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An Intercultural Study of Refusal Strategies Used in Jordanian Arabic and American English

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Abstract: The present study compares and contrasts the refusal speech act in Jordanian Arabic and American English. The refusal speech act is among the most dominant issues in disciplines such as educational environment and social work. Researchers become more interested in such topics as it helps them to compare and contrast between native and non-native speakers of English. Therefore, the topic is quite common regarding identifying the strategies among non-native speakers. However, very little research discovered the similarities and differences between native and non-native speakers of English. Thus, the researchers of this study tried to fill the gap by presenting an intercultural study of Refusal Strategies Used in Jordanian Arabic and American English. Refusing to take part in an action is a negative response that may result in a disagreement and harm the relationship between the listener and the provider. To prevent conflict when a presenter must deny a request, the presenter must deliver an appropriate denial and adapt to the interlocutor's perspective as well as the nature of the issue. The researchers used a modified Discourse Completion Test (DCT) as the research instrument. The findings reveal that both participant groups mainly preferred indirect strategies, followed by adjunct and direct strategies. In comparison, Jordanians tended to use more subversive strategies, unlike American participants who used a direct rejection strategy. The paper ends with an argument of significant future research areas.

Keywords: Speech Act, Refusals, Jordanian Arabic, American English.

1 Introduction

The ability to use language in various contexts is pragmatic competence [24, 33]. To be able to refuse while maintaining harmony, an interlocutor needs to have a high level of pragmatic competence, which can be difficult and complex for ESL and EFL students alike [5]. Refusals are found in every language. However, only some languages/cultures' denial techniques are in the same manner, and they need to be at ease in declining the same offer or request. When a person declines an offer or demand, he or she is engaging in the speech act of denial. It goes against expectations, and it is typically accomplished through indirect means. Refusal is described as a "face-threatening conduct that tends to destroy marital harmony" [36 p. 18]. Refusals, if misinterpreted, jeopardize personal connections and social relationships. Speakers deemed proficient in a second language may lack pragmatic competence because of their poor command of its syntax and vocabulary; that is, they may be unable to generate socially and culturally suitable discourse. Constructing refusals is a delicate pragmatic undertaking requiring solid pragmatic ability as a face-threatening act [11]. Most refusals incorporate several measures to avoid upsetting one's interlocutors since failing to reject appropriately might endanger the speakers' interpersonal ties. Therefore, this research provides answers to the following:

What are the similarities and differences between Jordanian Arabic (JA) and American English (AE) refusal strategies?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Speech Act Theory

A key focus of pragmatic studies is speech acts. A speech act is an activity that appears as an utterance. Because specific speech acts such as complaints are stated to be face-threatening, demonstrating a high degree of pragmatic competence [27]. One opposes the expectations of the interlocutors when performing a refusal, which is a favored reaction; as a result, successfully executing a refusal requires a high level of practical skill. Nevertheless, the learners

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need help developing this competency [2, 6]. Therefore, it is crucial to research this verbal act of refusal [1]. [7] asserts that rejection may offer essential insights into culturally ingrained social norms. Regarding intercultural pragmatics, the speech act of rejection would be a significant area of research for the Malay and Jordanian participants. Both participant groups will benefit from an increased understanding of intercultural pragmatics.

Refusals are activities that put one's face in danger and are considered commissive, requiring the refuser to take action [35]. Social characteristics such as gender, age, education level, power, and social distance affect refusals differently [20, 22]. It is a tough speech act that needs "face-saving tactics to accommodate the non-compliant aspect of the act," in addition to lengthy sequences of negotiation and cooperative successes [20, p. 2]. Refusal is one of the most challenging speaking acts to learn for both native and non-native speakers [27, 28]. Refusal is an incredibly fascinating area of research to analyze [16, 25]. The elicitation speech act also influences how speakers make refusals.

2.2. Semantic Formulas of Refusal

Semantic formulae, such as an explanation, a reason, or an alternative, show how a speech act is done [12, 13]. In the literature on cross-cultural pragmatics, the phrases "semantic formula" and "strategy" have been used interchangeably to refer to the same idea. According to [12], the refusal answers are categorized as follows.

Table 1: Classification of Refusals Based on [12]

Strategy	Semantic Formula	
Direct	Direct Refusal	
Indirect	Regret	
	Explanation (Excuse, Reason in others)	
	Alternative	
	Set Conditions for Future or Past Acceptance	
	Future Acceptance	
	Avoidance	Postponement Hedge
	Statement of Positive Opinion (Positive Feeling and Consideration of Feelings)	
Adjunct	Pause Fillers	
	Gratitude	
	Address Forms	

2.3. Past Studies

Numerous research on the speech act of refusals has been undertaken from diverse perspectives. Several studies have been conducted on ESL/EFL learners compared to native speakers [2, 8, 9, 23, 27, 31, 32]. The research on non-Arab (NA) and American native speakers (ANS) is diverse. [12] conducted one of the most significant studies on speech acts. They evaluated Japanese refusals to examine signs of pragmatic transfer in the order, occurrence, and content of semantic formulae using the DCT questionnaire. In contrast to Japanese learners, Americans arranged the semantic formulations similarly for both degrees (i.e., higher or lower status). According to the study, individuals used expressions of grief (apologies) more frequently with higher than lower-status interlocutors. This is a transfer from the Japanese because it is common in Japanese society to reject persons of various statuses using various semantic formulations. Other scholars frequently divide refusal semantic formulations into three categories: directness, indirectness, and adjuncts to refusals [10, 18, 26, 8].

Another study done in the Chinese context is [21]. He examined the commonalities and dissimilarities in intercultural communication of speech acts of refusals. The participants were sixty Chinese and sixty American students and instructors. A DCT questionnaire was used in this study. The findings indicated that Chinese and American refusals had more parallels than differences. For example, both groups chose indirect refusal techniques over direct refusal strategies, such as explanation, presentation of alternatives, and remorse. However, the Americans utilized more direct approaches than the Chinese. The study attributed these disparities to cultural differences between both groups.

A refusals taxonomy developed by [12] was utilized to examine the data from four studies with Malay English speakers. Based on the relative power and social distance, [34] investigated the rejection of English-language invitations by Malays and Iraqis. In the second study, [19] compared the English rejection methods used by Chinese overseas students to those used by Malay students while declining an invitation from an interlocutor of equal and higher status. In the third study, DCT was utilized to compare the methods Malay university students used to reject requests from professors. The studies' findings indicated that the refusal strategies of the groups under comparison shared more similarities than differences. Additionally, they found that Malay people offered longer and more in-depth remarks than their counterparts. Both groups favored less directness or negative willingness when using a direct technique. Both groups

were less blunt when rejecting higher-level interlocutors. [8] claim that religious commonalities and a collectivist cultural orientation are to blame for the similarities between Malays and Iraqis.

Turkey has the closest culture to Arab society. Both [15, 16] looked into the rejection techniques of Turkish English learners and native English speakers. The semantic formulations were investigated using a DCT in various contexts. According to the data, all groups used various tactics, with explanations/reasons being the most used semantic formulations. Furthermore, Turkish English learners were shown to use indirect strategies and adjuncts more frequently than direct ones.

DCT was utilized in several studies using Arab English speakers to prompt data on refusals. [12] refusals taxonomy was used to evaluate the data. 20 Saudi EFL students were the subjects of a study by [27] into the frequency and use of rejection techniques. According to the findings, Saudi EFL students used indirect refusal tactics more frequently than direct rejection strategies. [7] examined the usage of refusal methods and their occurrence among Saudi learners. His research found that Americans and Saudis utilized comparable refusal formulae, except direct refusal. Both groups utilized different semantic formulations in the substance of their refusals; Saudis used avoidance methods or provided vague responses. [2], the third study looked at the speech act of rejecting as 20 Yemeni students did. According to the findings, Yemeni speakers were less forthright in their refusals, citing prior "reasons" or "explanations" other than their wish to refuse. American speakers utilized a different semantic sequence, placing "regret" first and issuing blunter refusals.

[4] conducted a contrastive study on refusals with Jordanian and American in the Jordanian environment. He gathered information through written DCT, including invites, ideas, requests, offers, and follow-up interviews. He discovered indications of pragmatic transmission. Furthermore, Jordanian refusals were shown to be lengthy and detailed, with ambiguous justifications referencing God. His results showed that Jordanians used more indirect tactics than Americans. Finally, both groups used comparable indirect methods regularly. [23] conducted additional studies on Jordanian perceptions of refusal techniques regarding cultural and environmental aspects. The researchers discovered negative pragmatic transfer and the influence of cultural values in Jordanian EFLs. It is worth noting that this study found that refusal speech actions mirror the cultural values and customs of each group of students. Individuals with various cultural backgrounds could interpret refusals differently, which may lead to misunderstandings or communication problems.

3 Methodologies

3.1. Participants

The study included 15 undergraduate Jordanian EFL students and 15 native English speakers. The participants from Jordan range in age from 18 to 30. To counteract any potential gender effects, each group consisted of an equal number of men and women. The JA group participants were studying for various academic degrees. These participants' Test of English as a Foreign Language PBT scores ranged from 540 to 620, and their CBT scores ranged from 207 to 260. (TOEFL). Only those who had spent less than a year living or studying abroad in an English-speaking country were included in the survey. Most of these students had not gained experience traveling to or studying in English-speaking nations. Most native English speakers attended Jordanian universities as exchange students, but there were also English language instructors from Jordanian schools. The ages of the American participants range from 20 to 40.

3.2 Instrument and Procedure

The data collection method for the current investigation was a modified version of [12] semi-ethnographic DCT methodology. This instrument was selected because it allowed for cross-cultural comparison and could be given to many subjects in a short amount of time. Additionally, it gave the researchers total control over the many contextual variables [14]. Additionally, the scenarios created by [12] had already undergone piloting and reliability testing.

Instead of reading out the situation and getting written responses from the participants, the present study used an interviewer to read it aloud and record their verbal responses. Reading aloud and verbally answering on audiotape followed the methodology [30] employed in investigating speech acts of refusal. In their opinion, verbal elicitation is more similar to real-world conversation than written role plays. They discovered that the subjects they studied talked four times as much as they wrote.

Twelve instances that called for a refusal were included in the instrument: three requests, three invites, three suggestions, and three offers. The researchers then met the participants individually at a meeting location provided by the Department of English Language and Literature at Zarqa University (ZU), except for the American participant, who met at their place of employment. Then, the researchers gave the participants the task's comprehensive instructions. So, after reading each scenario aloud to the participants, the interviewer asked them to answer verbally via audio recording.

Each participant's interview took an average of 20 minutes to complete. For more than four weeks, data was gathered. Next, using the broad transcription convention, the audiotaped responses from both sets of participants were converted into written text.

3.4. Data Analysis

The classification of refusal methods developed by [12] served as the basis for the present study's analysis. Semantic formula sequences are words, phrases, or sentences that can be employed to perform the action in question and satisfy a particular semantic criterion or strategy [17]. The notes of students who declined to share them were dissected into parts that matched a semantic formula because they said: "I'm sorry, my notes aren't outstanding, and I'm scared they'll confuse you." Several generated replies did not fall under [3] classification methodology.

Four skilled coders checked the data in order to confirm the data reliability. They were all graduate students with English as their primary language major. In order to categorize such components, the authors of this study developed five semantic equations (see Table 2). Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data once all the information had been turned into semantic equations with a high level of reliability.

4 Results and Discussion

Therefore, the present study aims to answer the following: What are the Similarities and differences between JA and AE refusal strategies? Table 2 displays the rankings, frequency/percentages, and several occurrences of the semantic formulas employed by American and Jordanian participants for the two chosen groups. 432 Arabic rejection methods were produced as a result of the 15 Jordanian interviews.

- 1- Clarification or excuse, "I have an appointment at the same time."; "عندي موعد في نفس الوقت." was the most often utilized method in around 30.5 percent, followed by Regret (e.g., "I'm sorry."; "انا أسف") in around 14.8%.
- 2- Gratitude, "thank you."; "شكرا لك" was reported as an approach among JA participants, accounting for around 13.0 percent.
- 3- Negative ability, "I cannot today"; "الن استطيع اليوم" was utilized by around 10.2 percent as the fourth most often used approach.
- 4- In around 6.5 percent, the JA defined relation, "my beloved professor"; "عزيزي الدكتور" as a popular technique.
- 5- Other responses like, "I prefer writing about something else instead of writing about myself"; "انا افضل الكتابة عن شي اخر ما عدا الكتابة عن نفسي" reported approach by JA participants in roughly 5.6 percent. The other strategies were mentioned respectively in the table above.

AE participants provided 401 English refusal approaches.

- 1- Clarification (for example, "I have a very important test I need to study for.") was mentioned by the participants in around 26.7 percent.
- 2- Gratitude (e.g., "Thank you.") accounted for around 21.7 percent.
- 3- Negative ability, "I cannot make it this time." accounted for around 16.0 percent.
- 4- Regret, "I'm sorry..." around 11.2 percent. However, "that is a good concept" accounted for around 3.7 percent.
- 5- Non-performative, "no" was around 3.6 percent.

These strategies were the most common techniques chosen by AE participants. The comparisons and contrasts between the two groups of participants in spoken actions of refusal are shown in the following paragraphs. The first question was investigated to discover whether there are similarities and differences in the refusal strategies. According to [3], they favored indirect techniques, followed by adjunct methods, followed by methods and direct strategies. Examples of standard methods include offering an *excuse/reason/explanation*, *expressing sorrow or thankfulness*, *making remarks demonstrating negative ability/willingness*, and *attempting to discourage the interlocutor*. For example, JA (30.5 percent) and AE (30.5 percent) employed the explanation/ excuse method, which is the most (26.7 percent). The findings align with the abovementioned research on Jordanian Arabic refusals, which discovered that Jordanians, Americans, or Malays used the *clarification* strategy.

The main differences in refusal strategies in both groups were that Jordanians at all social status levels used indirect strategies than American participants of higher and equal status who used a direct refusal style. In contrast, other strategies showed differences for both groups. Furthermore, the refusals of American participants were lengthier than those of Jordanians. Some contrasts were that JA utilized some semantic formulas that AE did not. Such parallels and

disparities between the two groups indicate deeply ingrained cultural norms. The results are discussed in the next paragraph.

Table 2: displays the frequency/percentage, number of repetitions, and rankings of the semantic formulae.

Semantic formula	JA			AE			Total	
	R.	No.	%	R.	No.	%	No.	%
Unambiguous refusal	-	-	-	8	5	0.2	1	0.1
No	8	9	2.3	9	11	3.5	24	2.9
No thanks	10	6	0.7	7	7	1.2	8	1.0
Negativeability/ Willingness	6	42	10.2	12	55	16.0	108	13.0
be sorry	7	59	14.8	10	39	11.2	109	13.0
Hope	8	8	0.7	7	8	1.7	10	1.2
clarification/Excuse	9	123	30.5	13	97	26.7	239	28.7
Option	10	20	5.6	9	9	2.7	35	4.2
Future acceptance	7	9	1.6	7	6	0.7	10	1.2
Negative effect	-	-	-	9	4	0.2	1	0.1
Philosophy	-	-	-	8	5	0.7	3	0.4
*Swearing to God	9	7	0.7				3	0.4
Attack	13	3	0.2	9	4	0.2	2	0.2
Statement of principle	9	8	2.0	7	8	1.7	16	1.9
Criticize	9	7	0.9	9	4	0.2	5	0.6
Let the interlocutor of the Hook	13	3	1.2	9	4	0.2	6	0.7
Warning	-	-	-	9	4	0.5	2	0.2
Sarcasm	11	5	0.5	-	-	-	2	0.2
Conditional acceptance	9	7	1.2	7	8	1.7	12	1.4
*Using proverbs	10	6	0.7	-	-	-	3	0.4
Opinion	9	7	1.2	7	13	3.7	20	2.4
*Using taboo words	-	-	-	9	5	0.7	3	0.4
Asked for information	8	8	0.9	7	8	1.7	11	1.3
*God's blessing	6	10	1.4	-	-	-	6	0.7
Postponement	-	-	-	8	5	0.7	3	0.4
Understanding	10	6	0.5				2	0.2
Pausefiller	9	7	0.7	7	7	1.2	8	1.0
Gratitude	13	50	13.9	12	77	21.7	147	18.0
Negativity	8	8	0.9	10	3	0.2	5	0.6
Relation	10	23	6.5				28	3.4
Total		432	100		401	99.2	833	100.3

*Specify the addition of new categories regarding the current study.

The reasons why refusal methods are commonly used show that politeness is valued similarly throughout cultures. For instance, Jordanians tended to be less forthright regarding clarification content. AE participants tended to be more forthright. Jordanian participants seldom give justifications, but AE replies were popular. In doing so, Jordanians can accept the invitation as they can control their studying. Therefore, refusing is not a propensity or choice of an individual. However, no such physical reasons were found in the replies provided by AE participants.

As a result, cultural distinctions might be used to define this trend. Individualism is a significant feature of American society, in which individual goals take precedence over collective interests, and the liberty of group members is regarded as the most important. In contrast, Jordanian culture has significant collectivist elements, in which collective goals precede individual interests and maintain unity among group members, which is crucial. Jordanians explain uncontrolled occurrences or events beyond their control, such as family-related concerns. For example, while denying an invitation to attend a lecture from a professor (higher social standing) (situation 4), whereas Jordanian participants provided comments referring to family-related problems, AE participants provided no such family-related matters justifications. One JA participant, in particular, declined by claiming, "I'm extremely sorry dear doctor, I have to take my mother to the hospital that dayيومى فى ذلك المستشفى الى المستشفى. يجب ان اخذ امي الى المستشفى فى ذلك اليوم." This is consistent with the findings of previous refusal studies. For example, [7] discovered that Saudis are different than Americans in using

family circumstances. For example, Saudi participants said, "I have a problem in my family" and "I have to take my family out." Americans supply excuses representing their personal preferences, "I have to study" or "I'm not in the mood."

When it came to how JA and AE handled refusals, there were both similarities and contrasts. These parallels and contrasts in rejection strategies reflect JA and AE's cultural differences since language reflects culture. The DCT data give a window into human contact and would contribute empirical evidence regarding refusal performance in JA and AE. This information will be beneficial in cross-cultural comparative studies and other relevant fields.

5 Conclusion, Limitation, and Further Research

This research has some limitations. This study's subjects were drawn from one location in Jordan and US because regional dialects were not considered. Furthermore, the sample size was confined to a limited number of volunteers aged twenty to forty years. Different variables have different outcomes. These findings should be preliminary and inapplicable to other circumstances or people with other features. Furthermore, gathering data with a single instrument can only give insights into some aspects of Jordanian and American refusal strategies. "We should not anticipate a single data source to give all the required insights regarding speech act usage," say [29, p. 207].

Research has demonstrated the DCT's shortcomings compared to data collected in real-life situations. As a result, researchers are recommended to use different methods to understand the benefits of other methods better. That is, by including instances that represent a more comprehensive range of social contexts, some of the shortcomings of the current study may be addressed. Finally, the current investigation provided essential data that may be examined in intercultural comparisons.

The next step is to conduct more research to compare and contrast the refusal strategies used by different cultures and ethnic groups to foster cross-cultural understanding and reduce miscommunications among people due to improper use of the refusal speech act. Those from Jordan's Chinese and Western communities and students from other countries may be included in these ethnic groups.

We now have a better understanding of the English-speaking act of refusal in two linguistically and culturally distinct populations thanks to the current study which has been completed (Jordanians and Americans). Additionally, because speech actions are likely to be carried out relatively differently across cultures, it has been clearly stated that speech acts reflect cultural values and norms held by speakers from varied cultural origins. Such differences may result in misunderstandings or communication breakdowns when people from different cultural backgrounds interact. Last, the current investigation has found important information that may be utilized to compare and understand cultures.

Conflicts of Interest Statement

The authors certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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