# The Use of invitation-refusal strategies by Iraqi EFL University students in an online interaction*

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استخدام استراتيجيات رفض الدعوات من قبل طلبة الجامعات العراقية الدراسين للغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية في التفاعل عبر الانترنت

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المستخلص

تتميز المجتمعات الإسلامية باستخدامها لمختلف أفعال الكلام في مواقف الحياة اليومية، وخاصةً فعل الدعوة. لا يُعَدّ إظهار القبول بأهمية إظهار الرفض، لذا يحرص معظم الناس على عدم التسبب في إحراج الداعي أو تهديده. يُعدّ طلاب المرحلة المتوسطة في جامعة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقية من بين الذين درسوا ومارسوا استخدام فعل الدعوة. ومع ذلك، قد يواجه البعض صعوبة في تحديد الاستراتيجية المناسبة لرفض الدعوة، إذ قد تتأثر هذه الاستراتيجية بعوامل مختلفة، مثل الوضع الاجتماعي والجنس والعمر. لذا، جاءت هذه الدراسة لتسليط الضوء على الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة لرفض الدعوة، ودور متغيرات المسافة الاجتماعية والوضع الاجتماعي والجنس في اختيار هذه الاستراتيجيات.

**الكلمات المفتاحية: الدعوة ، استراتيجيات الرفض ، النزاصل عبر وسائل الانترنت**

## Abstract

Islamic communities are distinguished by their employment of various speech acts in daily life situations especially the speech act of invitation. Showing acceptance is not as important as showing refusal, therefore, most people try not to cause an embarrassment or threaten the inviter's face. Iraqi EFL University intermediate-level students are among those who have studied and practiced the use of speech act of invitation. However, some of them may face difficulties in deciding what strategy to use when refusing invitation since the latter might be affected by various factors such as social status, gender, and age. Accordingly, the present study came into existence to shed light on the strategies employed when refusing invitation and what role the variables of social distance/status and gender play in the selection of these strategies. Keywords: invitation, refusal strategies, online interaction

## 1. Introduction

In everyday life language, people invite one another, including friends or relatives in social interactions. Invitation is a crucial part of everyone's daily life. It is a means of strengthening and increasing social relationship and solidarity since there is some sort of mutual understanding between the inviter and the invitee. Performing an invitation, like any other speech acts, does not only include saying something on the part of the speaker (the inviter), it, as stated by Austin (1962) and later by Yule (1996), includes doing something as well.Al-Khatib (2006) stated that invitations represent an essential part in daily life since they are considered to be crucial parts of everyday customs. Moreover, they contribute to the establishment of some kind of social harmony among people. In some situations, some people may accept these invitations, whereas in some other ones, other people might refuse them employing various pragmatic and linguistic strategies. Searle and Vandervenken (1985) declare that declining an invitation might be performed via direct or indirect strategies. For Leech (2014), invitation is an example of speech event that reflects the Generosity Maxim.In uttering any sentence, as stated by Austin to whom the work on Speech Acts belongs (1962), there are three types of Acts performed which are as follows:

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1-Locutionary which means that the production of any sentence involves some kind of reference and sense as in:
-Can you bring me a glass of water?     -Come to dinner.

2-Illocutionary which refers to the act performed in uttering a sentence as in the previous two examples (a request and an invitation respectively)

3-Perlocutionary which reflects the effect of the second Act "Illocutionary" on the invitee.

Later on, Searle made a great addition to Austin's opinions concerning Speech Acts Theory. Searle's addition has elaborated Austin's work. In 1979, he proposed a classification of functions of language use by dividing illocutionary acts into a number of categories:

 -Assertives     -Directives     -Commissives     and Directives According to Searle's classification, invitations belong to "Directives". The speaker attempts to direct the hearer (the interlocutor) to do or not to do some future action. (ibid.). For some other specialists like Hancher (1979), invitation belongs to Commissive Directives which means that the speaker is committed to a certain course of behavior. Downing and Locke (2006), and later Aarts et al. (2020), state that declaratives are used for making invitations since they represent the most common and essential act used to express an action. Declaratives are normally used to arrange a sentence. Some others relate invitation to request since by uttering it, the speaker affects the claim of the hearer "invitee" to "the freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984)To add more, there might be issues related to the type of event in which the recipient is invited to participate such as whether it is a routine and informal gathering or a more formal event (Drew, 2005). For Hornby (2005), invitation is a form of request, whether spoken or written, for someone to do something or to go somewhere. Suzuki (2009, p.28) also declares that the occurrence of the speech act of invitation is "…when the participation or attendance of the addressee at a certain occasion or event is requested by a speaker, basically, one is hosted by the other".As different from other Speech Acts such as requests, invitations are described as being free from obligation, urgency or need. They are the result of a voluntary decision dependent on the speaker's personal wish, and as such, invitations are crucial means of social solidarity, keeping interpersonal relationships and creating social cohesion (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014).

## 1.1. Speech Act of Invitation

As described by researchers (Austin, 1962; Paltridge, 2000; Yule, 1996), a speech act of invitation is an illocutionary act that manifests when an inviter is expressing his or her intention to ask a hearer to participate in attendance at a specific occasion in an immediate or future activity at a specific time and place. According to Searle's (1979) categorization of speech acts, an offer is a directive speech act in which the speaker gives the hearer instructions on what to do. In that they all instruct the hearer to take some action, offers are comparable to orders, requests, and directives in this way. However, unlike directives, requests, or orders, invitations urge the hearer to act in the hearer's favor; Instead, the hearer is told to take that action for his or her own gain.Hancher (1979) claims that an offer is therefore both commissive and directive in that the speaker not only commands the hearer to take certain actions but also promises to take those actions in the future. When inviting someone to dinner, for example, the inviter not only asks them to come to the social gathering, but also swears to fulfill the pledge they made to the invitee.An invitation must make mention to time, location, and a call for an answer, according to Wolfson (1989, p. 67). He asserts that there is a different category of offers where the leads are left unclosed. Simply stated, a modal auxiliary word like "must," "should," or "have" is always used, time is always illimitable, and an answer is never necessary. "Ambiguous invitations" are the name for this kind of request. (p.

122).As defined by Searle (1976:11), invitation is a directive illocutionary SA that alludes to the speaker's efforts to persuade the hearer to carry out a particular action. According to Hancher (1979:13), the call is made through a speaker's commitment to a particular course of action. Accordingly, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, quoted in Alflig, 2016:1) assert that an offer is a particular kind of request; as a result, by saying it, the speaker affects the hearer's claim to "the freedom of action and freedom from imposition."The speech act of invitation, according to Suzuki (2009: 28), "occurs when the participation or attendance of the addressee at a certain occasion or event is requested by a speaker; in essence, one is hosted by the other." An offer is a speaking occurrence that demonstrates the Generosity Maxim, according to Leech (2014:180). The invitation is viewed as an offer that takes place "in a hospitality frame"; this implies that the speaker, acting as the host, provides his addressee, who assumes the character of a visitor, with something enjoyable. In this way, different invitation kinds are used in every day social interaction. After that, it might be "an invitation to a party," "to a meal," "to stay at speakers' homes," or something similar.

## 1.2. Declining an invitation

The speech act of refusal has been highlighted as an important issue in discourse pragmatics research (Fraser, 1990; Wannaruk, 2008). The act of refusing a request, invitation, or an offer is known as a refusal or declining an act, and it occurs frequently in communication (Sadler & Eroz, 2001). Cross-cultural research has found variances in how diverse cultures communicate rejection and how they do so politely (Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Takahashi, 1996). Additionally, the strategies utilized to conduct a rejection are heavily influenced by culture. Thus, refusals are called face-threatening behaviors (Brown & Levinson, 1987) as they may harm both the speaker's and the addressee's face. According to Fraser (1990), the refusal speech act is an important part of communication that people utilize to express their incapacity or reluctance to respond to a request or an offer. In a similar context, Wannaruk (2008) states that refusals are frequently used to define limits and emphasize one's autonomy. Sadler and Eroz (2001) view refusals as ubiquitous in communication, and people use them to escape duties or situations that they consider to be unpleasant.Cross-cultural studies find that the strategies used for expressing refusals differ greatly among cultures. According to Olshtain and Cohen (1990), certain cultures value civility and harmony in communication, whereas others value directness and clarity. Takahashi (1996) believes that cultural differences may have a substantial influence on how refusals are interpreted, and a lack of awareness of these distinctions may result in confusion and ruined relationships. In the same vein, Brown and Levinson (1987) see refusals as face-threatening behaviors that can harm both the speaker's and the addressee's social dignity. As a result, people employ a range of strategies to minimize or mitigate the face-threatening impact of refusals. Individuals, on the other hand, use indirectness, hedging, and softening language among other methods to respectfully and successfully decline. Indirectness is the use of language that implies an unwillingness to comply without expressly rejecting the request (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989). Hedging entails using uncertain wording to soften a refusal (Holmes, 1990). Mitigating language entails using polite words to demonstrate regard for the addressee's sentiments (Beebe at al. , 1990).Furthermore, Jiang and Zhang (2019) observe that while analyzing the denial speech act in Chinese culture, Mandarin Chinese speakers frequently explain their reasons for denying a request, a habit that is compatible with the Confucian precept of face-saving. This is to say that by explaining their denial, the speaker might avoid the potentially humiliating consequence of the rejection and retain a healthy connection with the addressee. Additionally, as Cohen (1996) pointed out, in Chinese society, outright refusing a request is considered disrespectful and extremely rude, particularly when the individual inquiring is of a greater social position. As a result, the explanation for the denial assists to mitigate the impact of the rejection while also demonstrating respect for the addressee.

## 1.3. The notion of face

In everyday life, we used to communicate with each other, invite one another, make suggestions, promises, and perform different speech acts. All these acts are a means for maintaining good relationships with others. Keeping good relationships does not only require enough linguistic knowledge, but also social and cultural factors ought to be taken into account. To add more, we have to be more polite in making our acts to keep others' faces in raising such questions as whom we are talking to, what is his/her social status, what is the occasion, and how old he/she is, and whether the one we are talking to is a male or a female. Cohen (1996) declares that it is not enough to have a mastery over structure and lexicon to successfully communicate. Learners of a language are in urgent need to "…develop a grammatical or linguistic competence as well as a communicative or pragmatic competence in order to communicate effectively, especially when communicating across cultures". (Al-Zeebaree & Yavuz, 2018, p.152).In their attempt to perform a speech act, people are always after keeping the other participant's face

in addition to theirs. A speaker tries to make his action approved and accepted by the listener/hearer, and to be free from imposition. These two important desires that are called by Yule (1996, p.61) as "face wants" constitute the notion of face. These two desires are labelled as positive and negative face wants respectively. (Brown and Levinson, 1987).As stated earlier, the notion of face was suggested by Goffman in (1967) and later developed by Brown & Levinson (1987). Yule (1996, p.60) defines it as a person public image that refers to "emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize". It is also defined by Scollon & Scollon (1999, p.45) as "the negotiated public image, mutually granted to each other by the participants in a communicative event". When inviting someone or making any other speech act, the speaker takes face wants into highly consideration. He/she wants his/her action to be accepted or approved of and not to be impeded at the same time. Some acts threaten face in their nature, and as such, they need to be softening. (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Face threatening acts differ from one culture to another. Softening some threatening acts leads to another term that is called "face saving act" in which the speaker utilizes a structure in which he tries to lessen the threat as in the following examples: (Yule, 1996, p.61)

7-Someone is singing very badly, so you may suggest the following

7a-I will go and tell him to stop his bad noisy singing

But your friend would suggest saying the following:

7b-Tell him that it is too late and most people want to sleep and you could just ask him to stop soon.

8-You have a big meal and you want to invite Ali whom you think that he would not come.

8a-Would you like to come to my big meal? Whether you come or not it doesn't matter

But your friend would try to lessen the face threat by suggesting:

8b-Would you like to come to my big meal? Even if you couldn't come, I will highly respect your decision.

It seems that the notion of face is related to politeness. To be polite, you want to be accepted and accept others at the same time. In other words, the aim is to focus on positive and negative faces. The use of politeness strategies in performing speech acts has led to classifying societies into positive and negative politeness strategies. Al-Khatib (2001) says that Arab countries are positive politeness societies as opposed to England which is a negative politeness society.Accepting an invitation may not be as importance as declining it might be as far as politeness is concerned. Since the hearer accepts the invitation from the same gender, same level, or even different level and social status, both the inviter's and invitee's faces will not be threatened. But what matters is in the case of declining an invitation. The way someone refuses an invitation is much more important than the refusal itself since it carries negative responses directed to the inviter. (Gass & Houck, 1999). Refusals are considered as the most noticeable source of face-threatening. To avoid face threatening, the invitee may take various aspects into his consideration such as the age, gender, and social status of the interlocutor. To add more, Beebe and Cummings (1985) state that refusals are also affected by culture and sociolinguistic variables as well. The relationship between the inviter and invitee might highly be affected by the negative or inappropriate refusal. Accordingly, there are various strategies for refusals the invitee has to adopt in order to avoid offending one's interlocutors. Takahashi & Beebe (1987, p.133) declare that "the inability to say 'no' clearly and politely… has led many nonnative speakers to offend their interlocutors."

## 1.4. Empirical Background

Studies on declining an invitation are great in number since, as stated before, declining it is considered a face-threatening act.In his study concerning British refusal, Kitao (1996), reached a point that over half of British refusals include an expression of regret and an excuse or reason. He states that the British give reason(s) in refusing, and usually depending on the degree of face-threat, a statement of regret is added to refusals to status equal persons rather than people of higher or lower status.In his study, Felix-Brasdefer (2003) tackled declining an invitation by native speakers and advanced non-native speakers of Spanish. In his study entitled "Declining an Invitation: A cross-cultural Study of Pragmatic Strategies in American and Latin American Spanish", he searched the preference for and manipulation of politeness strategies by those speakers mentioned above. Data were collected via three simulated role-play situations, which were recorded and then transcribed, related to refusal to an invitation. One of the essential objectives in this study was to shed light on the similarities and differences between Language 1 and Language 2 as far as the politeness strategies employed by native/non-native speakers, are concerned.The results of this study showed that the preference for direct strategies was conditioned by the social status of the situation. Positive and negative transfer of these strategies was also attested. As for the transfer of L1 sociocultural knowledge, the subjects' performance and verbal reports showed that the lack of L2 sociocultural knowledge was a crucial factor affecting the advanced non-native speakers' inter-language.Eslami's

article (2010) was also an attempt for investigating refusal strategies due to their importance as face-threatening acts. She tackled refusal strategies in general without focusing on invitation or any other speech act. She offered a teaching approach for both awareness raising and production activities.In their study, Farnia and Xiaojuan Wu (2012) investigated the pragmatic behavior of refusal to invitation by Chinese international university students and Malaysian university students in Malaysia. The second aim is to seek the respondents' perception in the process of refusing an invitation regarding their cognition, language of thought, and perception of insistence after refusing an invitation. Data were collected through a written discourse completion task and an immediate structured post-interview.The results showed that both respondents used the same strategies for refusing invitations but with different frequencies.In his study, Moaveni (2014) studied the refusal strategies by American and International students at an American university. He tried to find out the differences in refusal strategies employed by American and International college students as well as gender variation. He used a Discourse Completion Task. Six situations were developed and grouped into two stimulus types eliciting refusals to an invitation and a request. The results showed that via the use of emails, all groups demonstrated preference for direct refusal. American females preferred expressions of gratitude and stating positive opinions, whereas American male gave reasons and alternatives. International students, on the other hand, employed a greater variety of semantic formulas. They tended to use more regret than the American students.Margutti et al. (2018) studied the speech act of inviting and responding to invitations in authentic telephone calls in seven different languages. Conversational analysis was used for investigating telephone calls that were all recorded in family homes, and in one case, in a bank office. The languages studied were: Chinese, English, Farsi, Finnish, French, Greek and Italian. In this study, a comparison across languages was opened to other issues, i.e. how a certain recognizable social action develops from its earlier inception to recipients' understanding and responses.In his article, Sarfo (2018) investigated refusing strategies to invitation due to the influence which these strategies have as a face-threatening act. Interlocutors try to minimize this threat through employing various ways or strategies. The study showed that the various ways of refusing invitations are greatly influenced by such variables as gender, age and social status.In their study, Azezah and Sudana (2021) tried to investigated the use of refusal strategies in virtual communication via instant message application, i.e. Whats App. The results showed that the most commonly used refusal strategies were that of regret, and promise of future acceptance. The use of negative politeness has a more tendency towards the employment of refusal. Data analysis results showed that indirect refusal strategy of reason, promise of future acceptance, and statement of regret were the semantic formulas that were often employed instead of the direct refusal ones.Mohammed (2020) studied refusal strategies employed by Iraqi students. They focused on social as well as contextual factors like gender and social status in identifying these strategies. The results showed that when refusing invitations, instead of directly saying "No", Iraqi EFL learners employ different strategies. Students' level of education was not identified in this study and the DCT was used for data collection. No attempt was made for investigating the strategies those students might employ when accepting an invitation. In their study, Al-Darraji et al. (2013) tried to analyze the realization patterns of invitation as a speech act. This study aims at shedding light on some cultural values underlying this type of speech acts. Via analyzing texts, the researchers concluded that the speakers of the two languages English and Arabic differ in the way of making an invitation. The main reason behind this difference is due to cultural differences between the two languages. The researchers investigated the making of an invitation by Iraqi EFL speakers who have some other cultural aspects such as politeness and their Islamic traditions let alone teaching.Later in (2018), Al-Zeebaree and Yavuz investigated refusal strategies employed by Kurdish Undergraduate students as compared with native speakers of English. A DCT was also employed in this study. How to accept an invitation was also left in this study.On a pragmatic level, Mohammed (2020), in her study, investigated the use of invitation by Iraqi EFL non-departmental students (Third-Year students-Department of Dentistry-Al-Mustaqbal University College). She held her study in terms of recognition and production. Multiple choice questions and a DCT were employed in this study. The results showed that the learners' performance on the recognition part was questionable as they were unable to differentiate invitation from other speech act. On the production part, on the other hand, the learners employed some strategies more than others.  She concluded that Iraqi EFL students exhibited a pragma-linguistic lack because they employ more direct strategies in performing invitation which call for conventional indirectness.

## 1.5. Research Questions

According to what has been presented earlier, the present study attempted to answer the following questions:
1-What are the strategies Iraqi EFL University intermediate-level students employ when refusing invitations?

2-Do the variables of social status and gender have any effect on the selection of refusal strategies, and which one is the most influential variable?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Design of the study

The present study employed a quantitative design. (12) various situations were given to a group of (80) fourth-years students, College of arts, Basra University for the academic year 2022-2023. The situations were divided into cases to high light the social status factors. These cases were (High- low, Low—high, and Equal level). The 80 participants, on the other hand, were also divided into four groups to show the effect of gender on the selection of refusal strategies. These groups were as follows: (Male-male, Male-female, Female-female, and Female-male). Table 1 below clarifies the above divisions:**Table 1 Division of participants and situations in the study**

| Cases | Gender division | Social relationship Division |
|---|---|---|
| Case 1 | M to M | H to L |
| | M to M | L to H |
| | M to M | E |
| Case 2 | M to F | H to L |
| | M to F | L to H |
| | M to F | E |
| Case 3 | F to F | H to L |
| | F to F | L to H |
| | F to F | E |
| Case 4 | F to M | H to L |
| | F to M | L to H |
| | F to M | E |

### 2.2. Participants

As stated before, 80 fourth-year intermediate-level students, College of arts, University of Basra were selected to be the sample of this study. The reason behind this choice was that they have been studying speech acts for more than three years, as a result, they do know what the study is about. They were all within the morning classes to avoid the effect of age-variable. To identify students with intermediate level, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was conducted. The total number of morning fourth-year students was 149. (25) of them refused participating in the test. Then, the test was conducted. The levels of the students were determined based on the test results, as shown in Table 2, where the results were reported as (CEFR) level and standardized score for the test as a whole.

Table 2. *Oxford Placement Test Results*

| CEFR Level | Score Range | Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| A1 | 0-20 | 1 |
| A2 | 21-40 | 15 |
| B1 | 41-60 | 31 |
| B2 | 61-80 | 71 |
| C1 | 81-100 | 33 |
| Total | | 151 |

(https://www.hdmstuttgart.de/en/students/departments/language_center/placement_tests/oopt)

Students who got 61-80 marks were located within the upper Intermediate level. They are also called independent users. A number of 87 students were within this level. They were placed under another filtration process in which they were asked some questions to avoid individual differences. The questions included:

●Have you ever lived in a country that speaks English?
●Do you make chats with native speakers of English?
●Is one of your parents a native speaker of English?

Accordingly, (3) students were excluded and (4) refused to participate. Then, the resultant number of participants was (80) intermediate-level students to be the sample of the study.

## 2.3. Instrument

To test the study questions, fulfill its aims, (12) various situations were given to (80) participants. Those 80 participants were all invited to join a telegram group, and then they were instructed about the aims of this test. The test situation's validity and reliability were ensured by exposing them to jury members (5 members) who were experts in the field of linguistics and language teaching. All the jury members' comments and notes were taken into high consideration, a matter that led to the final version of the test situations copy to be given to the participants (See Appendix    , please). To find out which strategies were employed. Beebe et al. model (1990) was made use of in this study. Beebe et al model is going to be adopted to classify the strategies employed in declining/refusing an invitation. In their model, which is considered as one of the most important ones and widely used taxonomies for refusals, Beebe et al (1990) classified refusal strategies into three main categories which are direct strategies, indirect ones and adjuncts. These strategies can be used with different speech acts such as requests, suggestions, and offers in addition to invitations. (Eslami, 2010). Direct strategies are simply represented by two essential types, i.e. performative and non- performative statements as shown in the following examples respectively:

19-I refuse.

20-No. or I can't, I won't. (Negative willingness or ability. (Beebe et al., 1990)

Indirect strategies, as stated by Azizah and Sudana (2021, p.251), include "statement of regret, wish, reason, excuse, explanation, consideration of the interlocutor from any responsibility, promises of future acceptance, statement of alternatives, statement of philosophy, of principle, set of conditions for future or past acceptance, repetition and avoidance". Here some examples of the indirect strategies used:

●I wish I could        (Wish)
● I have to drive my sons to their school.        (An excuse)
● If you had told me before, I would have come. (Set condition for future acceptance)

Adjuncts are also made of "positive opinion, gratitude, pause fillers, statement of empathy, and willingness". (ibid). Adjuncts can't be used alone by themselves but accompanied by refusal strategies. Below are some examples:

● That's a good idea.      (positive opinion/feeling or agreement)
● Uhh; well; oh; uhm      (Pause fillers)      (Beebe et al., 1990)

## 2.4. Procedure

Having been identified, the 80 participants were divided into four groups, as stated before, to show the effect of the social status and gender variables. Those groups were (Male-Male), (Male-Female), (Female-Female), and (Male-Female). To add more, the 12 various situations were also classified as 3 situations for each group. These three situations represented the three different levels of social status, i.e. (High to Low), (Low to High), and (equal level). To make it clear, let's take the following example situations:

1-Situation 2: "Ali,Your friend or a staff member, invites you to go to the movie with him", how would you refuse this?

2-Situation4: "Zaineb, you are a teacher and you invite your student, Zahra, to your birthday party", how would she refuse it?The first situation shows an invitation between two equal level male participants, whereas the second one (situation 4) shows an invitation from a high-level female to a low-level female. The aim here was to show whether the variable of social status and gender have any effect in the selection of refusal strategies or not. Test validity was ensured by asking five experts in the field of linguistics and language teaching* to check the test procedure and situations.

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●Prof. Dr. Nadia Majeed, Language Teaching, Technical Institute, Baghdad
●Prof. Dr. Abdul-Kareem Lazim. Applied Linguistics, College of Basic Education, Misan University
●Asst. Prof. Dr. Ali ARIF, Language Teaching, College of Languages, Baghdad University
●Asst. Prof. Dr. Thulfaqqar . Applied Linguitics, College of Arts, Mustansiriyah University

## 3. Results

Having been collected and re-written, the whole responses were classified according to refusal strategies suggested by Beebe et al. (1990), then, they were all statistically treated to find out which strategies were the commonly used and what effects social status and gender variables have.Having been analyzed, the results showed that participants employed various declining strategies. To find an answer to the first research question, a comprehensive picture of the strategies used by the participants in order to decline an invitation in Telegram interactions across the four gender conditions (male to female, mal to male, female to male and female to male) has been provided in Figure 3.1. This figure vividly demonstrates the most frequently used strategy of each category (direct, indirect and adjunct) in male to male, male to female, female to female or female to male conditions:
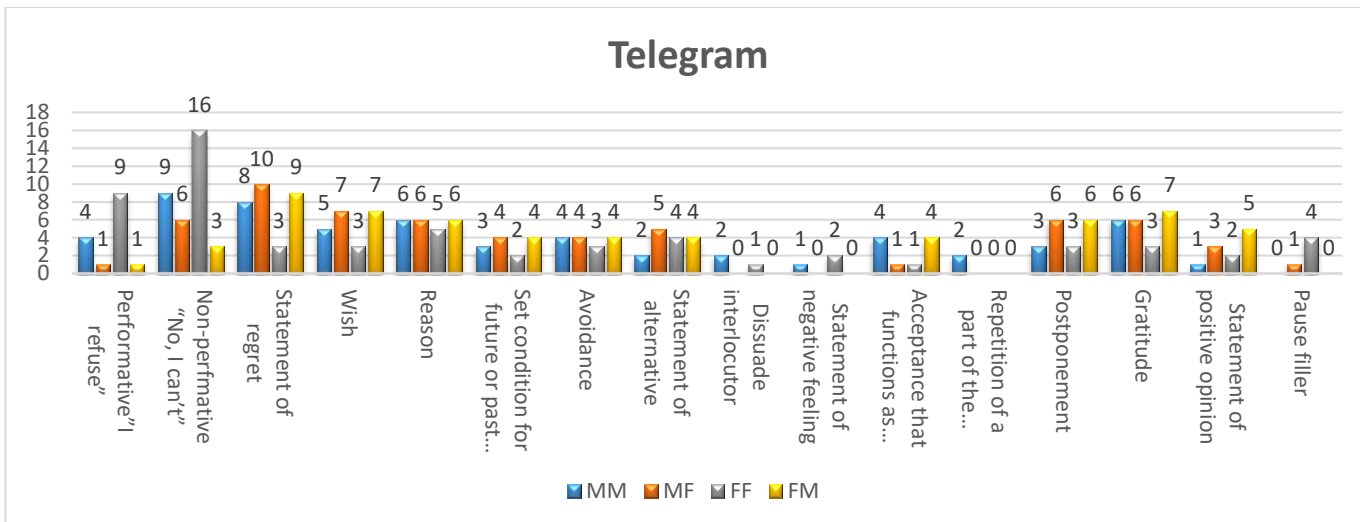


Figure 3. 1. Strategies used to decline an invitation in Telegram interactions across the four gender conditions (male to female, mal to male, female to male and female to male).

Most Iraqi EFL university intermediate-level students preferred using indirect strategies to show their invitation refusal, regardless of some few direct responses that made social status and gender more prominent. Let's consider some examples:

In situation1, most refusal responses were indirect regardless of gender or social status as in:

-"No, thanks. I can't come because I have something else to do"

-I'm sorry. I can't.

-"Thank you teacher, but I'm not sure I could come".

In situation 4 which occurred between two females, on the other hand, high-level females also preferred using an indirect refusal strategy rather than direct or adjunct one as seen below:

-"Happy birthday dear. But I'm sorry I can't".

-"I wish I could come".

-"Thank you dear. I will think about it".

In situation 6 a lower-level female invited a higher-level female. Here some responses were direct and made the social distance so clear as in:

-Situation 6 "Fatemah, your younger sister, Saja, invites you to go to the market", how would you refuse her invitation?

-"How dare you, Saja? You know I hate cinema movies".

-"Leave it".

Regardless of these negative face-threatening responses, some others were highly polite and indirect or adjuncts that did not cause an embarrassment to the invitee as in the following:

-What about watching an action film?   (Alternative)

-I shall think of it (Postponement)

-Sorry, I cannot (Regret and non-performative)

-Really thankful to you, but I'm afraid I cannot. – (adjunct)

-What a great idea it is! But I'm really sorry.   – (adjunct-showing positive opinion)

Various factors may govern the way people respond to an invitation, whether accepting or refusing it, such as the mood of the invitee, time, relationship, and even the type of invitation. However, most Iraqi EFL university intermediate-level students preferred using indirect strategies to show their refusal other than the direct or adjunct ones. A convincing explanation will be provided in the next coming sections.

Moving to find an answer to the second research question, an attempt was made to find out whether there was any association between the choice of declining strategies and the social status of the interlocutors in male to male interactions. The following table indicates the percentage of the strategies used in male to male interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in face to face contexts.

Table 3. 2. Percentage of declining strategies used in male to male interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in Telegram contexts

| | | | Direct Strategies | Indirect Strategies | Adjunct Strategies | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social status (Male-Male) | High-Low | Count | 0 | 16 | 4 | 20 |
| | | % within st | 0.0% | 40.0% | 57.1% | 33.3% |
| | Low-High | Count | 4 | 13 | 3 | 20 |
| | | % within st | 30.8% | 32.5% | 42.9% | 33.3% |
| | Equal Level | Count | 9 | 11 | 0 | 20 |
| | | % within st | 69.2% | 27.5% | 0.0% | 33.3% |
| | Total | Count | 13 | 40 | 7 | 60 |
| | | % within st | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Then, in order to see whether the social status has any role in the choice of declining strategies used by the interlocutors in male to male interactions, Crammer v was employed. The size of Cramer's coefficient between strategies and social status in male to male interactions is 0.342 and the approximate significance is 0.007. This is meaningful. This indicates that the kind of strategy has meaningful relationship with social status in male to male interactions; in other words, social status of the participants plays a role in the selection of the strategies by the interlocutors in male to male interactions. Table 3. 3. Cramer's V for male to male interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in Telegram contexts

| | | Value | Approximate Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nominal by Nominal | Phi | .484 | .007 |
| | Cramer's V | .342 | .007 |
| N of Valid Cases | | 60 | |

Low-level males showed a high degree of respect when declining a high-level males' invitation. They used indirect and adjunct strategies (16 and 4 times respectively out of 20 responses), and no cases of direct refusal strategy were recorded. They even employed more than one strategy to show their refusal. Let's consider the following examples:

-Situation 1: "you are at a party, and a male teacher of yours invites you to a glass of orange juice"

-Thank you Sir. I'm really sorry because I have to leave now. (Appreciation, regret and reason)

-Thank you so much for inviting me. I'm really sorry because I cannot.

-I hope you have a nice time dear Sir. I wish I could.      (adjunct and wish)

High-level males, on the other hand, were also very polite in showing their declining. Most of them (13 times out of 20) preferred using indirect strategies, 4 of them used direct ones and 3 used adjunct strategies. Let's take an example:

-Situation 3: "One of the male workers in your company wants to pay your way"

-What about letting me pay this time?      (Indirect- alternative)

-I highly appreciate this, but please don't. (adjunct)

-Please dear, pay for the juice only and I will pay for the rest.      (Alternative)

Equal level males, like in all other cases and situations, preferred using indirect and direct refusal strategies (11 and 9 times respectively) to show their declining. This might be due to the strong relationship between the two participants. In situation 2, it could be noticed that most responses were as follows:

-Situation 2: "Your friend, or a staff member, invites you to go to the movie with him":

-Next time.                         (Postponement)

-I 'm sorry dear. I have to go.       (regret and reason)

-No, I cannot.                      (direct)

-No. that's a terrible idea. Forget it.          (Negative feeling)

Along the same lines, the association between the choice of declining strategies and the social status of the interlocutors in male to female interactions was examined then. The following table indicates the percentage of the strategies used in male to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in face to face contexts.

Table 3. 4. Percentage of declining strategies used in male to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in Telegram contexts

| | | | Direct Strategies | st Indirect Strategies | Adjunct Strategies | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social status (Male-Female) | High-Low | Count | 0 | 16 | 4 | 20 |
| | | % within st | 0.0% | 37.2% | 40.0% | 33.3% |
| | Low-High | Count | 6 | 12 | 2 | 20 |
| | | % within st | 85.7% | 27.9% | 20.0% | 33.3% |
| | Equal Level | Count | 1 | 15 | 4 | 20 |
| | | % within st | 14.3% | 34.9% | 40.0% | 33.3% |
| Total | | Count | 7 | 43 | 10 | 60 |
| | | % within st | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The size of Cramer's coefficient between strategies and social status in male to female interactions is 0.292 and the approximate significance is 0.036. This is meaningful. It indicates that the kind of strategy has meaningful relationship with social status in male to female interactions in Telegram contexts.Table 3. 5. Cramer's V for male to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in Telegram contexts

| | | Value | Approximate Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nominal by Nominal | Phi | .414 | .036 |
| | Cramer's V | .292 | .036 |
| N of Valid Cases | | 60 | |

Once more here, females, in responding to males' invitations, were also very polite and showed their prestigious nature when declining males' invitations. The majority of females preferred using indirect refusal strategies (16 times out of 20) and just 4 of them employed adjunct ones. It must be stated here that females did not employ any direct declining strategy when responding to a male's invitation. Responses to the following situation:-
Situation 8: "Hadeel, an undergraduate student who gets along with you invites you to have lunch with him today"were:
-Thank you for the invitation but I'm sorry I cannot make it.    (adjunct and regret)
-Today? I'm really sorry I'm not sure I could. (avoidance- repetition and hedging)
-Situation 7: "Zaineb, your classmate, Ahmed, invites you to his party"
-Happy birthday dear. I wish I could.        (adjunct and wish)
-I'm sorry but I cannot come something came up.              (regret and giving reason)

By the same token, the possible association between the choice of declining strategies and the social status of the interlocutors in female to female interactions was investigated. The following table indicates the percentage of the strategies used in female to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in Telegram contexts.Table 3. 6. Percentage of declining strategies used in female to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in Telegram contexts

| | | | Direct Strategies | Indirect Strategies | st Adjunct Strategies | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social status (Female-Female) | High-Low | Count | 2 | 13 | 5 | 20 |
| | | % within st | 8.0% | 50.0% | 55.6% | 33.3% |
| | Low-High | Count | 13 | 5 | 2 | 20 |
| | | % within st | 52.0% | 19.2% | 22.2% | 33.3% |
| | Equal Level | Count | 10 | 8 | 2 | 20 |

|  | % within st | 40.0% | 30.8% | 22.2% | 33.3% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | Count | 25 | 26 | 9 | 60 |
|  | % within st | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Like the previous cases, in order to find the relationship between social status and the choice of declining strategies by the interlocutors in female to female interactions, the Crammer's v was employed. The size of Cramer's coefficient between strategies and social status in female to female interactions is 0.336 and the approximate significance is 0.009. This is meaningful. This indicates that the kind of strategy has meaningful relationship with social status in female to female interactions. In other words, social status proved to play a role in the choice of strategies by the interlocutors for declining an invitation in female to female interactions.Table 3. 7. Cramer's V for female to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in Telegram contexts

|  |  | Value | Approximate Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nominal by Nominal | Phi | .475 | .009 |
|  | Cramer's V | .336 | .009 |
| N of Valid Cases |  | 60 |  |

In both contexts, females' responses to other females' invitations were highly influenced by social status and gender as well. Low-level females showed high respect in employing indirect declining strategies when responding to other females' invitations. They apparently respected those females with a social status higher than theirs. High-level females, on the other, mostly employed direct strategies when declining low-level females' invitations, a matter that also reflected the influence of social status the invitees had as they reflected a lesser degree of respect to low-level females. They employed non-performative refusal strategy in most of their responses. Equal level females used all strategies to show their declining to invitations, a matter that reflected the deep relationship those females have with each other. Let's consider some responses to all three levels:

-Situation 4 :" Zaineb, you are a teacher, and you invite your student, Zahra, to your birthday party":

-Happy birthday. I'm really sorry because I have to travel tonight   (adjunct and regret with justification)

-Oh! Thanks a lot dear. I promised I will come next time     (Positive feeling and postponement- positive acceptance)

-I'm really sorry because I can't come due to a lot of things.    (Regret and reason)

-Situation 6:"Hadeel, your younger sister, invites you to go to the market":

-How dare you Saja! You know I hate cinema movies     (negative feeling)

-I can't, I'm so busy.          (non-performative and reason)

-Leave it.          (direct)

-Really thankful, but I'm afraid I can't.          (positive feeling and regret)

As the last step of this section, the association between the declining strategies and the social status of the interlocutors in female to male interactions was investigated. The following table indicates the percentage of the strategies used in female to male interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in Telegram contexts.Table 3. 8. Percentage of declining strategies used in female to male interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in Telegram contexts

|  |  |  | Direct Strategies | Indirect Strategies | st Adjunct Strategies | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social status (Female-Male) | High-Low | Count | 0 | 16 | 4 | 20 |
|  |  | % within st | 0.0% | 36.4% | 33.3% | 33.3% |
|  | Low-High | Count | 1 | 14 | 5 | 20 |
|  |  | % within st | 25.0% | 31.8% | 41.7% | 33.3% |
|  | Equal Level | Count | 3 | 14 | 3 | 20 |
|  |  | % within st | 75.0% | 31.8% | 25.0% | 33.3% |
| Total |  | Count | 4 | 44 | 12 | 60 |
|  |  | % within st | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Relationally, in order to find if there is any relationship between social status and the choice of declining strategies by the interlocutors in female to male interactions, the Crammer's V was employed. As Table 4. 65 demonstrates, the size of Cramer's coefficient between strategies and social status in female to male interactions is 0.187 and the approximate significance is 0.382. This is not meaningful; it indicates that the kind of strategy does not have meaningful relationship with social status in female to male interactions.Table 3. 9. Cramer's V for female to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in Telegram contexts

| | | Value | Approximate Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nominal by Nominal | Phi | .264 | .382 |
| | Cramer's V | .187 | .382 |
| | N of Valid Cases | 60 | |

As seen before, males were very polite and careful in choosing the type of strategies when negatively responding to females' invitations. In all levels, the majority of males employed indirect refusal strategies as indicated in table 3.8. It is a must in Iraqi society and in Islamic societies in general to show respect to females regardless of the situations which they might be in. In all levels, only 4 times out of 60 employed direct refusal strategies, whereas 44 times the indirect strategies were employed. Consider some responses:

-Situation 12: "Ziad, your manager, Saja, invites you to have a drink or breakfast with her":
-I apologize, sorry because I can't.              (regret)
-I really like to come but I have to go to the dentist.      (appreciation and reason)
-Situation 11:"Hasan, your younger sister, Wejdan, invites you to have a cup of tea with her":
-I'm sorry sister, I can't drink tea now.          (regret)
-What about having orange juice?          (alternative)
-Situation10:"Ahmed, your colleague, Hadeel, invites you to her birthday party":
-Oh! That's great! I wish I could.              (Positive feeling and wish)
-I don't like birthday parties.                  (direct-very rude response- a face-threatening act)
-Happy birthday, Hadeel. I will think about coming.      (positive feeling and postponement)

    In the next step of the study, the relationship between the strategies used by the participants for declining an invitation in Telegram conditions and their gender was examined. Table 3. 10 demonstrates the percentage of the strategies used by the participants to decline an invitation in the 4 conditions of gender (male to male, male to female, female to male and female to male) in Telegram interactions.Table 3. 10. Cross-tabulation of declining strategies across 4 gender conditions in Telegram interactions

| | | | Direct Strategies | Indirect Strategies | st Adjunct Strategies | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| gender | Male-Male | Count | 9 | 8 | 6 | 23 |
| | | % within st | 26.5% | 21.6% | 26.1% | 24.5% |
| | Female-Male | Count | 6 | 15 | 6 | 27 |
| | | % within st | 17.6% | 40.5% | 26.1% | 28.7% |
| | Female-Female | Count | 16 | 5 | 4 | 25 |
| | | % within st | 47.1% | 13.5% | 17.4% | 26.6% |
| | Male-Female | Count | 3 | 9 | 7 | 19 |
| | | % within st | 8.8% | 24.3% | 30.4% | 20.2% |
| Total | | Count | 34 | 37 | 23 | 94 |
| | | % within st | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The size of Cramer's coefficient between the most frequent strategy and gender in general is 0.289 and the approximate significance is 0.016. This is meaningful; it indicates that there is a relation between the kind of strategy selected and gender-variated interactions.Table 3. 11. Cramer's V to find the association among declining strategies and the four gender conditions in Telegram interactions

| | Value | Approximate Significance |
|---|---|---|

| Nominal by Nominal | Phi | .408 | .016 |
| | Cramer's V | .289 | .016 |
| | N of Valid Cases | 94 | |

In order to delve into the association between the strategies employed by the participants and their gender at the three levels of social status for declining an invitation, a chi-square test was also employed. The results indicated meaningful association between the strategies employed by the participants and their gender at the three levels of social status for declining an invitation (p-value=0.00<0.05). In other words, the participants may use different strategies in their interactions based on the gender of the interlocutor at different social statuses. The same thing was noticed before within face-to-face interactions, i.e. with females, males preferred using highly polite strategies (mostly the indirect ones) when declining their invitations. Females, on the other hand, when declining other females' invitations preferred using the direct refusal strategies other than the indirect or adjunct ones. This might be justified due to the fact that most, if not all, females want to prove themselves, to show others especially females, their prestige, etiquette and high social status. Males, on the other hand, could rarely think this way; they all the time tried to show respect to others regardless of their different social status. Within telegram interaction, a very striking point must be emphasized that, in responding to other males, males employed direct refusal strategies more than any other type of strategies, whereas in face-to-face interactions they did not do that, instead most of them employed indirect refusal strategies.In the next step of data analysis, the relationship between the strategies used by male participants for declining an invitation in Telegram conditions with regard to three conditions of social status (higher to lower, lower to higher, and equal) was examined. Table 3. 12 demonstrates the percentage of the strategies used by male participants to decline an invitation in the three conditions of social status in Telegram interactions.Table 3. 12. Cross-tabulation of declining strategies used by males across 3 social status conditions in Telegram interactions

| | | | Direct Strategies | Indirect Strategies | St Adjunct Strategies | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social status (Male) | Low | Count | 0 | 32 | 8 | 40 |
| | | % within st | 0.0% | 38.1% | 42.1% | 33.3% |
| | High | Count | 5 | 27 | 8 | 40 |
| | | % within st | 29.4% | 32.1% | 42.1% | 33.3% |
| | Equal | Count | 12 | 25 | 3 | 40 |
| | | % within st | 70.6% | 29.8% | 15.8% | 33.3% |
| Total | | Count | 17 | 84 | 19 | 120 |
| | | % within st | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

In all their social levels, males preferred employing indirect declining strategies more than the direct or adjunct strategies to show their refusal.

In order to examine the association between the strategies employed by the male participants and their social status for declining an invitation, a chi-square test was also employed. The results indicated meaningful association between the strategies employed by males and their social status for declining an invitation (p-value=0.003<0.05). In other words, male participants may use different strategies in their interactions based on the social status of the interlocutor. This can clearly be noticed in the following examples:

-Situation 3: "One of the workers in your company wants to pay your way":

-Now? No, please.                (indirect- repeating a part)

-No, thank you.                (direct)

-Situation 1: "John, you are at a party, a male teacher of yours invites you to a glass of orange juice or to lunch":

-Thank you teacher, I wish I could.            (appreciation and wish)

-I'm sorry I cannot because I have to go.        (regret and reason)

-Situation 2: "Your friend, a male staff member, invites you to go to the movie":

-I'm sorry, next time we will go.            (regret)

-What about visiting Sara?            (Alternative)

-Let me think of it.                (postponement)

Table 3. 13. Chi-square test to find the association among declining strategies used by male participants in Telegram interactions

|  | Value | Df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 16.384ᵃ | 4 | .003 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 20.664 | 4 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 11.952 | 1 | .001 |
| N of Valid Cases | 120 |  |  |

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.67.Then, the relationship between the strategies used by female participants for declining an invitation in Telegram conditions with regard to three conditions of social status (higher to lower, lower to higher, and equal) was examined. Table 4. 73 demonstrates the percentage of the strategies used by female participants to decline an invitation in the three conditions of social status in Telegram interactions.Table 3. 14. Cross-tabulation of declining strategies used by females across 3 social status conditions in Telegram interactions

|  |  |  | Direct Strategies | Indirect Strategies | St Adjunct Strategies | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social status Female)( | Low | Count | 2 | 29 | 9 | 40 |
|  |  | % within st | 10.0% | 42.0% | 47.4% | 37.0% |
|  | High | Count | 7 | 17 | 4 | 28 |
|  |  | % within st | 35.0% | 24.6% | 21.1% | 25.9% |
|  | Equal | Count | 11 | 23 | 6 | 40 |
|  |  | % within st | 55.0% | 33.3% | 31.6% | 37.0% |
|  | Total | Count | 20 | 69 | 19 | 108 |
|  |  | % within st | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

In order to examine the association between the strategies employed by the female participants and social status for declining an invitation, a Cramer's V was employed. The size of Cramer's coefficient between strategies used by female participants and social is 0.192 and the approximate significance is 0.093. This is not meaningful; it indicates that the strategies employed by the female participants for declining an invitation has no relationship with social status.A look at table 3.14 above would clearly reveal that females, in general, preferred using indirect strategies for declining invitations directed from males, then direct strategies came next in the number of occurrences especially when responding to low-level females. Table 3. 15. Cramer's V to find the association among declining strategies used by female participants in Telegram interactions

|  |  | Value | Approximate Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nominal by Nominal | Phi | .272 | .093 |
|  | Cramer's V | .192 | .093 |
| N of Valid Cases |  | 108 |  |

## 4. Discussion & Conclusion

Invitation is an essential part of our daily life situations. It is a crucial part of our Islamic culture. Showing refusals seems to be more problematic than showing acceptance since refusal is regarded as a face-threatening act and may cause an embarrassment to the inviter. As a result, most Iraqi EFL University Intermediate-level students preferred using polite refusal strategies that do not threaten the inviter's face. Examining the occurrences and percentages of refusal strategies employed in chapter four-tables reveals that indirect strategies (statement of regret, wish, reason, postponement, etc.) were highly used by both participants in an online interaction. Male-male interaction via telegram has a significant relationship with the social status variable since the latter plays a central role in selecting the appropriate refusal strategies. Low-level males and females, for instance, did not employ any direct

refusal strategy when responding to a high-level male. The same thing can be noticed with (female-female) interactions where high-level female-invitees used direct refusal strategies more than any other type reflecting the high social status, prestige they have. The only case in which social status variable was not significant was in the case of (female-male) interactions where males employed indirect strategies regardless of the social status they possessed. This result is corroborated by most of the previously mentioned studies, such as Felix Brasdefer (2003), Al-Khatib (2006), Eslami (2010), Moaveni (2014), Sarfo (2018), Grain and Mahdi (2021), and Challob and Mohammed (2021), that highlighted the role the social status variable plays in the selection of the appropriate refusal strategies. Nelson et al (1998) also emphasizes that social status differences affect the choice or refusal strategies. Felix Brasdefer (2003), on the other hand reached a conclusion that males were more direct than females. It might be thought that to prove themselves, Iraqi EFL University intermediate-level females, as opposed to males, rely mainly on everything including the way they respond to others especially females. High-level females, for instance, used direct strategies (13 times) when declining low-level females' invitations, whereas low-level females, on the other hand, employed indirect ones (13 times as well) when declining high-level females' invitations. With males, the case would be different. Most high-level females employed indirect strategies (12 times) when responding to low-level males' invitations, though only six out of twenty employed direct refusal strategies and they were all of high social status responding to a low-level males' invitations. Low-level females also showed their respect and politeness when responding to high-level males' invitations. They used indirect strategies (16 times out of 20) and (4 times) the adjunct strategies, whereas the direct ones were never used. This indicates the effect social status variable has on the selection of the suitable refusal strategies as supported by various studies mentioned before.The size of Cramer's coefficient between the most frequent strategy and gender in general is 0.289 and the approximate significance is 0.016. This is meaningful; it indicates that there is a relation between the kind of strategy selected and gender-variated interactions. The results given in the previous chapter indicated that there was a meaningful association between the strategies employed by the participants and gender at the three levels of social status for declining an invitation (p-value=0.00<0.05). In other words, the participants may use different strategies in their interactions based on the gender of the interlocutor at different social status. This result is also corroborated by most of the previous studies such as Al-Khatib (2006), Abdulsattar et al. (2010), Sarfo (2018), and Challob and Mohammed (2021) who proved the role gender plays in the selection of declining strategies.Via telegram, males used all three types of strategies. The results presented in chapter four (Table 4.69) indicated that there is a meaningful association between the strategies used by males and their social status for declining an invitation. They show a high degree of respect that can be vividly traced in their responses to females, where the indirect strategies have been employed (15 times). Females on the other hand, guided by their nature, prestige and etiquette, employed direct strategies (16 times) when responding to other females. In other words, high-level females, when responding to low-level females, preferred using direct refusal strategies rather than indirect or adjunct. Challob & Mohammed (2021) reached a conclusion that gender as well as social status sometimes determine the use of most of refusal strategies, male and females might employ similar or even the same refusal strategies.To conclude, being governed by their Islamic habits, social norms and culture, most Iraqi EFL University intermediate-level students pay close attention when selecting the appropriate declining strategies, especially when responding to females, regardless of the cases in which females are responding to each other, and this cannot be overgeneralized.

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