	3.28
Promise of Future Acceptance	2	1	3	4.92
Statement of Negative Consequences	4	3	7	11.47
Request for Help and Assistance	2	2	4	6.56
Unspecific or Indefinite Reply	2	2	4	6.56
Adjunct:				
Statement of Positive Opinion	1	4	5	8.20
Pause Filler	1	-	1	1.64
Gratitude/Appreciation	2	6	8	13.11
Total	25	36	61	100

4.1.6. Situation 6: The close friend's request

In situation 6, one of the close friends of the participants asks them to look at the books. The participants are having lunch in hurry because they have to attend a class only a few minutes later. Therefore, the participants decline the friend's request that shows an equal social status. For example:

“Dear friend, I am so sorry. I have to get back to class quickly. I promise to look at them later”.

This example is broken down into three refusal strategies in the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990):

1. I am so sorry: Statement of regret
2. I have to get back to class quickly: Excuse, reason and explanation
3. I promise to see them later: Promise of future acceptance

Iranian students generally stated ‘excuse, reason and explanation’ (36.6%), which is a component of indirect refusal strategies. The majority of refusers utilized “I have to go to class right now” and “I am going to leave in a few minutes”. The next most chosen indirect refusal strategy was ‘statement of regret’ (25.4%). The examples of this strategy include “I am so sorry” and “excuse me”. The next strategy is ‘promise of future acceptance’ (7.59%), which is also an indirect refusal strategy. Most of the participants made use of “I promise to

see them later” and “I will definitely do it later”. This is then followed by ‘request for help and assistance’ (3.12%), ‘statement of alternative’ (1.58%), ‘set condition for future acceptance’ (1.58%), ‘let the interlocutor off the hook’ (1.58%) and ‘self-defense’ (1.58%). The participants utilized ‘negative willingness/ability’ 5 times (7.95%), the examples of which include “I can’t stay longer” and “I can’t wait”. In terms of adjuncts to refusal strategies, the Iranian students employed ‘statement of positive opinion’ (11.12%) and ‘pause filler’ (1.58%). The example of positive opinion statement includes “I would like to” while the instance of the pause filler is “oh”. It can be seen that Iranian students utilized indirect refusal strategies more than direct ones. Table 6 summarizes Iranian students’ responses in terms of frequency and percentage.

Table 6

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 6

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
Negative Willingness/Ability	1	4	5	7.95
Indirect Refusal:				
Statement of Regret	8	8	16	25.4
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	10	13	23	36.6
Statement of Alternative	1	-	1	1.58
Set Condition for Future Acceptance	-	1	1	1.58
Promise of Future Acceptance	3	2	5	7.95
Request for Help and Assistance	-	2	2	3.12
Let the Interlocutor off the Hook	-	1	1	1.58
Self-defense	1	-	1	1.58
Adjunct:				
Statement of Positive Opinion	3	4	7	11.12
Pause Filler	1	-	1	1.58
Total	28	35	63	100

4.1.7. Situation 7: The close friend's offer

In situation 7, the participants deal with one of their close friends who is the same age with an equal social status. They travel and the close friend offers a type of food that the participants do not like. Thus, the participants refuse the friends' offer. For example:

“Thank you! But I don't like it”.

This response is divided into two refusal strategies based on the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990):

1. Thank you: Gratitude/appreciation.
2. I don't like it: Statement of negative consequences

The majority of the Iranian students utilized 'statement of negative consequences' (28%), that it is an indirect refusal strategy. The instances of this strategy include “I don't like it” and “I really don't like this food”. The next preferred strategies are 'excuse, reason, explanation' (8.77%) and 'statement of alternative' (8.77%), which are also indirect strategies. The statements of excuse, reason and explanation as expressed by the Iranian students are “I am allergic to this kind of food” and “I am full”. The next chosen strategy was the non-performative statement of 'no' (7%) in the direct refusal strategy. Furthermore, Iranian students utilized 'statements of regret' (1.75%), 'joke' (1.75%) and 'repetition of part of request' (1.75%). The statement of regret is “sorry”, the statement of joke is “over my dead body” and the instance of 'repetition of part of request' is “what?”. In terms of adjuncts to refusal strategy, the refusers utilized 'gratitude/appreciation' 15 times (26.42%). The example of gratitude/appreciation is “thank you”. The Iranian students also employed 'statement of positive opinion' (8.77%) and 'pause filler' (5.27%) in the adjuncts to refusal strategy. The instances of 'positive opinion statement' are “it's perfect” and “you are so kind” and the example of 'pause filler' is “oh”. It can be seen that Iranian students utilized indirect strategies more than direct strategy in this situation. Table 7 shows Iranian students' responses in frequency and percentage.

Table 7

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 7

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total	Total
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			Frequency	Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
No	-	4	4	7
Indirect Refusal:				
Statement of Regret	-	1	1	1.75
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	4	1	5	8.77
Statement of Alternative	1	4	5	8.77
Set Condition for Future Acceptance	1	-	1	1.75
Statement of Negative Consequences	7	9	16	28
Joke	1	-	1	1.75
Repetition of Part of Request	1	-	1	1.75
Adjunct:				
Statement of Positive Opinion	1	4	5	8.77
Pause Filler	-	3	3	5.27
Gratitude/Appreciation	7	8	15	26.42
Total	23	34	57	100

4.1.8. Situation 8: The close friend's suggestion

Situation 8 takes place in the restaurant. One of the close friends of the participants suggest them try a new meal. The participants and close friend, who are the same age, are of equal social status. Because the participants have never tried it before, they decline the friends' suggestion. The following response id divided into two refusal strategies according to the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990):

“I am very hungry right now and I like to order my favorite food”.

1. I am very hungry right now: Excuse, reason and explanation
2. I like to order my favorite food: Statement of alternative

The majority of the Iranian students expressed ‘statement of alternative’ (22.58%), which is a type of the indirect refusal strategy. The instances of this strategy include “I prefer to have pizza” and “I prefer to order my favorite meal”. The second chosen strategy is ‘excuse, reason and explanation’ (19.35%), which is also an indirect strategy. The instance of this strategy utilized by the Iranian students is “I’m very hungry right now ”. The third most

frequently- used strategy is ‘statement of negative consequences’ (14.52%). The examples of ‘negative consequences’ include “I’m not in the mood of testing new taste” and “I don’t like to order something new”. The next strategy is direct refusal strategy, which includes ‘no’ (6.45%) and ‘negative willingness/ability’ (6.45%). The statements of the negative willingness/ability as utilized by the refusers are “I can’t take the risk”, “I can’t accept your suggestion” and “I can’t try new meal”. This is then followed by ‘let the interlocutor off the hook’ (1.61%), ‘promise of future acceptance’ (3.23%), ‘criticize the request/requester’ (1.61%), ‘request for help and assistance’ (1.61%), and ‘unspecific or indefinite reply’ (3.23%). The examples of ‘let the interlocutor off the hook’, ‘promise of future acceptance’, ‘criticize the request/requester’, ‘request for help and assistance’ and ‘unspecific or indefinite reply’ are “I love how it tastes”, “I will try that one later”, “I am afraid of taking risk”, “how do you think that I order my preferred menu instead?” and “maybe next time I will try your suggestion”, respectively. In terms of adjuncts to refusal strategy, the Iranian students utilized ‘statement of positive opinion’ (9.68%) and ‘gratitude/appreciation’ (9.68%). The example of ‘positive opinion statement’ is “it seems interesting” while the examples of gratitude/appreciation include “thank you for your suggestion” and “thanks”. According to the Table 8, Iranian students employed indirect refusal strategies more than direct ones.

Table 8

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 8

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
No	-	4	4	6.45
Negative Willingness/Ability	2	2	4	6.45
Indirect Refusal:				
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	4	8	12	19.35
Statement of Alternative	7	7	14	22.58
Promise of Future Acceptance	-	2	2	3.23
Statement of Negative Consequences	5	4	9	14.52
Criticize the Request/ Requester	-	1	1	1.61

Request for Help and Assistance	1	-	1	1.61
Let the Interlocutor off the Hook	-	1	1	1.61
Unspecific or Indefinite Reply	1	1	2	3.23
Adjunct:				
Statement of Positive Opinion	4	2	6	9.68
Gratitude/Appreciation	2	4	6	9.68
Total	26	36	62	100

4.1.9. Situation 9: The student's invitation

The participants of this situation deal with their student with a low social status. The participants as a teacher have a Ph.D. exam and have been invited to their student's birthday party. Thus, the participant has to decline it. For example:

“Happy birthday. No, thank you. I have an exam next week”.

This example is comprised of four refusal strategies based on the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990):

1. Happy birthday: Statement of positive opinion
2. No: Non performative statement
3. Thank you: Gratitude/ appreciation
4. I have an exam next week: Excuse, reason and explanation

The Iranian students generally expressed ‘excuse, reason and explanation’ (25.58%) in the indirect refusal strategy. The majority of the Iranian students utilized “I have to study hard for my exam” and “I’m busy with my Ph.D. exam”. The next most frequently chosen refusal strategy was ‘statement of regret’ (15.11%), which is a type of indirect strategy. The examples of ‘regret statement’ are “I apologize” and “I am so sorry”. On the other hand, ‘non-performative statements’ includes ‘no’ (2.32%) and ‘negative willingness/ability’ (16.28%). The examples of the ‘negative willingness/ability’ as used by the refusers are “I can not come” and “I can not attend your celebration”. The next strategy was ‘criticize the request/requester’ (4.64%), which is an indirect refusal strategy. Most of the refusers utilized the statements “It is a pity” to decline the invitation. This is then followed by ‘wish’ (3.5%), ‘statement of alternative’ (3.5%), ‘promise of future acceptance’ (3.5%), ‘let the interlocutor off the hook’ (1.16%) and ‘unspecific or indefinite reply’ (1.16%). The example of ‘wish’ is

“wish you the best”, the example of ‘alternative statement’ is “I have to prepare for that”, the instances of ‘promise of future acceptance’ are “I’ll see” and “see you later”, the example of ‘unspecific or indefinite reply’ is “maybe next time” and the example of ‘let the interlocutor off the hook’ is “great!”. There were also adjuncts employed by the Iranian students s follows: ‘statement of positive opinions’ (13.95%), and ‘gratitude/appreciation’ (8.16%) and ‘pause filler’ (2.32%). The examples of these strategies are “congratulation, I love to be there”, “oh” and “thanks a lot for your invitation”. Table 9 shows Iranian students’ responses in in terms of frequency and percentage indicating that they utilized indirect refusal strategy more than direct ones.

Table 9

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 9

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
No	-	2	2	2.32
Negative Willingness/Ability	8	6	14	16.28
Indirect Refusal:				
Statement of Regret	6	7	13	15.11
Wish	1	2	3	3.5
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	11	11	22	25.58
Statement of Alternative	2	1	3	3.5
Promise of Future Acceptance	1	1	2	2.32
Criticize the Request/ Requester	3	1	4	4.64
Let the Interlocutor off the Hook	1	-	1	1.16
Unspecific or Indefinite Reply	-	1	1	1.16
Adjunct:				
Statement of Positive Opinion	4	8	12	13.95
Pause Filler	1	1	2	2.32
Gratitude/Appreciation	2	5	7	8.16
Total	40	46	86	100

4.1.10. Situation 10: The student's request

In this situation, the student, who has a low social status, requests to borrow the teacher's book. Teacher must prepare for next week's session, and thus the teacher refuses the student's request. This situation depicts a low social status between the participants as a teacher and their students. For example:

"I need this booklet this week. I will definitely give it to you next week".

According to the Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification of refusal speech act, there are two refusal strategies in the aforementioned example:

1. I need this booklet this week: Excuse, reason and explanation
2. I will definitely give it to you next week: Promise of future acceptance

Iranian students expressed 'excuse, reason and explanation' 24 times (38.71%), which is an indirect refusal strategy. The instances of this strategy include "I need them myself until next week" and "I need this booklet this week". The second most preferred strategy was 'statement of regret' (20.97%), which is also an indirect strategy. The statements of regret as given by the Iranian students are "I'm so sorry" and "unfortunately". The third strategy was 'set condition for future acceptance' (19.35%), the example of which include "after my session, I can lend it" and "I'll give to you at another time if you want". The next strategy was 'statement of alternative' (6.45%) such as "we can study together". This is then followed by direct refusal strategies that include 'no' (3.23%) and 'negative willingness/ability' (1.61%). "I cannot borrow it" is the example of 'negative willingness/ability'. The final strategies are 'promise of future acceptance' (3.23%) and 'unspecific or indefinite reply' (1.61%). The examples of 'promise of future acceptance' and 'unspecific or indefinite reply' are "I will definitely give it to you next week" and "maybe we can study together", respectively. In terms of adjuncts to refusal strategy, the Iranian students utilized 'pause filler' 3 times (4.84%). The example of 'pause filler' is "oh". In this situation, Iranian students utilized indirect refusal strategy more often than direct ones. Table 10 summarizes Iranian students' responses in the form of frequency and percentage.

Table 10

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 10

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
No	-	2	2	3.23
Negative Willingness/Ability	-	1	1	1.61
Indirect Refusal:				
Statement of Regret	7	6	13	20.97
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	12	12	24	38.71
Statement of Alternative	2	2	4	6.45
Set Condition for Future Acceptance	7	5	12	19.35
Promise of Future Acceptance	1	1	2	3.23
Unspecific or Indefinite Reply	-	1	1	1.61
Adjunct:				
Pause Filler	1	2	3	4.84
Total	30	32	62	100

4.1.11. Situation 11: The student's offer

This situation depicts a social status between the participants as a teacher and their students, the latter of which has a low social status. The student breaks the new camera of the teacher. The student apologizes and offers to replace it with a new camera. However, the participant refuses the student's offer. For example:

“Are you sure? But it was an accident and you don't have to buy it”.

This response is divided into three parts, each of which belongs to a particular refusal strategy in the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990):

1. Are you sure: Criticize the request/requester
2. It was an accident: Statement of positive opinion/feeling
3. You don't have to buy it: Let the interlocutor off the hook

Iranian students generally deployed 'let the interlocutor off the hook' (41.67%), which is a component of indirect refusal strategies. The majority of refusers expressed statements

such as “no worries”, “It’s ok”, “you don’t have to replace it” and “no problem”. The next most chosen direct refusal strategy was ‘negative willing/ability’ (8.33%). The instances of the ‘negative willingness/ability’ include “I can’t accept your offer to replace it” and “you can’t afford to buy a new one”. The next indirect refusal strategy was found to be ‘postponement’ (6.67%) and most of the refusers utilized the statements of “I will use its guarantee” and “I will fix it”. This is then followed by ‘excuse, reason, explanation’ (5%), ‘criticize the request/requester’ (3.33%), ‘unspecific or indefinite reply’ (3.33%). The examples of ‘excuse, reason and explanation’ are “It has guaranty” and “it was my birthday present”. The statements of ‘criticize the request/requester’ include “that’s bad”, “are you sure?”. With regard to ‘unspecific or indefinite reply’, the refusers utilized “there is not urgent to replace it soon”. The Iranian students only made use of ‘set condition for future acceptance’ (1.67%) and ‘promise of future acceptance’ (1.67%) once. The statements of ‘set condition for future acceptance’ and ‘promise of future acceptance’ are “let me see if I can repair it” and “we will talk about that later”. The participating students also employed adjuncts to refusal strategy consisting of ‘positive opinions/feeling or agreement’ statements. The next adjunct to refusal was ‘pause filler’ (5%) such as “oh”. Hence, Iranian students utilized indirect refusal strategies more frequently than direct ones. Table 11 represents Iranian students’ responses in terms of frequency and percentage.

Table 11

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 11

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
No	3	-	3	5
Negative Willingness/Ability	3	2	5	8.33
Indirect Refusal:				
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	2	1	3	5
Set Condition for Future Acceptance	1	-	1	1.67
Promise of Future Acceptance	-	1	1	1.67
Criticize the Request/ Requester	-	2	2	3.33

Let the Interlocutor off the Hook	11	14	25	41.67
Unspecific or Indefinite Reply	1	1	2	3.33
Postponement	2	2	4	6.67
Adjunct:				
Statement of Positive Opinion	5	5	10	16.66
Pause Filler	1	2	3	5
Gratitude/Appreciation	1	-	1	1.67
Total	30	30	60	100

4.1.12. Situation 12: The student's suggestion

Finally, in this situation, there is a teacher and a student who works in a laptop store. The situation depicts a low social status. The student is a shop assistant and suggests a model of laptop that the participants had it before. As a result, the teacher refuses the student's suggestion. For example:

“Because I already had this brand and I am not satisfied with its function, please suggest another item”.

Based on Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification of refusal speech act, this response is coded as follows:

1. I already had this brand: Excuse, reason and explanation
2. I am not satisfied with its function: Statement of negative consequences
3. Please suggest another item: Request for help and assistance

The majority of the Iranian students expressed 'statement of negative consequences' (25.8%), which is an indirect refusal strategy. The instances of this strategy were “I'm not satisfied with it”, “I hadn't a good experience of this model” and “I don't want that brand”. The second preferred indirect refusal strategy was 'statement of alternative' (19.36%) such as “I want to buy another brand”, “I would like to try something else” and “I prefer the X brand”. The third chosen strategy was 'excuse, reason and explanation' (17.73%). The example of this indirect refusal strategy was “I've had one of X's laptops recently”. The next strategy was 'request for help' (8.1%) such as “can you please suggest me another one?” and “what do you think?”. This is then followed by 'non-performative statement' of 'no' (6.45%), 'Criticize the request/requester' (1/61%), 'let the interlocutor off the hook' (1.61%) and

‘postponement’ (1.61%) utilize once. The instances of ‘criticize the request/requester’, ‘let the interlocutor off the hook’ and ‘postponement’ are “I prefer not to use it again”, “right” and “I would think of that”. In terms of adjuncts to refusal strategy, the Iranian students employed ‘gratitude/appreciation’ 8 times (12.90%). The examples of ‘gratitude/appreciation’ include “thank you for your suggestion” and “thank you for your help”. The next adjunct to refusal strategy was ‘statement of positive opinion’ (3.22%) such as “I would like to have another brand”. The final adjunct to refusal strategy was ‘pause filler’ (1.61%) such as “mm”. Table 12 summarizes Iranian students’ responses in the form of frequency and percentage, indicating that there is a tendency to utilize indirect refusal strategies more frequently compared to direct refusal strategies.

Table 12

Usage Type and Frequency of Refusal Strategies of Situation 12

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Direct Refusal:				
No	-	4	4	6.45
Indirect Refusal:				
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	6	5	11	17.73
Statement of Alternative	6	6	12	19.36
Statement of Negative Consequences	10	6	16	25.8
Criticize the Request/ Requester	-	1	1	1.61
Request for Help and Assistance	3	2	5	8.1
Let the Interlocutor off the Hook	1	-	1	1.61
Postponement	-	1	1	1.61
Adjunct:				
Statement of Positive Opinion	-	2	2	3.22
Pause Filler	-	1	1	1.61
Gratitude/Appreciation	2	6	8	12.90
Total	28	34	62	100

As a result, this study demonstrates that the Iranian students utilized the indirect refusal strategies more than direct refusal strategies. Based on coded data, they made use of a total of 768 strategies. The results also indicate that the Iranian students have utilized the direct refusal strategy of ‘negative willingness/ability’ most frequently. In the case of indirect refusal strategies, the Iranian students utilized the indirect refusal strategies of ‘excuse, reason, and explanation’ more frequently. The second most frequently used strategy as found to be the indirect refusal of ‘statement of regret’. Iranian students also made use of other indirect refusal strategies as follows: ‘statement of alternative’, ‘request for help and assistance’, ‘let the interlocutor off the hook’, ‘criticize the request/requester’, ‘promise of future acceptance’, ‘statement of native consequences’, ‘wish’, ‘unspecific or indefinite reply’, ‘self-defense’, ‘postponement’, ‘hedging’, ‘joke’ and ‘repetition’. Iranian students did not employ the refusal strategies of ‘statement of principle’, ‘statement of philosophy’, ‘guilt trip’, ‘lack of enthusiasm’, ‘avoidance’ and ‘topic switch’. In addition to these strategies, Iranian students utilized adjuncts to mitigate their direct and indirect refusal speech acts. They utilized the three of the four types of adjuncts that could not stand alone to function as a refusal. The most utilized adjunct to refusal strategies was ‘statement of positive opinion’. Other types of adjuncts to mitigate the refusal direct and indirect strategies were ‘gratitude/appreciation’ and ‘Pause filler’. It is also noteworthy that the Iranian students did not deploy the adjunct to refusal strategy of ‘statement of empathy’.

4.2. Frequency of Other Findings

Basically, address terms have roots in the sociocultural context of a society. In Persian, speakers usually address their interlocutors with different styles. In this study, the Iranian female students utilized the address term 11 times whereas their male counterparts utilized the address term 9 times when declining the interlocutors’ invitation, request, offer and suggestion. In addition, in order to express the address term, Iranian students made use of the job title ‘professor’, honorifics or terms of formality ‘sir’, ‘man’ as well as terms of intimacy ‘dear’, ‘my friend’, ‘honey’, ‘dear friend’. To summarize, the address term is a sign of valuable sociolinguistic information about the interlocutors and their relationship. In other words, Iranian students, when utilizing different address terms, consider social variables such as power and social distance as a crucial component in employing the refusal strategies.

As well as address terms, religious expression are also very common in Iranian culture. Islam is the official religion in Iran and thus Arabic expressions are utilized in daily speech acts. In fact, religious expression represents the Islamic practice within the culture. Unlike the Iranian male students, the Iranian female students utilized religious expression “my God” to express the notion of surprise, which is categorized under the ‘pause filler’ strategy. In this study, the examples of religious semantics in two of the responses utilized by the participants in situations 9 and 11 are as follows:

Situation 9: “Oh, *my God*, I’d love to be in your birthday but I have to study for my exam, otherwise I may get into trouble. Sorry”.

Situation 11: “Oh, *my God*. Be careful. We will talk about that later”.

4.3. Refusal Strategies by Gender

The total number of refusal strategies employed by Iranian students was 770 times. There are three main categories of refusal strategies, namely direct refusal, indirect refusal and adjunct to refusal (Beebe et al.’s, 1990). As an example, as seen in Table 14, the percentage of the total indirect strategies is 66.1%. This value indicates that the Iranian male and female students utilized the indirect refusal strategies 244 times and 265 times, respectively. The results also show that the numbers of indirect refusal strategies utilized by the Iranian male students are not significantly different from their female peers. In fact, the Iranian female students utilized indirect refusal strategies slightly more often than did the Iranian male students. Regarding the total number of direct refusal strategies use (12.6%), the Iranian female students employed 57 times, a relatively higher number compared to the Iranian male students (40 times). In terms of total adjuncts to refusal strategies (21.3%), the Iranian female students utilized the adjuncts to refusals (103 times) more than did their males counterparts (61 times). According to results, by and large, the Iranian females students utilized direct and indirect refusal strategies as well as adjuncts to refusals more than the Iranian male students did. The overall results of the type and frequency of the refusal strategies obtained from 12 situations, which involved an invitation, a request, an offer and a suggestion are summarized in Table 14.

Table 14

Overall Frequency of Iranian Students' Refusal Strategies Based on Gender

Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total	Total
			Frequency	Percentage
Total direct	40	57	97	12.6
Total indirect	244	265	509	66.1
Total adjunct to refusal	61	103	164	21.3
Total	345	425	770	100

In what follows, the utilization of pragmatic strategies of direct refusal, indirect refusal and adjunct to refusal strategy by male versus female Iranian students with different social states (low, equal and high) is investigated.

4.3.1. Direct Refusal Strategy

Direct refusal strategy comprises performative statements such as 'I refuse' and non-performative statements like 'no' or 'I can't'. The results of this part of data analysis show that Iranian students employed only non-performative direct refusal strategy, in each of the social states (low, equal and high). More specially, the Iranian male students utilized direct refusal strategies 40 times, while their female peers utilized the same type of strategies 57 times. When expressing a direct refusal, the male students were found to utilize 'negative willingness/ability' the most (37 times), follow by 'no' (3 times). The female students, on the other hand, mostly employed 'negative willingness/ability' (30 times) and 'no' (27 times). The most preferred direct strategy in this study was found 'negative willingness/ability' (67 times, 69.07%). The 'negative willingness/ability' (35 times) was utilized in a high social status (situations 1, 2, 3 and 4), where the students held higher power and formal relation towards the professor. This strategy was employed 12 times in an equal social status situation, where the Iranian students declined their close friends' invitation, request, offer and suggestion (situations 5, 6, 7 and 8). As shown in Table 15, the Iranian female students exhibited the highest frequency utilization of 'negative willing/ability' in contrast to the Iranian male students.

The next analyses show that the ‘negative willingness/ability’ was accompanied by ‘excuse, reason and explanation’, ‘statement of alternative’ and ‘statement of regret’, all of which were utilized to express refusal.

Table 15

Frequency of Direct Refusal Strategy by Iranian Students

Direct Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total	Total
			Frequency	Percentage
No	3	27	30	30.93
Negative willing/ability	37	30	67	69.07
Total	40	57	97	100

4.3.2. Indirect Refusal Strategy

The strategies of indirect refusal occur through the use of ‘excuse, reason and explanation’, ‘statement of alternative’, ‘statement of regret’, ‘wish’ and so on. By means of indirect refusal strategies, the student as a refuser mitigated the face-threatening act in order to soften negative effects. Based on the results of this study, altogether the Iranian male and female students employed a total 509 types of indirect refusal. From this total number, the Iranian male students used 244 times, while the Iranian female students utilized 265 times. In this study, the four most employed indirect refusal strategies by the Iranian male students were found ‘excuse, reason and explanation’ (73 times), ‘statement of regret’ (35 times), ‘statement of alternative’ (31 times), follow by ‘statement of negative consequences’ (28 times). The Iranian female students, on the other hand, mostly utilized ‘excuse, reason and explanation’ (82 times), ‘statement of alternative’ (43 times), ‘statement of regret’ (35 times) and ‘statement of negative consequences’ (22 times). Although there is not a large frequency difference between the Iranian male and female students, the strategy ‘excuse, reason and explanation’ can be viewed as the refusers’ attempt to save face in Iran. It was also found that only Iranian male students used ‘joke’, ‘repetition of part of requests’ and ‘hedging’ in their responses. Iranian students with different social status used indirect refusal strategies. The

four most preferred indirect refusal strategies are as follows. First, the indirect refusal strategy ‘excuse, reason and explanation’ was utilized 155 times (30.45%) in total, 60 times of which were employed by Iranian students with a low social status situations (situations 9, 10, 11 and 12). Second, the indirect refusal strategy ‘statement of alternative’ was utilized 74 times (14.45%), the most of which (28 times) occurred in equal social status situations (situations 5, 6, 7 and 8). The next indirect refusal strategy was ‘statement of regret’ used by Iranian students 70 times (13.75%). This strategy occurred 34 times in high social status situations (situation 1. 2. 3 and 4). Finally, Iranian students employed ‘statement of negative consequences’ 50 times in total with 32 times occurring in equal social status situations (situations 5, 6, 7 and 8). Table 16 demonstrates the results of indirect refusal strategies in terms of their frequency of use.

Table 16

Frequency of Indirect Refusal Strategy by Iranian Students

Indirect Refusal Strategy	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Statement of Regret	35	35	70	13.75
Wish	2	9	11	2.16
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	73	82	155	30.45
Statement of Alternative	31	43	74	14/54
Set condition for Future Acceptance	15	11	26	5.1
Promise of Future Acceptance	7	10	17	3.34
Statement of Negative Consequences	28	22	50	9.83
Criticize the Request/ Requester	8	11	19	3.74
Request for Help and Assistance	15	14	29	5.7
Let the Interlocutor off the Hook	14	18	32	0.2
Self-defense	4	1	5	0.98
Unspecific or Indefinite Reply	6	6	12	2.35
Joke	1	-	1	0.2
Repetition of Part of Request	1	-	1	0.2
Postponement	2	3	5	0.98

Hedging	2	-	2	0.4
Total	244	265	509	100

4.3.3. Adjunct to Refusal Strategy

Adjunct to refusal strategy is one of the three main pragmatic components in the classification of refusal speech act by Beebe et al (1990). The adjunct to refusal strategy cannot by itself perform a refusal, but it is accompanied by other elements of the strategy and can appear before or after the direct and indirect refusal strategies. According to collected data in this study, the Iranian male students preferred the following adjuncts to refusal strategies most: 'statement of positive opinion' (28 times) and 'Gratitude/appreciation' (26 times). On the other hand, the Iranian female students employed the following adjuncts to refusal strategies most: 'statement of positive opinion' (46 times) and 'gratitude/appreciation' (45 times). Iranian students utilized 'positive opinion/feeling or agreement' to mitigate possible negativity towards declines that have been or will be made. Iranian students also expressed 'gratitude/appreciation' when they endeavored to decline respectively. Moreover, 'pause fillers' were sometimes used to convey the feelings of the refuser, including empathy, surprise and thinking about the best way to refuse the interlocutor's invitation, request, offer and suggestion. The pause fillers "oh", "ah", "oops", "mm" were the least preferred of adjuncts to refusal, which took place 19 (7 times by males and 12 times by females) times out of 164 cases of this strategy. In fact, Iranian students did not show the specific intention 'statement of empathy' in the adjuncts to refusal. The Iranian male students utilized the statements of adjuncts to refusal strategy for 61 times, whereas the Iranian female students utilized them 103 times. This means that, in comparison to the Iranian male students, the Iranian female students employed this strategy more frequency than did their male counterparts. The results in terms of the type and frequency of the use of adjuncts to refusal strategy are found in Table 17.

Table 17

Frequency of Adjunct to Refusal Strategy by Iranian Students

Adjunct to Refusal	Male	Female	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Statement of Positive Opinion	28	46	74	45.12
Pause Filler	7	12	19	11.58
Gratitude/Appreciation	26	45	71	43.3
Total	61	103	164	100

5. Discussion

This section discusses the analyzed written responses of Iranian students to an invitation, a request, an offer and a suggestion as well as the results of the present study in relation to previous research studies listed in the literature review. The aim of the present study was to find out the frequency of Iranian students' use of refusal strategies in different situations and to investigate similarities and differences between ways of saying no in different social contexts in two languages and cultures. It is also noteworthy that the data pertaining to native English speakers were cited by Abed (2011) due to the short time frame and lack of access to native speakers. In this study, Iranian students deal with three types of interlocutors when refusing invitations, requests, offers and suggestions: professors, with high social status, close friends, with the same social status and students, with low social status. Finally, Iranian male and female students are compared in terms of gender and the Interlocutors' social status when utilizing refusal strategies.

The results of this study show that Iranian students utilized various refusal strategies in different situations. In relation to the first question of this study, various frequencies of refusal strategies are demonstrated in relation to 12 situations. The majority of Iranian students utilized more 'excuse, reason and explanation', 'negative willingness/ability' and 'statement of regret' in terms of inviting interlocutors with higher social status (situation 1). In terms of requesting, they employed less 'excuse, reason and explanation' in relation to interlocutors with the same social status (situation 6). In situations involving an offer, 'statement of regret' was not utilized while 'statement of alternative' was used more with interlocutors of high social status (situation 3). In situations where a suggestion was made, Iranian students utilized more direct refusal strategies in the equal social status (situation 8).

In response to the second question, the results of this study provide important information about the similarities and differences in the types and frequency of refusal strategies utilized between Iranian students and American native speakers of English. Prior to discussing refusal strategies, Abed's (2011) study should be reviewed to see how frequently they are utilized, and then both results are compared. According to Abed (2011, p. 172), the total number of refusal strategies utilized by American native speakers of English was 216 times. American native speakers of English utilized direct strategies 37 times (17.06%) and indirect strategies 179 times (82.94%). The majority of American native speakers of English used the indirect strategy 'excuse, reason, and explanation' most frequently (50 times,

23.26%), similar to Iranian male and female students. In fact, both Iranian students and American native speakers of English expressed various explanations when refusing invitations, requests, offers and suggestions. The next most common indirect refusal strategy was 'statement of regret' (27 times, 12.50%), which was also utilized by Iranian male students. This is followed by different results from Iranian students: 'attempt to dissuade interlocutor' 26 times (12.03%), 'promise of future acceptance' 19 times (8.79%), 'set condition for future' 15 times (6.94%), 'statement of alternative' and 'statement of philosophy' 11 times each, (5.94%), 'statement of principle' 7 times (3.24%), 'avoidance' 5 times (2.31%). 'Verbal' (1.84%) and 'wish' (1.85%) as indirect refusal strategies were utilized less frequently. As for direct refusal strategies, none of the American native speakers of English utilized 'performative verbs' in the same way as the Iranian students, but they employed 'non-performative statements' 37 times (17.06%), which ranked second among the refusal strategies, similar to the Iranian male students. As the investigation of the present study showed, similar to American native speakers of English, the Iranian students were more likely to use indirect refusal strategies than others. Regarding the second research question, the results showed that despite the similarities between American native speakers of English and Iranian students, differences in the type and frequency of refusal strategies were also found. This is also a clear indication of the relative similarity between Iranian students and American native speakers of English in avoiding certain refusal strategies.

Third, other factors that appear to influence the type of refusal strategies are gender and power. In the present study, Iranian female students utilized more direct refusal strategies, indirect refusal strategies and adjunct to refusal strategies than their male peers used. Since Iranian female students utilized adjuncts to refusal strategies more often, it seems that Iranian female students are more likely to employ positive politeness strategies. Nevertheless, gender was found to have no effect on the type and frequency of use of direct and indirect refusal strategies. 12 situations also show that the interlocutors in situations 1, 2, 3 and 4 have a high social status and the refusers use more direct refusal strategies than in the other situations. The similar use of indirect refusal strategies between the Iranian male and female students showed that they saved their faces to show their politeness. They attempted to be polite based on the culture of their first languages and to show their interlocutors that they have a reason for their refusal. The Iranian female students employed more refusal strategies in the professor's invitation situations, especially in high social status situation (situation 1), while they utilized less refusal strategies in the professor's suggestion situation (situation 4) with a low social status. On the other hand, Iranian male students utilized more refusal strategies in the

student's invitation situation (situation 9), while they employed fewer refusal strategies in the close friend's offer situation (situation 7) with the same social status.

In addition, the results of this study show similarities and differences with previous studies. In this regard, Iranian students living in Gothenburg utilized more indirect refusal strategies rather than direct refusal strategies, as did Iranian participants in the studies of Keshavarz et al. (2006), Allami and Naeimi (2011), Babai and Sharifian (2013) and Kazemi Gol (2013). Indeed, Iranian learners of English language utilized different frequencies of indirect refusal strategies to show their politeness. More importantly, the results proved that Iranian male and female students stated different orders of refusal strategies. Consistent with the findings of Alzebaree and Yavuz (2018), Iranian male students utilized more direct refusal strategies. In support of this study, Allami and Naeimi (2011), Babai and Sharifian (2013), Kazemi Gol (2013) utilized 'excuse, reason and explanation' more frequently than other refusal strategies.

The studies by babaie and sharifian (2013) and Allami and Naeimi (2011) contrast with this study in terms of refusal strategies based on social status. They utilized more indirect refusal strategies when interlocutors' social status was high and equal, while Iranian students in this study utilized more indirect refusal strategies when interlocutors' social status was low and equal. In line with the findings of previous studies, Hassani et al. (2011), this study shows that refusers utilized more direct refusal strategies with interlocutors of high social status. Moreover, these results differ from the findings of Beebe et al. (1990) and Hassani et al. (2011), who found that participants utilized fewer direct refusal strategies with high social status than with the same social status. Regarding the adjuncts to refusal strategies, the results of this study are similar to the findings of Tamimi Sa'd and Qadermazi (2014) and show that Iranian students utilize more adjuncts to the refusal strategies compared to direct refusal strategies. Another similarity between this study and Tamimi is that gender did not affect the results. In addition, Iranian students in this study utilized more 'reason, excuse and explanation' with low social status interlocutors, which is different from the findings of Allami and Naeimi (2011).

6. Conclusion

The speech act of refusal is a complex notion by means of which the refuser directly or indirectly says 'no' to the invitation, request, offer and suggestion of the interlocutor. Because a refusal threatens the negative face of the interlocutor, refusals are often expressed through indirect refusal strategies to avoid appearing rude and offensive. In this study, the refusers utilized indirect refusal strategies in different situations, which require a high level of pragmatic competence. Accordingly, pragmatic failure may arise as a consequence of limited linguistic proficiency in the L2 or a lack of L2 sociocultural knowledge.

Data analysis indicated that the use of the indirect refusal strategy and adjunct to the refusal strategy was driven by the tendency to use positive politeness and to soften the offensive. Moreover, Iranian students and American native speakers of English utilized indirect refusal strategies with different frequencies. The indirect refusal strategy 'excuse, reason and explanation' was the most frequently used strategy in both groups. They utilized this strategy to reduce the negative face of the interlocutor. Regardless of gender, Iranian students employed indirect refusal strategies more frequently than direct ones when the social status of the interlocutors was the same and low. In addition to most of the strategies in Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification, Iranian students employed some additional strategies not included in this taxonomy, such as 'address term' and 'religious expression'. Alternatively, Iranian students did not employ several strategies from Beebe et al.' (1990) classification, such as 'statement of principle', 'statement of philosophy', 'guilt trip', 'lack of enthusiasm', 'non-verbal of avoidance', 'topic switch' and 'statement of empathy'.

In general, Iranian students are attached to culture and social variables such as gender, social status, social distance and position of power, so they employed different strategies in their refusals.

In Persian, the frequency differences of refusal strategies are statically significant regarding the social variables of gender among the Iranian female students with a native-like competency to express the refusal speech act indirectly. Similarly, On the other hand, gender as a social variable influences the refusal strategies, as it is largely a determinant of the choice of refusal strategies.

In closing, since the participants in this study were Iranian students, some limitations of this study should be noted. Since the age range constituted only a small portion of the general population and other important variables such as the age of the participants, the methods of

learning English methods and the level of English proficiency should also be considered. In addition, the data might be different if the data collection had been conducted in-person. As a recommendation for future studies, it is suggested that a similar study be conducted with participants from other walks of life, as social variables may affect the use of refusals.

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Appendix: Discourse Completion Test

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Discourse Completion test (DCT) is a kind of open-ended questionnaire. The DCT consists of twelve situations that were divided into four categories of requests, invitations, offers and suggestions. The addressees consist of three categories: professor (higher social status), a close friend (equal social status) and a student (low social status). Imagine that you are in the following situations with a native English speaker. Please read the twelve situations carefully and refuse them as naturally as you can. Do not spend a lot of time thinking and respond with what you think would be the most appropriate refusal responses. This survey is for the thesis of first-year and please keep in mind that the data will only be utilized for research purposes.

Thanks in advance for taking the time to respond.

A: Participants' Background Information

1. Gender: Female() Male()
2. Age:
3. Level of study: Bachelor() Master() Ph.D.()
4. Have you ever lived in an English- speaking country?
5. How long have you been living in Sweden?

B: The Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

1. You just helped your professor to finish a project. To celebrate successful completion of the project he/she invites you along with the other students involved in the project to lunch. However, your mother is sick and you have to look after her. What would you say?
2. As a course assignment you need to give a lecture two weeks later in your class. Your professor ask you to give your lecture a week earlier than scheduled. However, it is not possible for you to get prepared for the lecture in a week. What would you say?
3. One of your professors is accompanying you on a visit to a book fair with a group of

- other students. About to pay for a rather expensive book, you realize that you have forgotten to take your wallet. Your professor/teacher offers to pay for that. However, you would not like to accept his/her offer. What would you say?
4. You have taken an academic writing course your progress in which will be mainly assessed on your term paper. Your professor suggests a topic in which you are not interested at all and you would like to work on something else. What would you say?
 5. You feel very tired and are not in a good mood. One of your close friends the same age as you invites you to the movies with him/her this evening to make you feel better. However, you'd prefer to stay home and rest. What would you say?
 6. You are eating your lunch in a fast food restaurant near your university. One of your close friends who is the same age as you puts his/her books on the table and asks you to watch them while he/she gets his/her food. But you are about to finish and will be leaving in a few minutes for a class. What would you say?
 7. You are travelling on a bus with a close friend who is almost the same age as you. He/she offers you some food, but it is a kind of food you don't like. What would you say?
 8. You are in a restaurant with a close friend the same age as you. Your friend suggests that you take a meal that you have never tried before. However, you'd like to order something tried and true. What would you say?
 9. Your student invited you to his/her birthday party; but you have to prepare for a Ph.D. exam and would not be able to make it. What would you say?
 10. One of your students wants to borrow your book. However, you need them yourself since you are preparing for next week's class. What would you say?
 11. Your student is taking a photo with your new camera when it falls down and breaks. He/she apologizes and says that she/he will replace it. What would you say?
 12. You would like to buy a laptop computer. The shop assistant, who is your student asks what you are looking for and then suggests a model from a certain brand. However, you have had a laptop from that brand before and you were not at all satisfied with that. What would you say?