How to Cite:
El-Dakhs, D. A. S., Alhaqbani, J. N., & Adan, S. (2021). Female university teachers' realizations of the speech act of refusal: Cross-cultural and interlanguage perspectives. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, *5*(S2), 1308-1328.
https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v5nS2.1821

Female University Teachers' Realizations of the Speech Act of Refusal: Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Perspectives

Dina Abdel Salam El-Dakhs
Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Jawaher Nasser Alhaqbani
Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Sofia Adan
Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

***Abstract*---**The current study investigates how university teachers decline students' requests and examines the teachers' refusal strategies from cross-cultural and interlanguage perspectives. To this end, 60 female university teachers at a private Saudi university participated in 10 role-plays which involved them in declining several students' requests. The participants consisted of three groups; 20 native speakers of American English (NSE), 20 native speakers of Saudi Arabic (NSA) and 20 native speakers of Saudi Arabic who completed the role-plays in English as non-native speakers of the language (NNSE). The role-plays were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data were coded using Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz's (1990) refusal model and Trosborg's (1995) model of internal modifiers. The results revealed the teachers' general preference for the use of indirect over direct refusal strategies and the American teachers' stronger tendency to use indirect and mitigating internal modifiers than Arab teachers. The results also showed that the cross-cultural differences between the American and the Arab teachers were limited and that there was no effect for negative pragmatic transfer for the NNSE. The results are interpreted in terms of relevant theoretical models and the existing literature.

***Keywords*---**cross-cultural, interlanguage, pragmatics, refusal, speech act.

***Corresponding author**: El-Dakhs, D. A. S.; Email: ddakhs@psu.edu.sa*
Manuscript submitted: 27 July 2021, Manuscript revised: 09 Oct 2021, Accepted for publication: 18 Nov 2021

Introduction

The current study examines the refusal strategies university teachers employ to decline students' requests. Several studies have examined the speech act of refusal, which can be defined as the speaker's "[denial] to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor" Chen et al. (1995), in different contexts (Kwon, 2004; Iliadi & Larina, 2017; Verzella & Tommaso, 2020). However, there is a dearth of refusal studies in the domain of teacher-student talk. Earlier studies on the realization of speech acts in teacher-student talk mainly focused on the speech acts of praise and criticism El-Dakhs et al. (2019); Lü (2018); Nguyen (2013); Tang (2016), to the neglect of the speech act of refusal. The current study aims to fill this gap because declining a student's request is a complex task. Before declining students' requests, teachers need to consider several factors, including relevant pedagogical values and principles, the institutional policies, the culture of the place, the teachers' prior knowledge of the students and the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students. Examining how the university teachers in the current study manage this task and exploring which refusal strategies they prefer to use is an intriguing area of research (Schegloff, 1988; Haverkate, 1990).

In addition to filling an important gap in the literature, the current study is significant for several reasons. First, the current study adopts both cross-cultural and interlanguage perspectives through comparing the refusal patterns of American teachers speaking in English (NSE), Saudi teachers speaking in Arabic (NSA) and Saudi teachers speaking in English as non-native speakers (NNSE) within the same private university in Saudi Arabia where English is the medium of instruction. The recruitment of the three groups allows us to explore the cross-cultural differences, if any, between American English and Saudi Arabic as well as the pragmatic competence of the Saudi teachers who teach university-level courses in English. Second, the fact that the current study examines the refusal patterns of Saudis adds further significance because Arabs are generally underrepresented in the pragmatic literature. The current study will thus shed more light on the use of the speech act of refusal among this population. Finally, the current study will have implications for novice teachers on how to best decline students' requests. The findings will also be relevant to further research on interlanguage pragmatics. The current study draws on the theory of Mixed Game Model Weigand (2010), and earlier studies on the speech act of refusal. Hence, the following sections will include a summary of the main tenets of this theory and a survey of the relevant literature. This will be followed by stating the research questions, describing and interpreting the results and drawing final conclusions (Egger et al., 2003; Bernstein et al., 2000).

Theoretical framework

Weigand's Dialogic Action Game or Mixed Game Model (MGM) Weigand (2010), views human beings as social beings that engage in dialogic interaction with the purpose of negotiating particular goals. In the current study, students are engaged in interactions with their teachers. In the initiative action, the students make requests while teachers, in the reactive action, decline these requests. The concept of "negotiation" in the model allows for the integration of several factors that could influence the interaction. This is particularly the case in the current study where

teachers need to consider several factors while forming their refusals, including their interpersonal relationship with the students, pedagogical priorities, institutional policies and their prior knowledge of the students. It will be interesting to explore how these factors influence the teachers' realization of the speech act of refusal (Caffi & Janney, 1994; Locher & Bolander, 2019).

The MGM is methodologically grounded on a few principles of probability. According to Weigand (2017), no strict rules can guide human interaction. Human interaction is instead governed and interpreted within a range of principles of probability. Among the principles that are most relevant to the current study is the "regulative" principle which mediates between opposing abilities and interests of the speaker (Weigand, 2017; Weigand, 2015). For example, in the case of refusal, a conflict arises between the teacher's purpose to decline the request clearly and explicitly and between several social concerns, including the student's feelings. According to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), the speech act of refusal is a face-threatening act (FTA) that threatens the addressee's negative face (i.e., one's desire for respect and freedom of imposition) because the speaker declines the addressee's request and thus imposes an undesired action on the addressee. In the context of a teacher-student relationship, in which maintaining a good rapport is a priority, how will teachers handle this FTA? This is a question to consider in the current study (Kealey, 1989; Machery et al., 2004).

Another relevant MGM principle of probability is the MGM principle of different worlds Weigand (2009), which postulates that people live in different communicative worlds based on their different backgrounds and will, thus, evaluate actions differently. In the current study, the principle of different worlds operates at two levels. At one level, a cross-cultural comparison will be conducted between the behavior of the NSE, the NSA and the NNSE. Coming from different cultures, it is expected that Americans and Arabs may behave differently particularly that they are often classified as belonging to different types of communities. For example, according to Hofstede (2001), Americans, and other Western communities, are individualistic in nature, and thus demonstrate loose ties among their members with higher emphasis on the individual's needs and priorities. Arabs, along with other eastern countries, are classified as collectivist and thus emphasize highly integrated relationships, value loyalty and support to others and pay special respect to hierarchical systems. It will be intriguing to explore the effect of this classification on the teachers' preferences in the current study (Takimoto, 2012; Takahashi, 2005).

In addition to the cross-cultural level, the MGM principle of different worlds categorizes all the teachers in the current study as belonging to one and the same communicative world since they all teach within the same university. In fact, talk in institutionalized academic settings is expected to reflect the values underpinning the educational culture of the discourse Hiraga & Turner (1996), and typifies participants' actions when shaping interactions (Araújo, 2012). Hence, the current study will allow us to explore whether the influence of the national culture, as represented by American versus Saudi teachers, or the influence of the institutionalized academic setting, as all the speakers are well-trained teachers who teach at the same institution, will be more influential in determining the teachers' choices of refusal strategies (Rinartha & Suryasa, 2017; Zong & Zhen, 2021).

Literature review

Earlier pragmatic studies on the speech act of refusal can be divided into three categories; namely, (1) monolingual studies, (2) cross-cultural studies and (3) interlanguage studies. Monolingual studies examine only one language either to discover the influence of certain variables, such as gender, age or formality, on the realization of the speech act of refusal in this language Félix-Brasdefer (2006), or to explore the dialectal variations within the language from a variational pragmatic perspective (El-Dakhs, 2018). The present section will not survey these studies because the current study adopts cross-cultural and interlanguage perspectives. Hence, the focus of this literature review section will be on (1) cross-cultural studies and (2) interlanguage studies (Atmowardoyo & Sakkir, 2021; Vysotki et al., 2021).

Cross-cultural studies on the speech act of refusal

Several studies have adopted a cross-cultural approach to the examination of the speech act of refusal. For example, Kwon (2004), focused on the cross-cultural variations in refusals by Korean speakers in Korea and American English speakers in the USA. The results revealed clear cross-cultural differences. For instance, Korean speakers' refusals sounded less transparent, less direct, and more tentative than those of English speakers. Another clear difference was related to social status. While Korean speakers tended to take a more mitigating approach in dealing with a higher status person as compared to other status types, English speakers did not seem to be particularly sensitive to one status versus another in their refusals. Another example is Iliadi & Larina (2017), who explored the speech act of refusal in British English and Russian. The results revealed both quantitative and qualitative differences in refusal strategies. The Russians used more direct strategies than the British while the latter did more face-work to mitigate their refusal. Along the same lines, Verzella & Tommaso (2020), compared how speakers of American English and speakers of Italian refuse a request. The results showed marked differences between the two groups. While speakers of American English tended to rely on positive face strategies (e.g., praise/encouragement) to mitigate their refusals, speakers of Italian tended to use negative face strategies (e.g., lengthy explanations combined with apologies).

Similar studies were conducted comparing Arabic and English refusals. For example, Al-Shalawi (1997), examined refusals in Saudi Arabic and American English, and found that the Americans were more direct and more concerned with the clarity of their explanation than the Saudis. Additionally, the Saudis preferred family-oriented excuses while the Americans tended to use personal excuses. The Saudis also used religious expressions frequently whereas the Americans recurrently used expressions of regret. Similar results were found by Al-Issa (1998), who compared refusals by Jordanians and Americans. Jordanian refusals tended to be lengthier, more elaborate and less direct, and also exhibited a high occurrence of religious expressions. Likewise, Al-Shboul & Huwari (2016), found that Jordanians used more indirect strategies than Americans, and Alhaidari (2009), showed that Saudis showed a stronger preference for indirect messages than Australians. This finding was often explained in terms of the collectivist versus individualistic perspective. Arabs, being a collectivist community, preferred

indirectness to protect in-group interests and harmony while Americans, being individualistic, preferred directness since protecting one's autonomy takes priority over the group (Vysotki et al., 2021; Menaka & Sankar, 2019).

Few studies examined the indirectness of Arabic refusals in light of the interlocutors' social status. For example, Morkus (2014), examined the influence of equal versus unequal social status on the realization of the speech act of refusal among native speakers of Egyptian Arabic versus native speakers of American English. Morkus (2014), confirmed the tendency of Arabic refusals towards verbosity, the frequent use of religious expressions and the preference for formulaic language such as proverbs and common sayings. However, he highlighted that Egyptians tend to be particularly verbose and indirect with addressees of a higher status only. A similar influence for the addressee's social status was found among Yemenis in a recent study by Al-Ghamdi & Alrefaee (2020), when they compared the refusal strategies of Yemeni Arabic speakers and American English speakers. Yemenis tended to be more direct than Americans with addressees of a lower or equal social status.

Interlanguage studies on the speech act of refusal

Interlanguage pragmatic studies have often highlighted that pragmatic competence often lags behind the lexico-grammatical proficiency of L2 learners Kasper (2001); Soler (2002), and that this delay in developing L2 pragmatic competence can lead to communicative failure (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; O'keeffe et al., 2019). For example, Wannaruk (2008), found that Thai EFL refusals are marked by negative pragmatic transfer which was motivated by the importance of modesty on the Thai culture, the lower language proficiency level of EFL learners and dealing with addressees of a higher status. Similarly, Bella (2014) investigated the developmental patterns in the ability of Greek EFL learners to refuse a request. The results showed that, although there is a great deal of pragmatic development with increasing proficiency, even the advanced learners' performance lagged behind native speakers in several respects. Likewise, Allami & Naeimi (2011); Shishavan & Sharifian (2016), investigated the refusal strategies of Iranian EFL learners versus native speakers of English (i.e., American speakers in Allami & Naeimi (2011), and Anglo-Australian speakers in (Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016). Both studies highlighted the role of social status in cross-cultural miscommunication. While American patterns for refusals were quite consistent regardless of social status, Allami & Naeimi (2011), highlighted that the Iranian EFL learners were particularly sensitive to social status and their patterns for refusals varied accordingly. A similar finding was pointed out by Shishavan & Sharifian (2016), who showed that Iranian and Australian participants exhibited different refusal patterns while making refusals to status equals, which could lead to intercultural miscommunication.

The studies on the speech act of refusal among Arab learners of English led to similar results. Darwish (2018), found some effect of negative transfer in Egyptian EFL learners' refusals. The instances of negative pragmatic transfer included the use of religious expressions and expressions related to the evil eye, the frequent use of statements of philosophy, and sometimes joking for mitigation. Similarly, Al-Mahrooqi & Al-Aghbari (2016); Alrefaee & Al-Ghamdi (2019), highlighted several

instances of negative transfer in the refusal of Yemeni EFL learners. Al-Mahrooqi & Al-Aghbari (2016), found that the participants' refusals were largely inappropriate and inaccurate. The refusals were heavily influenced by the Yemeni culture and reflected lack of knowledge of the role of social status when issuing refusals. Alrefaee & Al-Ghamdi (2019), also found several instances of negative transfer and highlighted that the low proficiency level in English is an important contributing factor. Altheeby (2018), contributed to this research direction through comparing the refusal patterns of Saudi EFL and ESL learners with those of native speakers of British English. The ESL and NSE groups' results showed relatively more similarities when compared with the EFL group in terms of directness, politeness and modifications. Altheeby (2018), highlighted that the length of time spent learning English and the intensity of communication affect non-native groups' age acquisition of speech acts.

The present survey of earlier studies reveals that there is a dearth of studies on the realization of the speech act of refusal in teacher-student talk within the university context. This is the gap that the current study aims to fill. From a cross-cultural perspective, it will be interesting to see how the academic setting and the relationship between teachers and students will influence the realization of the speech act of refusal in Saudi Arabic and American English. Additionally, the study involves a group of Saudi teachers who speak in English to their students in compliance with the university policy. Earlier interlanguage pragmatic studies focused on language learners at low or intermediate level of proficiency. However, the participants in the current study are teachers who teach using English as a medium of instruction and have graduated themselves from similar programs. They also use English in several sophisticated contexts, such as delivering presentations in conferences and publishing research articles. So, will these teachers behave similarly to language learners and exhibit clear instances of negative transfer? Or will they exhibit appropriate pragmatic competence in English?

Research questions

In order to examine the university teachers' refusal patterns from both cross-cultural and interlanguage perspectives, the study focuses on these research questions:

- What are the most frequent refusal strategies used by NSE, NSA and NNSE?
- To what extent are the refusal strategies used by the NSE, NSA and NNSE similar?

Methodology

Participants

The participants in the current study consisted of 60 female university teachers working at a private Saudi university in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. The participants were divided into three equal groups of 20; namely, native speakers of English (NSE) who responded in English to the role-plays used in the study, native of speakers of Arabic (NSA) who responded in Arabic, and Arabs who

responded to the role-plays in English, their second language and hence were non-native speakers of English (NNSE). While the first group were American nationals, the other two groups were Saudi nationals. The NSE and the NNSE groups were teaching courses in English at the university that adopted English as the medium of instruction. Additionally, they had to speak to students in English even if they knew some Arabic because of a university policy that required university teachers to communicate in English with students. As for the NSA group, they were teachers of selected courses that are taught in Arabic, including Arabic and Islamic studies and Islamic Sharia. Hence, the participants responded to the role-plays in the way they would naturally do in the university.

The NSE had 15.5 years of teaching experience in average (ranging from 5 to 30 years) and had been working at the private university for an average of 5.8 years (ranging from 1 to 16 years). The NSA had between 1 and 20 years of teaching experience (Average= 6.6 years) and had been working at the private university between 1 and 12 years (Average = 4.5 years). As for the Arab-English bilinguals, they had an average teaching experience of 4.6 years (ranging between 1 and 10 years) and had been working at the private university for an average of 2.7 years (ranging between 1 and 8 years). The inclusion of these three groups in the study was to help discover how Americans versus Saudis realize the speech act of refusal (i.e., cross-cultural perspective), and how English-speaking Saudis realize the same speech act in comparison with native speakers of Arabic and English (i.e., an interlanguage perspective).

Data collection

The data were collected through 10 role-plays (see Appendix A) that were used in an earlier study by the first author (El-Dakhs, 2020). The role-plays represented everyday situations that university teachers often face with their students in real-life. El-Dakhs (2020) reported that the role-plays were devised through a focus group with 5 university teachers who agreed that these role-plays represented regular situations they faced with their students. Additionally, the situations were reviewed by 3 professors of Applied Linguistics. In the role-plays, the students made requests to their university teachers who were supposed to decline these requests. In order to make it natural for the teachers to decline the requests, the role-plays consisted of two types of scenarios: (1) violations of university policies (i.e., role-plays no. 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10) and (2) situations which are too difficult to accept (i.e., role-plays no. 2, 5 and 6). For example, changing a course grade or cancelling a scheduled class constitute violations to the university policies while it is highly unlikely for teachers to consent to a late submission of an assignment after two extensions or to reschedule a major exam at a time inconvenient for the majority of the students.

While conducting the role-plays, the participants read the instructions. Then, one of the researchers read out each role-play and allowed the teachers to respond, as they would do in real life. The researchers audio-recorded the role-plays and later manually transcribed them in preparation for data coding. All participants responded to the role-plays considering that their students were females. This was to reflect the actual situation where the participants were teaching. In Saudi Arabia, female teachers teach female students in a separate university campus than the

campus for the male students who, in turn, are taught by male teachers. It is worth noting that an ethical clearance was granted to the current study prior to data collection. The participants were invited to participate in the study via emails and those who consented to participate were scheduled for the role-plays at convenient times.

It is important to note that we decided to collect data through role-plays, not written discourse completion tasks, because the focus of the current study is on oral communication. It is evident that teachers would produce more natural and authentic speech when they speak in role-plays than when they write their answers in written tasks. We are aware that collecting naturally occurring request-refusal sequences of teacher-student talk would have rendered much more authentic data. However, role-plays were more feasible to implement and allowed for the control of relevant study variables.

Data coding

The data were coded with the use of Beebe et al. (1990), model of refusal (see Appendix B), which proved easy to use, fit well with the data and was used widely in the literature (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Bella, 2011; El-Dakhs, 2018; Kwon, 2004; Morkus, 2014). The model consisted of three categories. The first was known as "direct refusal" and included a few strategies, such as performatives and negative willingness. The second was labelled "indirect refusal" and included several strategies, such as expressions of regret and giving reason/explanation. The third and last category was called "adjuncts" and they referred to several additional external modifiers that were used along with refusals, including statements of positive opinion/empathy and expressions of gratitude/appreciation (Bella, 2014). Under "adjuncts," we added two subcategories that emerged in the data, which were "terms of endearment" and "God's will". We did not, however, examine the use of pauses and fillers. It is worth noting that the participants made use of several internal modifiers, whether as downgraders or upgraders. Hence, the data were also analyzed for the use of internal modifiers through Trosborg (2011), model of internal modifiers (see Appendix C).

Results

The results section is divided into two sub-sections as per the study research questions.

What are the most frequent refusal strategies used by NSE, NSA and NNSE?

Indirect strategies were much more frequently used than the direct strategies by the three groups as shown in Table (1). The group that made least use of direct strategies was the NSE for whom direct strategies represented only a quarter of their total use of refusal strategies. This number increased with the NSA (30%) and the NNSE (33%). Among the direct strategies, the strategy that was most used was the non-performatives across the three groups. This strategy was mainly exemplified by the use of "I can't" (e.g., I can't cancel the class because this is against university policy.). As for the indirect strategies, the most common strategies were the use of statements of regret (e.g., I'm sorry) and the provision of

excuses/reason/explanation (e.g., I teach in a computer lab and all computers are taken. So, I cannot really accommodate you.). To much less extent, the three groups attempted to dissuade the students through explaining relevant consequences (e.g., I will have to mark you absent here.). Two other strategies were notably used more commonly by one of the groups. While the NSA set a condition for future consent more often than the NSE, the latter provided alternatives for the students more often than the NSA.

Table 1
Refusal strategies used by NSE, NSA and NNSE

Strategy	NSE	NSA	NNSE
Performative	1	5	0
Non-Performative	134	148	160
Total direct strategies	135	153	160
Statement of regret	101	67	87
Wish	0	6	0
Excuse, reason, explanation	175	155	141
Statement of alternative	37	18	19
Set condition for future/ past acceptance	9	43	25
Promise of future acceptance	0	0	0
Statement of principle	11	13	7
Statement of philosophy	0	0	1
Attempt to dissuade interlocutor	59	55	45
Acceptance that functions as refusal	0	0	0
Avoidance	0	0	0
Total indirect strategies	392	357	325

Regarding the use of adjuncts, the NSA produced the highest number of adjuncts (n= 85) followed by the NSE who produced 73 adjuncts. The NNSE produced a small number of adjuncts, which is only 34. The adjuncts mainly consisted of terms of endearment and statements of empathy across the three groups. However, the NSA was the only group that referred to God's will repeatedly. It must also be noted that the NSE produced the highest number of statements of empathy while the NSA produced the highest number of terms of endearment. The figures regarding the use of adjuncts are represented in Table (2).

Table 2
Use of adjuncts and internal modifiers by NSE, NSA and NNSE

Adjunct	NSE	NSA	NNSE
Statement of positive opinion	4	0	0
Statement of empathy	30	12	16
Gratitude/appreciation	3	0	0
Terms of endearment	36	59	18
God's will	0	14	0
Total adjuncts	73	85	34

We examined the use of internal modifiers in terms of downgraders and upgraders as shown in Table (3). The NSE produced the highest number of downgraders (N=97) which accounted for almost double the number of downgraders used by the other two groups. The use of downgraders was dominated by cajolers for the three groups. However, the NSE used downtoners much more frequently. As for the upgraders, they were most frequently used by the NSA (n= 67). In fact, the NSA produced upgraders three times more often than the NNSE and four times more often than the NSE. The three groups used intensifiers almost equally. However, what marked the NSA's performance was an exceptionally higher use of plus commitors and that it was the only group that produced swearing by God.

Table 3
Use of internal modifiers by NSE, NSA and NNSE

Polite markers	17	1	5
Understaters	0	1	0
Hedges	2	14	0
Downtoners	32	5	8
Cajolers	39	25	35
Subjectivizers	7	1	5
Total downgraders	97	47	53
Swear words	0	0	0
Overstarers	0	17	1
Intensifiers	14	17	17
Plus commitors	0	12	2
Swear by God	0	21	0
Total upgraders	14	67	20

To what extent are the refusal strategies used by the NSE, NSA and NNSE similar?

In order to examine the differences among the three groups statistically, a One-way ANOVA was run and the statistically significant differences were summarized in Table (4). Four instances of statistically significant differences were noted in favour of the NSE. The NSE produced significantly more negative willingness, indirect strategies, cajolers and downgraders than the other two groups.

Table 4
ANOVA results for cross-group comparisons

Strategy	NSE		NSA		NNSE		F	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Negative willingness	1.33	0.67	1.15	0.38	1.20	0.40	3.831	0.023
Indirect refusal	2.38	1.13	2.14	1.01	2.06	1.11	4.557	0.011
Cajolers	1.56	0.79	1.24	0.44	1.14	0.36	0.275	0.007
Downgraders	1.81	1.31	1.36	0.49	1.16	0.42	7.709	0.001

Discussion

The teachers in the current study clearly preferred to use indirect refusal strategies in their interaction with students. These strategies constituted almost three quarters of the total number of strategies used by the NSE and around a third of the total number of strategies employed by the NSA and the NNSE. Preferring the use of indirect strategies shows the teachers' sensitivity to the face-threatening nature of the refusal speech act (Brown & Levinson, 1978). The teachers generally preferred to minimize imposition through the use of indirect strategies. This pattern of using indirect strategies to handle FTAs in teacher-student talk was similarly found in earlier studies that addressed other face-threatening acts, such as criticism (El-Dakhs et al., 2019; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). In these studies, the teachers prioritized maintaining good interpersonal relationships with their students over being direct and giving explicit responses. Weigand (2017), regulative principle is at work here since the teachers carefully considered their opposing abilities and interests. Additionally, the concept of "negotiation" in the MGM allows us to interpret the strong influence of teacher-student relationship on the teachers' preferences.

The importance of having good rapport with students is clearly reflected in the types of direct/indirect strategies most preferred by the teachers. The most preferred direct strategy for the three groups was the use of non-performatives, mainly the negative willingness/inability strategy (e.g., I can't mark you present as this is against the university policy). Despite being direct, this strategy allows the teachers to maintain a good rapport with students because it shows that the refusal is beyond the teachers' authority. Hence, the students' anger, if any, will be directed towards policies, rules, logistical arrangements, etc., but not towards the teacher (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Likewise, the most preferred indirect strategies were expressions of regret (e.g., I'm sorry) and giving reasons/excuses/explanation (e.g., I have not received a memo in this regard). These are strategies that can minimize the negative effect of refusals. Even when the teachers decided to dissuade the students, the teachers chose not to threaten the students. They were often explaining the relevant consequences for the students' requests in terms of the institutional policies and regulations (e.g., If you attend the event, I will have to mark you as absent. This is the university policy.) Again, explaining the consequences in this manner eliminated any potential personal conflicts.

In terms of cross-cultural comparisons and the MGM principle of different worlds, it was interesting to find that the NSE were more indirect than the NSA. Notably, the NSE used significantly more negative willingness, indirect strategies, cajolers and downgraders. This finding came in contrast to earlier studies Al-Issa (1998); Al-Shalawi (1997); Al-Shboul & Huwari (2016), that highlighted that refusals in Arabic are more indirect than in American English. One possible reason is related to the contextual factor of status which was found to affect Arabs' directness (Morkus, 2014; Al-Ghamdi & Alrefaee, 2020). In Morkus (2014), Egyptians were more indirect than Americans in their interaction with addressees of a higher status. In Al-Ghamdi and Al-rafee, Yemenis were more direct than Americans in their interaction with addressees of a lower or equal status. The fact that the teachers in the current study were interacting with their students who were of a lower status explains why Arabs were more direct than Americans. In fact, social

status has been found to particularly affect speaker behavior in collectivistic cultures, such as Iranian Keshavarz et al. (2006), Mexican Felix-Brasdefer (2002), and Japanese (Henstock, 2003). On the contrary, status does not seem to have such a strong influence in the American society which believes in equality and emphasizes egalitarianism (Stewart & Bennett, 1991).

Two other relevant reasons for the indirectness of American refusals stem from the American culture. First, the American society is classified as individualistic Hofstede (2001), and thus prioritizes the individual's needs and desires. According to Brown & Levinson (1978), freedom of imposition is a main desire for individuals. Hence, Americans are known to cater for individuals' negative face through minimizing imposition. In the current study, they particularly accommodated the students' negative face through using more indirect strategies to reduce the negative effect of refusal and using more downgraders to mitigate the potential offensive effect. Second, the American, and Western, university professors are known to deal with students as equals within the academic context. Egalitarianism is prioritized in the Western world of academia. The picture is different in collectivist societies, such as the Arab World, where hierarchical relationships place students at a lower status than professors. This cultural difference was noted in earlier studies on the realization of speech acts in the university context (Hiraga & Turner, 1996; Cao, 2005).

It must be noted, however, that the statistically significant differences between Arabs and Americans were restricted to four cases only. This minimal influence can be interpreted in terms of the context of the study. First, the university where the study is conducted, and which constitutes a communicative world in terms of the MGM principle of different worlds, is characterized as a multi-cultural community. The faculty members belong to a variety of nationalities. The fact that the participants in the current study were all working within the same place which is multicultural in nature has contributed to minimizing cultural differences in the teachers' preferences. Another important contributing factor is that the current study was restricted to the domain of teacher-student talk. As mentioned earlier, it is widely acknowledged that talk in institutionalized academic settings is governed by the educational culture of the discourse Hiraga & Turner (1996), and typifies participants' actions and thus minimizes differences in their interactions (Araújo, 2012). What could have further helped minimize cross-cultural differences is that the participants had been working at the same university for relatively long periods (e.g., the average years of service at the Saudi university for the American teachers was 5.8).

In terms of the interlanguage perspective, a number of observations about the NNSE's refusals must be noted. First, the NNSE's refusals did not show clear evidence of negative transfer although negative pragmatic transfer was recurrently reported in earlier studies (Al-Mahrooqi & Al-Aghbari, 2016; Alrefaee & Al-Ghamdi, 2019; Wannaruk, 2008). For example, the NNSE did not use any religious expressions, such as God's will or swearing by God, which are known to be a common characteristic of Arab discourse (Darwish, 2018; Morkus, 2014). Second, the NNSE manipulated the use of several refusal strategies and adjuncts. This characteristic is not common among language learners whose responses often lack variety and are often confined to a limited number of strategies. Third, the

statistically significant differences between the NNSE and the NSE were confined to four cases, two of which were related to the reduced use of internal modifiers. The minimal use of internal modifiers is a characteristic of English as a lingua franca (ELF) which is known to be content-oriented and thus lacks features of interactional features, such as internal modifiers (Cogo & Dewey, 2006). In fact, the effective manipulation of refusal strategies by the NNSE in the current study and the lack of evidence of negative transfer supports that view that the ELF, which is used for global communication by speakers who are competent language users, should be considered as a legitimate variety of the English language that should be examined on its own right without reference to a native speaker model (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004; Riekkinen, 2010).

Conclusion

The current study revealed that university teachers in general prefer to use indirect refusal over direct refusal strategies in order to maintain a good rapport with their students. They are particularly careful when dealing with the students' negative face. Teachers often try to minimize imposition on students through the use of indirect strategies and mitigating modifiers. The current study also revealed that the contextual factor of social status is an important factor in determining the refusal patterns of Arabs. Although Arabs may use more indirect strategies with addresses of a higher status, they become more direct with addresses of a lower or equal status. This comes in contrast with Americans whose refusal patterns are generally not influenced by the addressee's status. Another important finding in the current study is that institutionalized academic discourse has a huge influence on teacher-student interaction. The educational values and the culture of the academic institution minimize cross-cultural differences among teachers of different backgrounds. Additionally, the current study highlighted that non-native speakers with such a high command of the English language as university teachers who teach in English should not be compared with language learners with their deviant language production. University teachers in this context are ELF speakers who should be viewed as speakers of a legitimate variety of English that is worthy of investigation.

Based on the current study, we can make some recommendations. First, theoretically it is important to adopt a theoretical framework that allows for probability such as the MGM in the current study because it allows for interpreting data in a way that reflects real life. Models that rely on strict dichotomies, such as Hofstede (2001), collectivism-individualism index cannot solely accommodate research findings because other contextual variables always affect the discourse, such as the influence of the social status and the effect of institutionalized academic discourse in the current study. Second, non-native speakers of English with an exceptionally high command of English and who use the language for global communication should be viewed as ELF speakers, differently than language learners whose English is still developing and includes several deviations. In fact, researchers are now increasingly interested in examining the nature and characteristics of ELF. Finally, further pragmatic research is needed in the area of teacher-student talk. So far, the focus has been on the speech acts of praise and criticism. Further research on other speech acts is needed in order to provide a comprehensive picture of this domain of interaction which is extremely important

for successful university life. It will be interesting to conduct further studies with a high number of participants and from both genders in order to avoid the limitations of the current study.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by Prince Sultan University under Grant [Applied Linguistics Research Lab- RL-CH-2019/9/1]

References

Al-Ghamdi, N., & Alrefaee, Y. (2020). The role of social status in the realization of refusal speech act: a cross-cultural study. *The Asian ESP Journal*.

Alhaidari, A. A. (2009). *The art of saying no: A cross-cultural pragmatic comparison of Saudi and Australian refusal appropriateness applied in academic settings* (Doctoral dissertation).

Al-Issa, A. S. (1998). *Sociopragmatic transfer in the performance of refusals by Jordanian EFL learners: Evidence and motivating factors*. Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Allami, H., & Naeimi, A. (2011). A cross-linguistic study of refusals: An analysis of pragmatic competence development in Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of pragmatics*, *43*(1), 385-406.

Al-Mahrooqi, R., & Al-Aghbari, K. (2016). Refusal strategies among Omani EFL students. *SAGE Open*, *6*(4), 2158244016672907.

Alrefaee, Y., & Al-Ghamdi, N. (2019). Refusals among Yemeni EFL Learners: A Study of Negative Pragmatic Transfer and Its Relation to Proficiency. *Asian EFL Journal Research Articles*, *25*.

Alrefaee, Y., & Al-Ghamdi, N. (2019). Refusals among Yemeni EFL Learners: A Study of Negative Pragmatic Transfer and Its Relation to Proficiency. *Asian EFL Journal Research Articles*, *25*.

Al-Shalawi, H. G. (1997). *Refusal strategies in Saudi and American cultures*. Michigan State University.

Al-Shboul, Y., & Huwari, I. F. (2016). A comparative study of Jordanian Arabic and American English refusal strategies. *British journal of English linguistics*, *4*(3), 50-62.

Altheeby, M. (2018). *Differences in the pragmatic competence of Saudi EFL and ESL learners* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).

Araújo, A. D. (2012). Academic genres in university contexts: An investigation of students' book reviews writing as classroom assignments. *International advances in writing research: Cultures, places, measures*, 319-333.

Atmowardoyo, H., & Sakkir, G. (2021). Effects of best-practice based materials in receptive language learning behaviours in improving receptive language skills. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, *5*(S1), 1313-1334. https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v5nS1.1604

Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Do language learners recognize pragmatic violations? Pragmatic versus grammatical awareness in instructed L2 learning. *Tesol Quarterly*, *32*(2), 233-259.

Beebe, L. M., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals. *Developing communicative competence in a second language*, *5573*.

Bella, S. (2011). Mitigation and politeness in Greek invitation refusals: Effects of length of residence in the target community and intensity of interaction on non-native speakers' performance. *Journal of pragmatics*, *43*(6), 1718-1740.

Bella, S. (2014). Developing the ability to refuse: A cross-sectional study of Greek FL refusals. *Journal of pragmatics*, *61*, 35-62.

Bernstein, G. A., Borchardt, C. M., Perwien, A. R., Crosby, R. D., Kushner, M. G., Thuras, P. D., & Last, C. G. (2000). Imipramine plus cognitive-behavioral therapy in the treatment of school refusal. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, *39*(3), 276-283. https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-200003000-00008

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In *Questions and politeness: Strategies in social interaction* (pp. 56-311). Cambridge University Press.

Brown, P., Levinson, S. C., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Vol. 4). Cambridge university press.

Caffi, C., & Janney, R. W. (1994). Toward a pragmatics of emotive communication. *Journal of pragmatics*, *22*(3-4), 325-373. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(94)90115-5

Cao, J. (2005). *A pragmatic analysis of the speech act of criticizing in primary and junior high school Chinese lecturer-student talk* (Doctoral dissertation, Northeast Normal University).

Chen, X., Ye, L., & Zhang, Y. (1995). Refusing in Chinese. *Pragmatics of Chinese as native and target language*, 119-163.

Cogo, A., & Dewey, M. (2006). Efficiency in ELF communication: From pragmatic motives to lexico-grammatical innovation. *Nordic journal of English studies*, *5*(2), 59-93.

Darwish, A. (2018). Socio-pragmatic Transfer in Egyptian Refusals. *The Athens Institute For Education And Research*, 32.

Edda, W. (2017). The mixed game model: A holistic theory. In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Dialogue* (pp. 174-194). Routledge.

Egger, H. L., Costello, J. E., & Angold, A. (2003). School refusal and psychiatric disorders: A community study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, *42*(7), 797-807. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.CHI.0000046865.56865.79

El-Dakhs, D. A. S. (2018). Saying "Yes" and "No" to requests: Is it the same in Egyptian and Saudi Arabic?. *Language and Dialogue*, *8*(2), 235-260.

El-Dakhs, D.A.S. (2020). The art of saying "No" to university students: A pragmatic analysis of the speech act of refusal in teacher-student role-play. Journal of Language and Education, 6(4), 140-152.

El-Dakhs, D. A. S., Ambreen, F., Zaheer, M., & Gusarova, Y. (2019). A pragmatic analysis of the speech act of criticizing in university teacher-student talk: The case of English as a lingua franca. *Pragmatics*, *29*(4), 493-520.

Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2002). *Refusals in Spanish and English: A cross-cultural study of politeness strategies among speakers of Mexican Spanish, American English, and American learners of Spanish as a foreign language*. University of Minnesota.

Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2006). Linguistic politeness in Mexico: Refusal strategies among male speakers of Mexican Spanish. *Journal of pragmatics*, *38*(12), 2158-2187.

Haverkate, H. (1990). A speech act analysis of irony. *Journal of pragmatics*, *14*(1), 77-109. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(90)90065-L

Henstock, M. I. (2003). *Refusals: A language and cultural barrier between Americans and Japanese*. Purdue University.

Hiraga, M. K., & Turner, J. M. (1996). Differing perceptions of face in British and Japanese academic settings. *Language Sciences*, *18*(3-4), 605-627.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations*. Sage publications.

Howatt, A. P. R., & Widdowson, H. G. (2004). *A history of ELT*. Oxford University Press.

Hyland, F., & Hyland, K. (2001). Sugaring the pill: Praise and criticism in written feedback. *Journal of second language writing*, *10*(3), 185-212.

Iliadi, P. L. L., & Larina, T. V. (2017). Refusal strategies in English and Russian. *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, *8*(3), 531-542.

Kasper, G. (2001). Four perspectives on L2 pragmatic development. *Applied linguistics*, *22*(4), 502-530.

Kealey, D. J. (1989). A study of cross-cultural effectiveness: Theoretical issues, practical applications. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *13*(3), 387-428. https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(89)90019-9

Keshavarz, M. H., Eslami, Z. R., & Ghahreman, V. (2006). Pragmatic transfer and Iranian EFL refusals: A cross-cultural perspective of Persian and English. *K. Bardovi-Harlig, JC*.

Kwon, J. (2004). Expressing refusals in Korean and in American English.

Locher, M. A., & Bolander, B. (2019). Ethics in pragmatics. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *145*, 83-90. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2019.01.011

Lü, L. (2018). Role of Email in Intercultural Communication of Criticism in a Chinese English Curriculum Reform Context. *English Language Teaching*, *11*(2), 193-207.

Machery, E., Mallon, R., Nichols, S., & Stich, S. P. (2004). Semantics, cross-cultural style. *Cognition*, *92*(3), B1-B12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2003.10.003

Menaka, G., & Sankar, G. (2019). The language learning assessment using technology for the second language learners. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Culture*, *5*(4), 1-6. https://doi.org/10.21744/ijllc.v5n4.674

Morkus, N. (2014). Refusals in Egyptian Arabic and American English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *70*, 86-107.

Nguyen, T. T. M. (2013). An exploratory study of criticism realization strategies used by NS and NNS of New Zealand English.

O'Keeffe, A., Clancy, B., & Adolphs, S. (2019). *Introducing pragmatics in use*. Routledge.

Riekkinen, N. (2010). "This is not criticizing, but.... *Softening criticizing: The use of lexical hedges in academic spoken interaction. Helsinki English Studies*, *6*, 75-87.

Rinartha, K., & Suryasa, W. (2017). Comparative study for better result on query suggestion of article searching with MySQL pattern matching and Jaccard similarity. In 2017 5th International Conference on Cyber and IT Service Management (CITSM) (pp. 1-4). IEEE.

Schegloff, E. A. (1988). Presequences and indirection: Applying speech act theory to ordinary conversation. *Journal of pragmatics*, *12*(1), 55-62. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(88)90019-7

Shishavan, H. B., & Sharifian, F. (2016). The refusal speech act in a cross-cultural perspective: A study of Iranian English-language learners and Anglo-Australian speakers. *Language & Communication*, *47*, 75-88.

Soler, E. A. (2002). Relationship between teacher-led versus learners' interaction and the development of pragmatics in the EFL classroom. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *37*(3-4), 359-377.

Stewart, E. C., & Bennett, M. J. (1991). Cultural patterns. A cross-cultural perspective.

Takahashi, S. (2005). Noticing in task performance and learning outcomes: A qualitative analysis of instructional effects in interlanguage pragmatics. *System*, *33*(3), 437-461. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2005.06.006

Takimoto, M. (2012). Metapragmatic discussion in interlanguage pragmatics. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *44*(10), 1240-1253. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2012.05.007

Tang, C. (2016). Managing criticisms in US-based and Taiwan-based reality talent contests: A cross-linguistic comparison. *Pragmatics*, *26*(1), 111-136.

Trosborg, A. (2011). *Interlanguage pragmatics: Requests, complaints, and apologies* (Vol. 7). Walter de Gruyter.

Verzella, M., & Tommaso, L. (2020). The pragmatics of refusing a request in Italian and American English: A comparative study. *Discourse and Interaction*, *13*(1), 92-112.

Vysotki, V. M., Patalashko, E. V., Stepanenko, V. E., Makarova, T. V., & Balabanova, I. A. (2021). Language as a communication resource and its place in the representation of world practices: philosophical and linguistic approach. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, *5*(S3), 574-584. https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v5nS3.1621

Wannaruk, A. (2008). Pragmatic transfer in Thai EFL refusals. *RELC journal*, *39*(3), 318-337.

Weigand, E. (2009). *Language as dialogue: from rules to principles of probability* (Vol. 5). Weigand, E. (2010). Language as dialogue.

Weigand, E. (2010). *Dialogue the Mixed Game* (Vol. 10). John Benjamins Publishing.

Weigand, E. (2015). Dialogue in the Stream of Life. *Language and Dialogue*, *5*(2), 197-223.

Zong, F., & Zhen, S. X. (2021). The link between language and thought. *Macrolinguistics and Microlinguistics*, *2*(1), 12–27. Retrieved from https://mami.nyc/index.php/journal/article/view/12

Appendix (A) – Study: Examining university teacher-student talk

Instrument: Role play

Dear Faculty member
Participation in these role-plays is voluntary, so please feel free to refuse participation if you do not wish to take part in the study.

The aim of this study is to examine how university teachers handle students' requests. The data are collected through role-plays that will be recorded and later transcribed. The participants' identities will be kept strictly confidential. No special reward is offered for participation in the study. Your participation will, however, be highly appreciated by the researchers to help advance scientific research.

Procedure

You will read 10 scenarios involving students' requests. Please, decline these requests in natural spoken English as you would do in real life while actually talking to your students. In case you feel that you would not say anything in real life or you would consent to the requests, please say so and explain your reason(s).

Example:

- Your student requests that you cancel your class because they want to study for an exam that is scheduled after your class.
- You say: Sorry, dear. I would like to help, but I cannot cancel my class. We are already behind with the syllabus.
- Now, you will be reading one scenario at a time and then have your response to your student in natural spoken English recorded.

Situation (1)
Your student requests receiving an A+ grade in the course although her performance grants her only a B grade.

Situation (2)
Your student requests submitting an assignment late although you had already extended the submission deadline twice. She has no valid reasons.

Situation (3)
Your student requests cancelling the class in order to participate in another event held on campus. You have not received any instructions from the university management to allow students to attend the event.

Situation (4)
Your student requests attending class in another section than the one he is registered because he has some friends in the other section.

Situation (5)
Your student requests re-scheduling a major exam at a time that is not convenient to the majority of students in class. He fails to provide valid reasons.

Situation (6)
Your student requests submitting an assignment in groups although you had planned this particular assignment to be completed individually. This is the only individual assignment on the syllabus.

Situation (7)
Your student requests changing the class time because the class time at 9.00 a.m. is too early for him. The university does not allow teachers to change class time.

Situation (8)
Your advisee requests that you allow her to register courses for the new semester without meeting you for the advising session required by the university.

Situation (9)
A student requests that you allow her to register in your class although your class has reached the maximum limit for registered students as per the university policy.

Situation (10)
Your student requests that you do not count his absence on the academic portal. He does not give valid reasons why he may need to miss classes.

Appendix B: Request Refusal Strategies

Strategy	Example
I. Direct	
A. Performative	I refuse
B. Non-Performative	
B. 1. No	No
B.2. Negative willingness or inability	I can't, I won't, I don't think so
II. Indirect	
A. Statement of regret	I'm sorry, I feel terrible
B. Wish	I wish I could help you
C. Excuse, reason, explanation	My children will be at home that night.
D. Statement of alternative	
D. 1. I can do X instead of Y	I'd rather do – I'd prefer
D.2. Why don't you do X instead of Y?	Why don't you ask somebody else?
E. Set condition for future/ past acceptance	If you had asked me earlier, I would have…
F. Promise of future acceptance	I'll do it next time – I promise I will
G. Statement of principle	I never do business with friends.
H. Statement of philosophy	One can't be too careful.
I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor	
I.1. Threat or negative consequences	I won't be any fun tonight.
I.2. Guilt trip	I can't make a living off people who just order coffee.
I.3. Criticize the requester	That's a terrible idea.
I.4. Request help/ empathy.	I hope you understand my difficult situation.
I.5. Let interlocutor off the hook	Don't worry about it- That's okay.
I.6. Self-defense	I'm trying my best – I'm doing all I can.
J. Acceptance that functions as refusal	
J.1. Unspecific or indefinite reply	I don't know when I can give them to you.
J.2. Lack of enthusiasm	I'm not interested in diets.
K. Avoidance	
K.1. Nonverbal	Silence, hesitation, do nothing
K.2. Verbal	Topic switch, joke, postponement
III. Adjuncts	
A. Statement of positive opinion	That's a good idea.
B. Statement of empathy	I realize you are in a difficult situation
C. Pause fillers	Uhh, well, uh
D. Gratitude/ appreciation	Thank you.
E. Term of endearment	Dear, sweetheart
F. God's will	God's willing (InshaaAllah in Arabic)