



## Decoding Marriage Proposals: Strategies of Refusals in Contemporary Marriages among Kurdistan Region Public University Students

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### Abstract

This study examines the strategies employed by female university students in the Iraqi Kurdistan region when declining marriage proposals. The researchers utilized a questionnaire, consisting of five different contexts, to collect data from 19 to 23-year-old participants. The data is analyzed qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Further, the face negotiation theory developed by Stella Ting-Toomey is used to analyze the obtained data. The study investigates the perceptions and experiences of individuals receiving marriage proposal refusals and how these influence the communication process. The results reveal that sociocultural factors and norms influence the choice of refusal strategies among the participants. The findings also provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics involved in declining marriage proposals within the context of Iraqi Kurdistan. Eventually, the study contributes to the existing literature on refusal strategies and has practical implications for improving cross-cultural communication and interpersonal relationships.

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## تحليل مقترحات الزواج: إستراتيجيات الرفض في الزواج المعاصر بين طلاب الجامعات الحكومية في إقليم كردستان العراق

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المستخلص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة عن الاستراتيجيات التي تتبعها الطالبات الجامعيات عند رفض عروض الزواج في منطقة كردستان العراق. وظف الباحثان استبياناً يتضمن خمسة سياقات مختلفة لجمع البيانات من المساهمات اللواتي تتراوح أعمارهن بين 19 و23 عاماً. وتم تحليل البيانات نوعياً وكمياً. كما وظفت نظرية التفاوض الوجهي التي طورها ستيليا تينغ-تومي لتحليل البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها. وتستكشف الدراسة تصورات وخبرات الأفراد الذين يتلقون رفض عروض الزواج وكيف تؤثر هذه التصورات على عملية التواصل. تظهر النتائج أن العوامل والمعايير الاجتماعية والثقافية تؤثر في انتقاء استراتيجيات الرفض بين المشاركات. كما تقدم النتائج رؤية قيمة

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حول الديناميكيات المعقدة المرتبطة برفض عروض الزواج في منطقة كردستان العراق. في نهاية المطاف، تساهم هذه الدراسة في الأدبيات الحالية حول استراتيجيات الرفض ولها دور في تحسين عملية التواصل عبر الثقافات والعلاقات الشخصية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** نظرية التفاوض الوجيهي، استراتيجيات الرفض، عروض الزواج، الطالبات في الجامعات العامة في إقليم كردستان العراق

## Introduction

In the facilitation of social interaction and human communication, language functions as a fundamental instrument. It serves as the conduit through which individuals engage in the transmission of information encompassing thoughts, concepts, intentions, sentiments, and emotions. Everyday discourse constitutes a perpetual reservoir of linguistic expression, discernible through various speech patterns or behaviours. Consequently, the exploration of speech activities should ideally constitute the primary endeavour in any inquiry into the structural aspects of language.

In everyday communication, people engage in communication for various purposes, including sharing information, expressing emotions, and maintaining connections with others. This communication often involves face-to-face negotiations, where individuals exchange verbal acts like complaints, requests, explanations, offers, and refusals. Refusal, a universal linguistic act, varies across cultures due to cultural norms and practices. For instance, a marriage proposal, wherein a male asks a female for her hand in marriage, exemplifies a scenario where refusal might occur.

Brown and Levinson (1987), Fraser (1990), and Smith (1998) have extensively studied these interactions, highlighting how factors such as social rank, age, gender, power dynamics, level of education, and social distance influence both the act of proposing and the response to it, whether acceptance or rejection. Yamagashira (2001, p.260) states that Refusal is “a sensitive, pragmatic task,” and for this manifestation, participants have to be highly cautious while managing refusal situations. However, the act of refusing is a considerable obstacle for those who are in academic contexts, since it requires a high level of proficiency in both the language being spoken and the associated cultural norms. Rejecting someone without upsetting them is difficult.

Simply having mastery of the language is not sufficient; one must also possess pragmatic skills in order to navigate this situation successfully. Undergraduate students from Iraq possess considerable proficiency in vocabulary and a solid comprehension of grammar. However, if one's ability to use language effectively in a practical manner is lacking or defective, then the intended speech act will not be executed successfully, leading to potential misunderstandings.

Refusal constitutes an omnipresent facet across linguistic frameworks, albeit exhibiting nuanced manifestations contingent upon cultural contexts. Cultural dynamics wield considerable influence over the execution and selection of strategies in refusal. The acceptability of certain cultural norms within a given societal framework may not necessarily translate universally. Notably, non-native English speakers, particularly Iraqi female learners, may inadvertently superimpose the cultural norms and standards of their native linguistic milieu onto their English discourse, as expounded by Phuong (2006). The current study sets itself toward answering the following research questions:

1. What are the blatant refusal strategies that KRG female undergraduate students used when refusing marriage proposals?
2. To what extent these strategies are employed and why?

### **The statement of the problem**

The objective of this study is to inspect the complicated dynamics of marriage rejections in the setting of contemporary Kurdish society. Though marriage proposals play a decisive role in shaping societal structures and interpersonal interactions, individuals' manoeuvres when declining them have received less responsiveness, especially among university students in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRG).

This study further investigates the multifaceted techniques employed by KRG public university students to turn down marriage proposals by looking at individual, societal, and cultural influences on their choice of action. The research intends to contribute to a fuller understanding of modern marriage dynamics and interpersonal communication patterns within the Kurdish community by focusing on an understudied component of marriage negotiations.

### **The significance of the paper**

Generally stated, this paper highlights some significance. Firstly, it focuses on Cultural Insight. That is, comprehending the techniques used to reject marriage proposals offers highly valued insights into cultural expectations and norms surrounding the process of marriage within the Kurdish community. Hence, a deeper understanding can be achieved by tackling the dynamics of interpersonal relations along with the social interactions found in the region.

Secondly, it pays attention to interpersonal Communication. It investigates the strategies utilized by the new generation (contemporary university students) while rejecting marriage proposals which results in providing insights essential for communicative practices along with interpersonal negotiation skills. This finally manages sensitive conversations related to marriage.

Thirdly, it handles educational Context. As this paper is concerned with university students, it offers suggestions for the educational situations regarding the role that higher education may have in forming the students' attitudes towards the process of marriage and relations.

### **The Aims of the Paper**

This paper aims to analyze the strategies that are used by KRI public university female students while refusing marriage proposals. Further, it also attempts to highlight which strategies are highly and less likely employed and why in diverse contexts: cultural, social, personal, academic as well as emotional.

## **Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

### **Face Negotiation Theory**

The face negotiation theory acknowledges, clearly and explicitly, that individuals from other cultures have distinct perspectives on other people's "faces." Face negotiation theory offers a thorough framework for examining the diverse factors affecting facework and conflict resolution, encompassing cultural,

individual, and situational dynamics (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2005; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). In terms of communication, the Face Negotiation Theory is based on the fundamental concept that individuals across cultures strive to maintain and negotiate face-to-face interactions. Therefore, we can perceive the act of refusal in a conflict scenario as a facet of face negotiation, shaped by cultural norms and individual attributes that dictate how individuals manage their own and others' dignity during conflict resolution (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey, Yee-Jung, Shapiro, Garcia, & Oetzel, 2000; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991).

The Face Negotiation Theory originated and advanced by Stella Ting-Toomey (1988, 2005). This theory offers a valuable framework for understanding how individuals manage interpersonal conflicts while preserving dignity. Employing this theoretical construct can provide solid groundwork for anticipating the dynamics of face-saving behaviours within unfamiliar cultural contexts.

According to Ting-Toomey (2017b), faces represent a universally understood aspect of human civilization, with each individual within a society owning and managing their face. Ting-Toomey (2017b) asserts that faces are a ubiquitous phenomenon present in all societies. Building upon Ting-Toomey's insights, Neuliep and Johnson (2016) suggest that face refers to an individual's perception of positive self-esteem or self-image in communicative contexts. They contend that people universally acknowledge the face as an emotional expression of their self-image. While the concept of face is intrinsic to all civilizations, its interpretations may vary across cultures.

Moreover, West and Turner (2010) state that the Face Negotiation Theory comprises several fundamental assumptions, each encompassing pivotal elements including face, conflict, and culture. Firstly, it acknowledges the significance of self-identity within interpersonal dynamics, recognizing that individuals navigate their identities in diverse manners across cultural contexts. Secondly, it highlights the impact of facial expressions and cultural norms on conflict resolution strategies. Lastly, it underscores the inherent risk certain behaviours pose to one's self-image or perception of dignity, emphasizing the importance of preserving face in social interactions. An individual's self-identity encompasses a rich tapestry of past, present, and anticipated experiences, perspectives, beliefs, memories, and aspirations. Interactions with others significantly influence the negotiation of self-identity, as individuals engage in a continuous process of defining and redefining themselves within social contexts. Moreover, one's cultural and ethnic heritage profoundly shapes their sense of self, influencing how one projects oneself outwardly to the world.

Individuals across diverse backgrounds and cultural contexts engage in a perpetual process of navigating and refining their multifaceted self-conceptions. Addressing challenges that potentially jeopardize one's social standing and interpersonal rapport constitutes the second tenet of the Face Negotiation Theory. Various strategies are available for managing conflicts, including avoidance, compromise, domination, and integration. As social beings, it's common for us to encounter emotions such as flushing, awkwardness, humiliation, pride, or embarrassment. Deeply rooted in concerns about our perception by others, these emotions often manifest through our facial expressions.

When we face challenges or compromises to our social standing, we naturally tend to defend or uphold our dignity, also known as "face." In individualistic societies, receiving public recognition or praise for our accomplishments can significantly enhance our sense of social worth. Within the framework of face

negotiation theory, two primary challenges emerge the risk of "losing face," which involves experiencing a decline in social esteem or dignity, and the imperative of "preserving face," which entails maintaining one's social standing and dignity in interpersonal interactions (Ting Toomey, 2011).

Ting-Toomey (1988) has proposed a comprehensive framework for understanding the management of face in intercultural communication. According to the author, individuals employ four distinct face-work strategies to navigate face concerns and maintain positive relationships in cross-cultural interactions.

**Face-restoration strategies:** These strategies are employed to repair or restore an individual's face after it has been threatened or compromised. This may involve expressions of regret, offers of restitution, or the use of defensive explanations to preserve one's face.

**Face-saving strategies:** These strategies aim to prevent face loss or damage before it occurs. Individuals may use tactful communication techniques, avoid sensitive topics, or communicate indirectly to mitigate potential face-threatening situations.

**Face-giving strategies:** These strategies involve actions that contribute to the positive face of others. This may include the use of compliments, displays of admiration, and acts of compassion to enhance the public image of one's interlocutors.

**Face-assertive strategies:** These strategies represent attempts to make one's own needs or rights known without significantly harming the reputation of others. This entails defending oneself or expressing one's thoughts and convictions while still respecting the dignity of the individuals involved.

Ting-Toomey's (1988) framework highlights the nuanced and dynamic nature of face management in intercultural communication. These four face-work strategies provide a useful lens for understanding how individuals navigate face concerns and maintain positive relational outcomes in diverse cultural contexts.

## **Previous Studies**

Marriage proposals constitute important interpersonal events in many cultures, often carrying complex socio-cultural implications. The dynamics of undergraduate female students refusing marriage proposals in Iraqi Kurdistan, where traditional beliefs cross with modern aspirations, deserve scholarly consideration. This literature review aims to combine existing research on related topics, providing insights into the pragmatic refusal strategies employed by young females in circumnavigating marriage proposals within this specific cultural environment.

Qassim and Abbas (2022) conducted a study, entitled "Impoliteness Formulas, Triggers, and Purposes to Refusal as Employed by Iraqi English Learners", and examined the many forms, reasons, and justifications of rudeness that Iraqi English language learners use when they decline marriage proposals. Their paper heightened answers to the questions of 'What are the impoliteness formulae that Iraqi English learners use to decline marriage proposals? And (2) what are the causes, triggers, and goals of their impoliteness? The results showed that insults and sharp criticisms/complaints were the most common impoliteness formulae. The replies from the Iraqi students indicated that the most frequent causes of impoliteness are anger and disapproval.

Similarly, Hussein et al (2019), in their paper " Usage of Speech Act of Request among Iraqi Male and Female Undergraduate EFL Students", explored the progression of English learners' understanding of pragmatics, particularly focusing on their ability to use requests as a speech act. The study aimed to delineate variances in the employment of requests between male and female undergraduate EFL students from Iraq. Additionally, it highlighted the common struggle among English learners in effectively demonstrating pragmatic skills in utilizing requests, including interpreting utterances, discerning language users' intentions, and grasping the contextual nuances of request usage.

Further, Yavuz and Yaseen(2018), in their study "Suggestion and Refusal Strategies in English by Kurdish Undergraduate Students", examined the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic proficiency of Kurdish undergraduate students learning English as a foreign language, focusing on their abilities to make suggestions and refusing requests. The findings of the research indicated variations in the strategies and patterns employed by Kurdish EFL undergraduate students compared to native English speakers, as well as variances between students attending state and private universities.

In addition, Chee Me et al (2023) conducted a paper entitled "Refusal and politeness strategies favoured among Iraqi and Malaysian learners in marriage proposals". They dealt with the resemblances and disparities among Iraqi and Malaysian English learners concerning their approaches to declining marriage proposals. The study also examines the preferred politeness tactics employed by learners to preserve the dignity of their conversation partners, considering factors such as social proximity and status. The results revealed that both Iraqi and Malaysian learners predominantly employed indirect refusal strategies when faced with marriage proposals, alongside hierarchical politeness strategies emphasizing independence, regardless of interlocutors' social standing or proximity. However, there were differences in the specific types of indirect strategies preferred. Iraqi learners tended to favour rationale, expressions of regret, and non-performative statements, whereas Malaysian learners leaned towards expressing regret, non-performative statements, and providing reasons.

Moreover, It is worth noting that, Qassim et al (2021), in the framework of their study" Pragmalinguistic and Socio-pragmatic Transfer among Iraqi Female EFL Learners in Refusing Marriage Proposals", highlighted the concept of transfer from both a pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic perspective, specifically focusing on marriage scenarios among Iraqi EFL learners. The study aims to compare the most frequently utilized refusal strategies by Iraqi female EFL learners with those of American native English speakers. The findings of the study revealed that Iraqi female EFL learners exhibited similar patterns in refusing marriage proposals compared to American speakers. Pragmalinguistic transfer was observed in the literal translation of words, phrases, and structures into English within their refusals. Additionally, socio-pragmatic transfer was evident in the incorporation of certain cultural aspects from Arabic, such as elaboration, exaggeration, repetition, endearing terms, and others, into their expressions in English.

Eventually, Seng et al (2020), published a paper entitled "Pragmatic Awareness of Iraqi Undergraduate EFL Learners in Using Request Strategies", through which they elucidated the pragmatic understanding of English learners, particularly focusing on their proficiency in employing request strategies, which are crucial for enhancing pragmatic skills in both academic and social interactions. The study's primary goal was to underscore the significance of strategies in enhancing the pragmatic awareness of Iraqi undergraduate EFL learners. Furthermore, it highlighted a common challenge among

English learners in effectively demonstrating pragmatic abilities, particularly in understanding the intended meaning behind utterances and the intentions of language users when utilizing requests. There is a burgeoning interest in exploring the efficacy of strategies in augmenting students' pragmatic awareness within the realm of EFL college instruction.

In the wake of previous research endeavours focusing on pragmatic awareness, sociopragmatic transfer, and politeness strategies in marriage proposals among diverse cultural contexts, there arises a compelling need to explore the nuanced dynamics of rejection strategies in contemporary marriages, particularly among Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Public University students. This forthcoming study, titled "Decoding Marriage Proposals: Strategies of Rejection in Contemporary Marriages among KRG Public University Students," seeks to delve into the intricacies of how rejection is navigated within the context of modern-day relationships. Building upon prior investigations into request strategies, refusal patterns, and sociocultural influences on marital interactions, this research endeavours to shed light on the specific strategies employed by KRG Public University students when declining marriage proposals.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This research aims to comprehensively tackle its objectives, which necessitates a qualitative content analysis methodology for its depth and richness in understanding phenomena. However, to ensure the findings, statistical analysis is incorporated to provide quantitative insights and validate the qualitative findings. This combined approach enables a holistic examination of the research questions, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of the data that goes beyond mere description to uncover patterns, relationships, and underlying trends.

### **Participants**

The present study involved a sample of 80 Kurdish English language learners, specifically focusing on female Iraqi students from the College of Education-Shaqlawa at Salahaddin University ( $n = 40$ ) and female students from the Faculty of Arts at Soran University ( $n = 40$ ). The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 23 years old, and they were all enrolled in English language programs.

### **Research Instrument**

The data collection process for this study involved the distribution of a questionnaire that consisted of five distinct contexts, with each context presenting four optional statements (Point 1, Point 2, Point 3, and Point 4). The participants were asked to respond to these statements within the given contexts.

The use of a multi-context questionnaire allowed the researchers to explore the participants' face work strategies across a range of communication scenarios. By providing four distinct statement options for each context, the instrument enabled the researchers to assess the participants' preferences and approaches to managing face concerns in diverse interactional situations.

The questionnaire format facilitated the systematic collection of data, ensuring a standardized method of eliciting responses from the sample of 80 Kurdish English language learners. This methodological approach aimed to provide the researchers with a comprehensive understanding of the face work strategies employed by the female Iraqi students from Salahaddin University and the female students from Soran University, within the age range of 19 to 23 years old.

### **Procedure and Analysis of the Data**

The gathered data were subjected to encoding and analysis using Stella Ting Toomey (1988) Face Negotiation Theory. This process entailed sorting and scrutinizing the data. In essence, the data underwent a systematic examination guided by Ting Toomey (1988, 2005, 2017), allowing for a comprehensive analysis of refusal behaviours.

Further, throughout this part, in addition to identifying and classifying the strategies into different categories, they are also explained and analyzed individually. Moreover, each optional statement, in the questionnaire, aligns with one strategy of the Face Negotiation Theory by Stella. That is, in the social context; p.1 stands for Face giving strategies, p2 stands for Face saving strategies, p3 Stands for Face Assertive strategies, and p4 stands for Face Restoration strategies. Regarding the cultural context, p1 Stands for Face Assertive strategies, p2 stands for face-giving strategies, p3 stands for Face saving strategies, and p4 stands for Face Restoration strategies. In addition, in the Personal context; p1 stands for Face saving strategies, p2 stands for Face Assertive strategies, p3 stands for Face Restoration strategies, and p4 stands for Face giving strategies. In academic context; p1 stands for Face saving strategies, p2 stands for Face Assertive strategies, p3 stands for Face giving strategies, and p4 stands for Face Restoration strategies. Finally, in emotional context; p1 stands for Face Assertive strategies, p2 stands for Face Restoration strategies, p3 stands for Face saving strategies, and p4 stands for Face giving strategies. In the following Tables, the frequencies of occurrence of the refusal strategies employed by Salahaddin University and Soran University students are identified.

Table 1. **Descriptive statistics for refusal strategies used by Salahaddin University Students**

	Social context				Cultural Context				Personal Context				Academic Context				Emotional Context				Total
	p.1 (FG S)	p.2 (F SS )	p.3 (F AS )	p.4 (F RS )	p.1 (F AS )	p.2 (F GS )	p.3 (F SS )	p.4 (F RS )	p.1 (F SS )	p.2 (F AS )	P3 (F RS )	p.4 (F GS )	p.1 (F SS )	p.2 (F AS )	p.3 (F GS )	ps s4 (F RS )	p1 (F AS )	p2 (F RS )	p3 (FSS )	p4 (FGS)	
	12	9	11	8	15	9	7	9	8	7	14	11	13	11	10	6	5	13	11	11	40
Percentage	30	22.5	27.5	20	37.5	22.5	17.5	22.5	20	17.5	35	27.5	32.5	27.5	25	15	12.5	32.5	27.5	27.5	

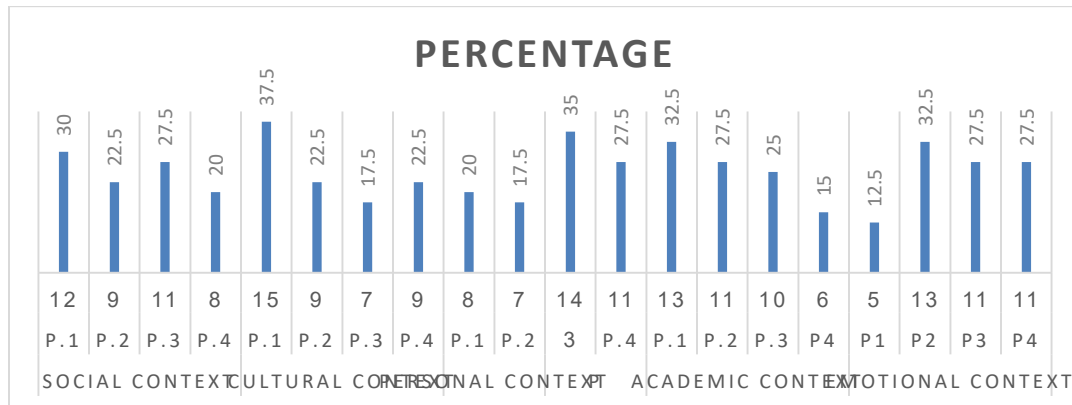
According to the statistics results presented in Table 1, it is found that Salahaddin University students employed different strategies in different contexts; in a social context, 12 students (%30) used Face giving strategy, 9 students(%22.5) used face-saving strategy), 11 students(%27.5) used Face Assertive strategy, and 8 students(%20) used Face Restoration strategy.

In cultural context, 15 students (%37.5) used Face Assertive strategy, 9 students(%22.5) used face giving strategy), 7 students(%17.5) used Face saving strategy, and 9 students(%22.5) used Face Restoration strategy. In a personal context, 8 students (%20) used the Face face-saving strategy, 7 students (%17.5) used the face assertive strategy, 14 students (%35) used the Face restoration strategy, and 11 students (%27.5) used Face face-giving strategy.

In an academic context, 13 students (%32.5) used Face face-saving strategy, 11 students (%27.5) used the face assertive strategy), 10 students (%25) used Face face-giving strategy, and 6 students (%15) used the



Face Restoration strategy. Finally, in the emotional context, 5 students (%12.5) used the Face assertive strategy, 13 students (%32.5) used the face restoration strategy, 11 students (%27.5) used the Face saving strategy, and 11 students (%27.5) used Face giving strategy.



**Figure 1. The frequency of occurrence of the above-mentioned refusal strategies used by Salahaddin University students.**

As can be seen in Figure 1, the frequency of occurrence of the above-mentioned refusal strategies used by Salahaddin University students is depicted from the most frequently used strategy which is the face assertive strategy in cultural context (%37.5) to the least frequently used one which is also face assertive strategy (% 12.5) but in the emotional context.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the most and least frequently used refusal strategies by Salahaddin University Students**

Salahaddin university			100%
Cultural context	p.1(FAS)	15	75
Emotional context	p.1(FAS)	5	25

According to the statistics results presented in Table 2, it is found that Salahaddin University students employed different strategies in different contexts; the most frequently used strategy is the Face Assertive strategy in a cultural context which is used by 15 students (% 75), and the least frequently used strategy is Face assertive strategy in an emotional context which is used by only 5 (%25) students.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for refusal strategies used by Soran University Students

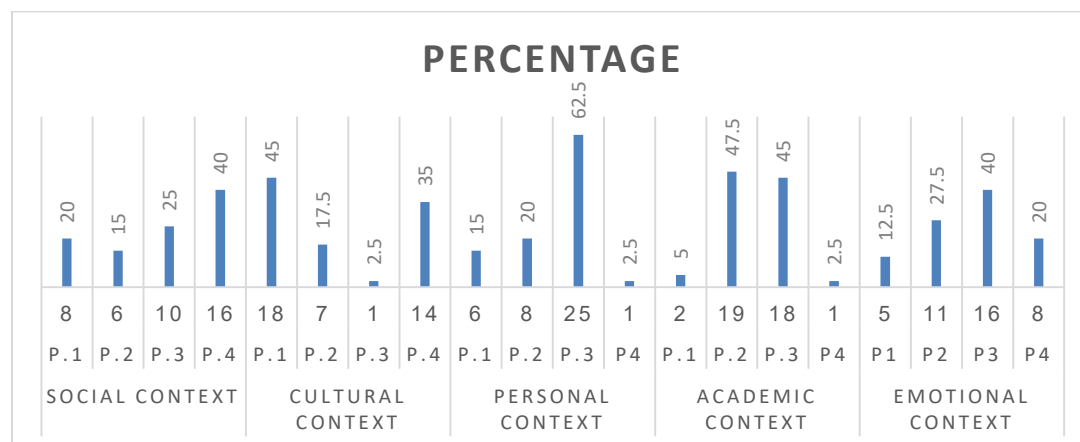
[illegible]

	Social context				Cultural Context				Personal Context				Academic Context				Emotional Context				Total
																					40
	p.1 (FGS )	p.2 (FSS )	p.3 (FAS )	p.4 (FRS )	p.1 (FAS )	p.2 (FG S)	p.3 (FS S)	p.4 (F RS )	p.1 (FS S)	p.2 (FAS )	p.3 (FR S)	p4 (F GS )	p.1 (FS S)	p.2 (FAS )	p.3 (F GS )	p4 (F RS )	p1 (FAS )	p2 (FR S)	p3 (F SS )	p4 (F G S)	
	8	6	10	16	18	7	1	14	6	8	25	1	2	19	18	1	5	11	16	8	
percentage	20	15	25	40	45	17.5	2.5	35	15	20	62.5	2.5	5	47.5	45	2.5	12.5	27.5	40	20	

According to the statistics results presented in Table 3, it is found that Soran University students employed different strategies in different contexts; in a social context, 8 students (%20) used Face giving strategy, 6 students(%15) used face-saving strategy), 10 students(%25) used Face Assertive strategy, and 16 students(%40) used Face Restoration strategy.

In cultural context, 18 students (%45) used Face Assertive strategy, 7 students(%17.5) used face giving strategy), 1 students(%2.5) used Face saving strategy, and 14 students(%35) used Face Restoration strategy. In a personal context, 6 students (%15) used Face face-saving strategy, 8 students (%20) used the face assertive strategy, 25 students (%62.5) used the Face restoration strategy, and 1 student (%2.5) used the face-giving strategy.

In an academic context, 2 students (%5) used Face saving strategy, 19 students (%47.5) used face assertive strategy), 18 students (%45) used Face giving strategy, and 1 students (%2.5) used Face Restoration strategy. Finally, in the emotional context, 5 students (%12.5) used the Face assertive strategy, 11 students (%27.5) used the face restoration strategy, 16 students (%40) used Face face-saving strategy, and 8 students (%20) used the Face giving strategy.



**Figure 2.**The frequency of occurrence of the above-mentioned refusal strategies used by Soran University students.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the frequency of occurrence of the above-mentioned refusal strategies, used by Soran University students, is depicted from the most frequently used strategy which is the face restoration strategy in the personal context (%62.5) to the least frequently used one which is face giving strategy (%2.5) in personal context, Face saving strategy (% 2.5) in cultural context along with face restoration strategy (%2.5) in the academic context.

**Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the most and least frequently used refusal strategies by Soran University Students**

Soran university			%
Personal context	p.3	25	96.15385
Personal context and cultural context, academic context	p.4, p.3,p4	1	3.846154

According to the statistics results presented in Table 5, it is found that Soran University students employed different strategies in different contexts; the most frequently used strategy is the face restoration strategy in the personal context (%96) the least frequently used one is face giving strategy in personal context, Face saving strategy in cultural context along with face restoration strategy in the academic context (%3).

### **Qualitative Analysis**

The data shows that the students from the two universities employed different strategies for refusing marriage proposals across various contexts (social, cultural, personal, academic, and emotional). Salahaddin University students tended to use more face-assertive and Face Saving strategies, while Soran University students relied more on Face Restoration strategies. This suggests potential differences in the cultural norms, communication styles, and face-saving behaviours between the two student populations.

### **Contextual Variations in Refusal Strategies**

The frequency of the refusal strategies used by the students varied significantly across different contexts. For example, Salahaddin University students used more Face Assertive strategies in the cultural context, while Soran University students used more Face Restoration strategies in the personal context. This indicates that the students tailored their refusal strategies to the specific situational and contextual factors, likely to maintain their social face and navigate the cultural expectations surrounding marriage proposals.

### **Predominant Strategies and Underlying Reasons**

The most frequently used strategies by Salahaddin University students were Face Assertive in the cultural context (37.5%) and Face Restoration in the personal context (35%). For Soran University students, the most common strategies were Face Restoration in the personal context (62.5%) and Face Assertive in the academic context (47.5%). These predominant strategies suggest that the students prioritized different face-saving concerns, such as asserting their autonomy, restoring their image, or accommodating cultural norms, depending on the context.

### **Least Frequently Used Strategies and Potential Implications**

The least frequently used strategies were Face Assertive in the emotional context for Salahaddin University students (12.5%) and Face Giving in the personal and cultural contexts, as well as Face Restoration in the academic context for Soran University students (2.5-3%).

The reluctance to use certain strategies, such as face-giving, may indicate a cultural tendency to avoid direct refusals or overt face-threatening acts, especially in personal and emotional contexts.

### **Potential Sociocultural Factors and Implications**

The differences in refusal strategies between the two universities could be influenced by various sociocultural factors, such as regional variations, religious or ethnic backgrounds, or differences in educational environments. Understanding these nuances can inform cross-cultural communication training, facilitate better interpersonal interactions, and help address potential misunderstandings in marriage proposal situations.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the refusal strategies employed by Salahaddin University and Soran University students in the context of marriage proposals. The comparative analysis between the two universities reveals notable differences in the frequency and patterns of refusal strategies used by the students.

One key distinction is the predominant use of Face Assertive strategies by Salahaddin University students, particularly in the cultural context, while Soran University students favoured Face Restoration strategies, especially in the personal context. This suggests that the two student populations may have differing cultural norms and communication styles when it comes to navigating marriage proposal situations.

The Salahaddin University students' tendency to use more Face Assertive strategies could be indicative of a stronger emphasis on autonomy, self-determination, and direct communication in their cultural and social contexts. The willingness to openly assert their refusal may reflect a greater emphasis on individual agency and a desire to maintain their personal boundaries, even in the face of cultural expectations surrounding marriage.

In contrast, the Soran University students' preference for Face Restoration strategies, particularly in the personal context, may indicate a greater focus on preserving social harmony, saving face, and avoiding direct confrontation. This approach aligns with the cultural values of many societies in the region, where maintaining one's public image and respecting social hierarchies are of paramount

importance.

The contextual variations observed in the use of refusal strategies by both universities further underscore the nuanced and adaptive nature of face-saving behaviours. Students appear to tailor their responses to the specific demands and expectations of different settings, ranging from the social and cultural to the personal and academic. This contextual sensitivity suggests a sophisticated understanding of the sociocultural norms and the need to navigate them strategically.

The least frequently used strategies, such as Face Giving by Soran University students and Face Assertive in the emotional context for Salahaddin University students, may indicate cultural taboos or discomfort around certain types of refusals. The reluctance to use these strategies could be rooted in the desire to avoid direct face-threatening acts, especially in intimate or emotionally charged situations, where preserving social harmony and maintaining one's public image are of paramount concern.

The findings of this study have important implications for cross-cultural communication, particularly in the realm of marriage proposals and other interpersonal interactions. Understanding the nuances of refusal strategies and the underlying sociocultural factors can help facilitate more effective and respectful communication, mitigate potential misunderstandings, and foster greater cultural sensitivity and understanding.

Future research in this area could delve deeper into the specific sociocultural, religious, and educational, political factors that shape the refusal strategies employed by university students in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Expanding the study to include a larger and more diverse sample, as well as exploring the perspectives of the individuals receiving the refusals, could further enrich the understanding of these complex interpersonal dynamics.

## **Conclusion**

This study provided valuable insights into the complex dynamics involved in declining marriage proposals within the context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. By applying the face negotiation theory framework, the researchers were able to analyze the different factors and norms that influence the choice of refusal strategies among female university students in this region.

The findings revealed significant differences in the refusal strategies employed by female participants in different universities. Additionally, the study explored the perceptions and experiences of individuals on the receiving end of marriage proposal refusals. These insights underscore how the communication process and outcomes are shaped by the face concerns and conflict management styles of all parties involved. Gaining this nuanced understanding is crucial for navigating sensitive interpersonal negotiations within the context of Iraqi Kurdistan. This research contributes to the existing literature on refusal strategies by providing a comprehensive analysis of the complex sociocultural influences at play. The findings have practical implications for enhancing cultural, academic, personal, emotional and social competencies and improving interpersonal relationships, particularly in the context of marriage proposals and negotiations. Further research is warranted to expand our understanding of these dynamics in other diverse settings.

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## Appendix

Below is a questionnaire form custom-made for researching the strategies of rejection in contemporary marriages among KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government) Public University students:

**Title of Research: Decoding Marriage Proposals: Strategies of Rejection in Contemporary Marriages among KRG Public University Students**

**By**  
**Dr.Kurdistan Rafiq and Dr.Chiyae Khurshid**

**Note to Participants:** Thank you for participating in this research study questionnaire. Your responses are valuable and will contribute to a better understanding of rejection strategies in contemporary marriages among KRG Public University students. Please answer the following questions honestly and to the best of your ability. Your responses will be kept confidential.

**Personal Information:**

- Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
- What is your academic major? \_\_\_\_\_

Variables	Rejection Statements/ Items
<b>social context</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I appreciate your proposal, but I have to be honest—I don't see a future for us as a married couple."</li> <li>I've been thinking about your proposal, and I think we should focus on our individual goals for now."</li> <li>I understand your feelings, but I have to decline your proposal. I don't feel the same way about you</li> <li>I've realized that I need more time to figure out what I want in life before considering marriage. I hope you can respect my decision." I am sorry</li> </ol>
<b>cultural context</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I've been thinking about your proposal, and I realize how important our culture is to both of us. Maybe we should take some time to discuss our options with our families.</li> <li>In our society, marriage is sacred, and I don't think we're meant to be together in that way. I hope you can accept my decision with understanding."</li> <li>I've been reflecting on our cultural expectations, and I think we should focus on our individual paths for now. Let's see where life takes us."</li> <li>"In our culture, marriage is a significant commitment, and I don't believe we're the right match for each other. I am sorry, I must respectfully decline your proposal."</li> </ol>

<b>personal context</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I've considered your proposal, and while I care about you deeply, I don't think marriage is the right step for us. Let's cherish what we have and see</li> </ol>
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>where life takes us."</li> <li>I've thought about it, and I don't think we're compatible for marriage. I cannot accept your proposal."</li> <li>"I've been thinking about your proposal, and I realize I'm not ready for marriage right now. Let's continue to support each other as friends."</li> <li>"I appreciate your proposal, but I don't see a future together. I need to be honest about my feelings and decline."</li> </ol>
<b>academic context</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I understand your desire to move forward, but I think we should focus on our individual academic pursuits for now. Let's keep communication open and see where our goals lead us."</li> <li>Thank you for your proposal, but I'm not ready to balance marriage with my academic responsibilities. I have to decline."</li> <li>I appreciate your good feelings, but I think it's important for both of us to focus on our studies before considering marriage. Let's revisit this conversation later."</li> <li>"I appreciate your proposal, but I'm fully committed to my academic pursuits right now. I am sorry I cannot accept your proposal."</li> </ol>
<b>emotional context</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I understand how much this means to you, but I'm struggling with my emotions right now. Can we pause and revisit this conversation later?"</li> <li>I understand your desire to marry me, but I apologize and cannot say yes. My heart tells me it's not right."</li> <li>"I've been thinking about your proposal, and while I care about you, I'm not sure if I'm ready for marriage. Can we take some time to process our feelings?"</li> <li>I care about you deeply since I know your good heart but I cannot see us building a future together. I have to decline."</li> </ol>

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your input is greatly appreciated!