Pragma-linguistic Invitation-Refusal Strategies Employed by Iraqi EFL University Intermediate-Level Students in a Face-to-Face Interaction*

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الاستراتيجيات البراغماتية اللغوية لرفض الدعوات من قبل طلبة الجامعات العراقية ذوي المستوى المتوسط الدارسين للغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية في المقابلات المباشرة

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المستخلص

هدفت الدراسة الحالية الى دراسة الاستراتيجيات البراغماتية اللغوية التي يستخدمها طلبة الجامعات العراقية من ذوي المستوى المتوسط الدارسين للغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية عند نفض الدعوات الموجهه لهم في التفاعلات المباشرة. كما بحثت الدراسة في الأدوار الوسيطة للمكانة الاجتماعية (العلاقة بين المتحاورين)، والجنس (ذكر ام انثى)، في اختيار نوع استراتيجيات الرفض. وللإجابة على أسئلة البحث، تم اختيار عينة عشوائية مكونة من (٨٠) طالبًا وطالبة من ذوي المستوى المتوسط في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة البصرة. أُجري اختبار جامعة اكسفورد لتحديد المستوى لغرض اختيار العينة من ذوي المستوى المتوسط. وبعد تحديدهم، قُسِّم الطلاب إلى أربع حالات (ذكر –ذكر ، أنثى–أنثى، ذكر –أنثى، أنثى–ذكر) وتم تعريضهم لانثى عشر موقفا من الحياة وطلب منهم رفض تلك المواقف. تم توزيع المواقف الاثنى عشر على ثلاثة مستويات (الاعلى –للادنى) (الادنى – للاعلى) و (في المستوى نفسه). ولغرض الاطلاع على انواع استراتيجيات الرفض المستخدمة، تم الاعتماد على انموذج بيب واخرون (١٩٩٠). اظهرت المراجعة الدقيقة لنتائج التحليلات الإحصائية أن غالبية طلاب المستوى المتوسط الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، استخدموا استراتيجيات غير مباشرة للتعبير عن رفضهم في التفاعلات المباشرة. وكان من ابرز الاستراتيجيات غير المباشرة المختلفة المستخدمة هنا: كان التعبير عن الأسف، ثم الرغبة، والسبب، والتبرير حيث استخدمها غالبية المشاركين. في التفاعلات المباشرة، استخدم معظم المشاركين استراتيجيات رفض غير مباشرة، وبدرجة أقل، استراتيجيات رفض مساعدة. أما في التفاعلات المباشرة، فقد ثبت أن متغير الوضع الاجتماعي كان له تأثير كبير على اختيار استراتيجيات الرفض. ولم يكن لمتغير الجنس نفس تأثير الوضع الاجتماعي. لم يكن هنالك تاثير ملحوظ لجنس الفرد عند اختيار استراتيجية الرفض خصوصا عندما يكون الطرف الاخر ذو جنس مختلف. فعند الرد على دعوة موجهه من انثى، على سبيل المثال، استخدم الذكور الانواع الثلاثة من استراتيجيات الرفض. اما الاناث، من جهة اخرى، فقد استخدمن استراتيجيات الرفض المباشرة في اغلب مواقف الرد على دعوة اناث اخريات، بينما سادت كل انواع استرايجيات الرفض على ردود الاناث عند رفض دعوة موجه من رجل.الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستراتيجيات البراغماتية اللغوية ، الدعوة ، رفض الدعوة، التفاعلات المباشرة

Abstract

The present study was an attempt to investigate the pragma-linguistic strategies employed by Iraqi EFL University intermediate-level students when refusing invitations in face-to-face interactions. It also investigated the mediating roles of social status (the relationship between the two interlocutors), and gender in selecting the type of refusal strategies. In order to answer the research questions, a number of (80) intermediate-level fourth-year students of English studying at University of Basra were chosen. An Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was conducted to separate those students with intermediate level. Having been identified, The students were divided into four cases (male-male; female-female; male-female; and female-male) and were given (12) Discourse Completion Tests (DCT) in the form of daily-life situations in which they had to show their refusal to an invitation directed to them by a partner in three different levels (High-Low, Low-High, and Equal Level). Beebe et al. model of invitation refusal strategies (1990) was employed to examine the types of strategies employed by the participants. Carefully reviewing the results of the statistical analyses reveals that the majority of Iraqi EFL University intermediate-level students employed indirect strategies to express their refusal in face-to-face interactions. Among the various indirect strategies employed here, Statement of regret, then wish, reason, and justifications were the most prominent ones that used by the majority of participants. In face-to-face interactions, most participants employed indirect and in lesser degree, adjunct refusal strategies. In face-to-face interactions, social status variable was proved to be of great influence on the selection of refusal strategies. Gender variable was not as influential as the social status was. Gender conditions were not associated with the type of strategies selected by participants as far as the opposite gender was concerned. When responding to females, male participants employed all three types of refusal strategies. Females, on the other hand, used direct strategies in most of their responses to females' invitations, whereas all three types of refusal were employed when responding to males' invitations.

Keywords: Pragma-linguistic strategies, invitation, refusing an invitation, face-to-face interaction

1. Introduction

Arab people used to invite each other on various occasions, even for the simplest ones such as having tea or coffee. As a result, inviting others has become an essential part of daily life. Inviting others 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.

Invitation, as a speech act, contributes 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.

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. Invitation as a Speech Act

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.

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).

Although they are conceptually comparable to Wolfson's ambiguous invitations, Clark and Isaac (1990) assert that ostensible invitations are yet another comment on the speech act of request. Ostensible speech acts of invitation can therefore be described as "those invitations that the speaker extends not to be taken seriously, but to accomplish some other unstated purposes, as indicated above." (p. 2). 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."

1.2. Refusing 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.

Cultural differences bring to the surface specific ways of expressing refusal (Olshtain & Cohen, 1990). It is considered disrespectful in Japanese society to deny a request immediately since it may cause the addressee to lose face. As a result, subtle means of expressing refusal while maintaining social compatibility are often adopted (Takahashi, 1996). This cultural practice corresponds to the Japanese idea of "amae," which emphasizes the value of interpersonal relationships and the need to preserve harmonious social connections (Doi, 1973). Directness and honesty, on the other hand, are highly desirable in American society, and it is normal to convey refusals clearly (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981). Direct communication is regarded as a demonstration of respect for the addressee's time as well as a means of avoiding ambiguity or misunderstanding. This behavior is consistent with the cultural concept of individualism, which values personal liberty and independence (Hofstede, 1984).

1.3. Invitation refusal and Face Concept

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).

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)

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

1a-I will go and tell him to stop his bad noisy singing

But your friend would suggest saying the following:

1b-Tell him that it is too late and most people want to sleep and you could just ask him to stop soon.

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

2a-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:

2b-Would you like to come to my big meal? Even if you couldn't come, I will highly respect your decision.

Refusals can be viewed as face-threatening acts in communication since they pose a potential threat to the positive face or social identity of the requester. To lessen this potential face risk, communicators may adopt politeness strategies that make the hearer's rejection less intimidating (Brown & Levinson, 1987). They explain that there are two primary sorts of politeness strategies: positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness is a politeness strategy that stresses the speaker's interest in the positive face of the hearer, which refers to a person's desire to be liked, loved, and respected by others. Positive politeness can be utilized in refusals to preserve a positive social interaction between the speaker and the hearer. Before starting a rejection, a person may utilize good courtesy by expressing thanks and appreciation to the listener. This may include thanking the hearer for their request, praising the significance of their request, or expressing sympathy for their circumstance (Kitao, 1996).

1.4. Previous Studies

It is stated earlier that studies on speech acts goes back to Searle (1976). Many researchers tackled the speech act of invitation from different aspects, but what is striking was that most of them focused on strategies employed in making invitation and those of refusing/declining them due to their crucial relation to face-threatening act.

1.4.1. Foreign Studies

In his study concerning British refusal, Liao (1994), 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.

Felix-Brasdefer (2003) tackled declining an invitation by native speakers and advanced non-native speakers of Spanish. In his study, he searched the preference for and manipulation of politeness strategies by those speakers mentioned above. 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 MalaysiaThe results showed that both respondents used the same strategies for refusing invitations but with different frequencies.

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. 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. 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.

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.

Azezah and Sudana (2021) tried to investigate 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.

1.4.2. Iraqi Studies

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.

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.

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

Based on what has been presented before, the present study tried to find out the answers for the following research questions:

1-What are the pragma-linguistic strategies Iraqi EFL university intermediate-level students might use when refusing invitations in face-to-face interactions?

2-Do the variables of social status or relationship between the two participants and gender affect the selection of refusal startegies?

2. Methodology

2.1. Study Design

The present study employed a quantitative design. Twelve various daily life situations were given to a group of (80) fourth-years students, College of arts, Mustansiriyah University for the academic year 2022-2023. The situations were divided into cases to high light the social status factors. These cases were as follows: (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 participants were told about the aims of this study. 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. To find out which strategies were employed, Beebe et al. model (1990) was employed in this study. It was 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:

1-I refuse.

2-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 (See Appendix A, please).

3. Results

    As previously mentioned, the first question of the study addressed the linguistic and pragmatic strategies used by Iraqi intermediate EFL students when declining invitations in face-to-face interactions. The strategies used by the participants in order to directly decline an invitation have been demonstrated in the following table:

Frequency and percentages of the strategies used for direct decline of an invitation in f eractions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Performative "I refuse"	12	27.9	27.9	27.9
	Non-performative "No, I can't"	31	72.1	72.1	100.0
	Total	43	100.0	100.0	

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As Table 2 reveals, the participants preferred "non-performative" strategies as the direct way for declining an invitation. In other words, regarding direct strategies, "non-performatives" were the most dominant strategies employed for refusing an invitation in face-to-face interactions as indicated in Figure 4. 3.
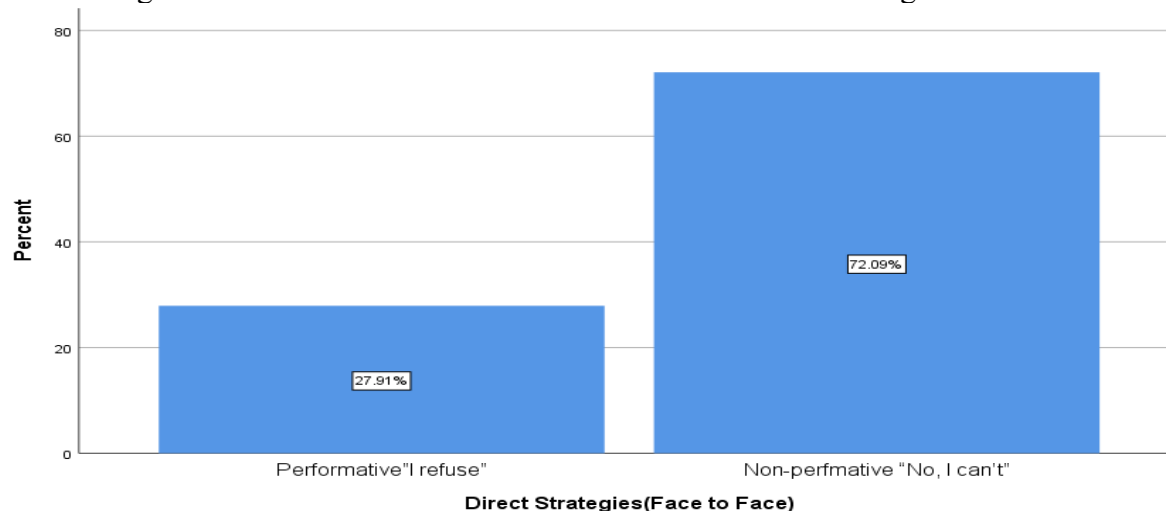

Figure 1. Frequency and percentages of the strategies used for direct decline of an invitation in face-to-face interactions

A look at the responses obtained from research participants reveals that the most direct refusal strategy was employed by equal level parties and also with an invitation directed by a lower-level to a higher-level invitee. In situations 2, 5, 7, and 10, most refusal strategies employed were direct in such cases as shown below:

-Situation 5: "Hadeel, your friend, Sarah, invites you to have orange juice with her, how would you refuse it?"
-No, I can't. You know I don't like it. – (non-performative)
-No, I don't like orange juice. – (non-performative)

Among friends or colleagues, it seems very usual to directly refuse an invitation without threatening the inviter's face especially in case that both participants are of the same gender since they are always together having various things done together, as a result, refusing the other's invitation directly does not cause an embarrassment or is not a face-threatening act.

Along the same lines, some strategies were employed by the participants in order to indirectly decline an invitation as demonstrated in the following table.

Frequency and percentages of the strategies used for indirect decline of an invitation in face-to ns

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Statement of regret	22	15.1	15.1	15.1
	Wish	15	10.3	10.3	25.3
	Reason	15	10.3	10.3	35.6
	Setting condition for future or past acceptance	12	8.2	8.2	43.8
	Avoidance	13	8.9	8.9	52.7
	Statement of alternative	14	9.6	9.6	62.3
	Dissuade interlocutor	10	6.8	6.8	69.2
	Statement of negative feeling	10	6.8	6.8	76.0

Acceptance that functions as refusal	9	6.2	6.2	82.2
Repetition of a part of the invitation	12	8.2	8.2	90.4
Postponement	14	9.6	9.6	100.0
Total	146	100.0	100.0	

As clearly demonstrated in Figure 2, "statement of regret" enjoyed the highest frequency. Showing regret and sorry for not being able to attend and giving reasons and justifications could be the most dominant strategy employed by most Iraqi people in their daily life. This kind of strategies does not threaten the inviter's face, nor does it cause an embarrassment to him. Participants used (regret and sorry) in order to soften the prelocutionary impact of the face-threatening act on the inviter. Let's consider the following examples:

-Situation 12: "Ziad, your manager, Tabarak, invites you to have a drink, how would you refuse it?"

In this situation, a high-level female invited a low-level male worker in her company. The majority of male responses were as follows:

-I'm really sorry, Sir. I have a lot to do. – (Statement of regret)

-I feel sorry because I can't. – (Statement of regret)

"Expressing wish" and "bringing reason" equally enjoyed the next rate of frequency. "Statement of alternative" and "postponement" were the next highest strategies followed by "Setting condition for future or past acceptance" and "Repetition of a part of the invitation". To add more, most of males in their responses give reasons and justifications for not being able to attend as in:

-"Oh! I'm sorry because I can't come because I have to travel tonight".

-"That's so kind of you Sir, but I can't because I have to drive my brother to his school".

Providing such reasons or justifications is socially considered as a very polite manner that creates positive feeling on the part of the inviter regardless of his/her invitation being rejected. Figure 2 below clearly demonstrates the strategies along with their frequencies.
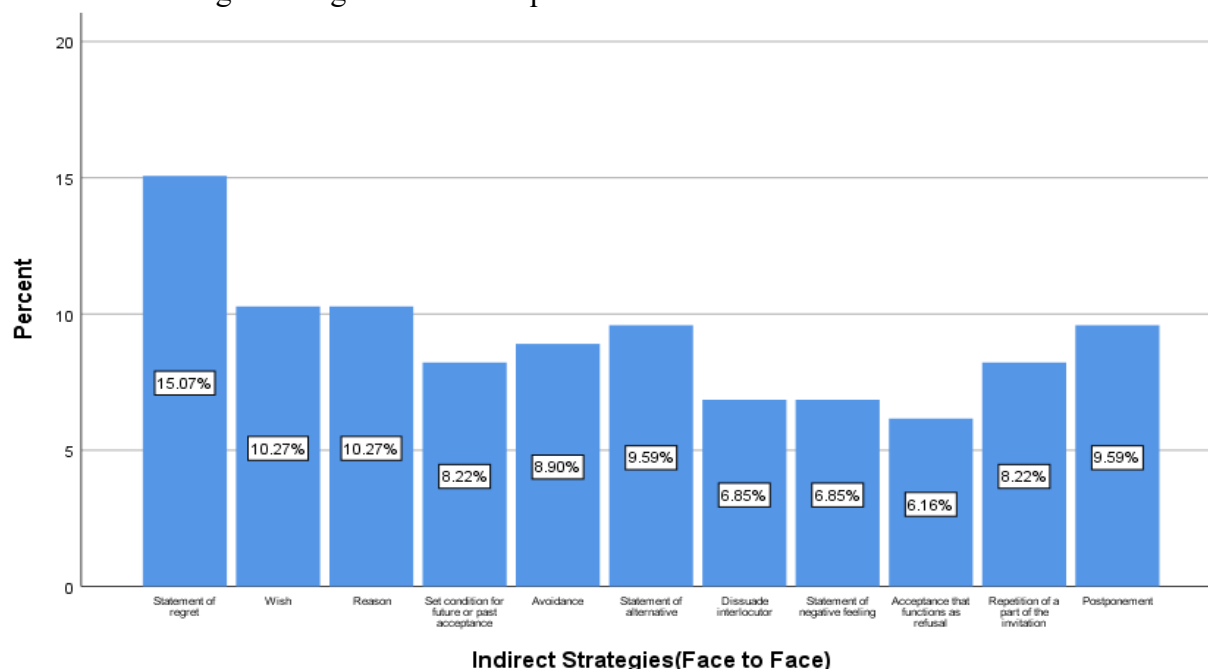

Figure 2 Frequency and percentages of the strategies used for indirect decline of an invitation in face-to-face interactions

Let's consider the following situation:

-Situation 9: "Fatemah, your boss, Falah, invites you to have a cup of tea with him, how would you refuse it?"

It can be noticed that most refusal strategies employed were expressing wishes, giving justifications, or trying to postpone or give an alternative as shown below:

-"Thanks for your invitation. I hope you enjoy your time. I'm really sorry".

-"I wish you have a good time. I'm really sorry because I have to get up early tomorrow"

-"Would you mind making it tomorrow?" – (Postponement)

-"What about having dinner?" – (alternative)

Meanwhile, some strategies were considered as adjunct. They were classified in a different category. Table 4 shows their frequencies and percentage.

Table 4 Frequency and percentages of adjunct strategies used to decline an invitation in face-to-face interactions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Gratitude	18	35.3	35.3	35.3
	Statement of positive opinion	11	21.6	21.6	56.9
	Pause filler	22	43.1	43.1	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

As indicated in Figure 3, "pause filler" enjoyed the highest frequency. "Gratitude" appeared as the second and "statement of positive opinion" stood as the third frequent strategies used by the participants in order to decline an invitation in face-to-face interactions.
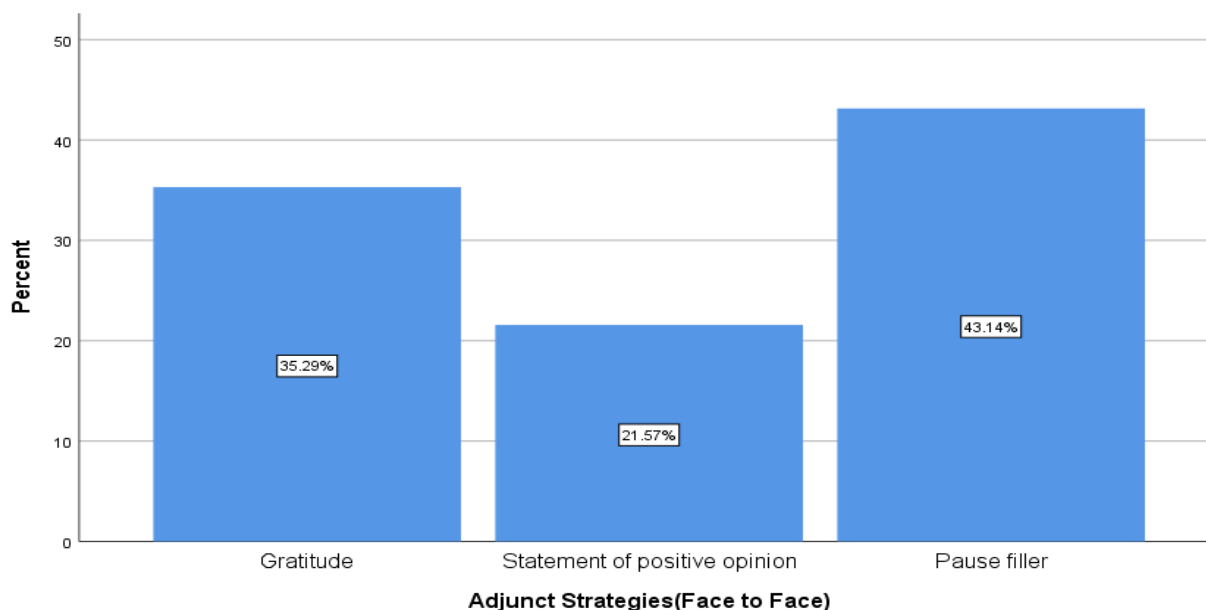

Figure 3 Frequency and percentages of the adjunct strategies used to decline an invitation in face-to-face interactions

Adjuncts might be regarded as an improved type that helps not threaten the inviter's face, i.e. an invitee shows his happiness and gratitude of being invited and then he/she shows his/her refusal or inability to come in a very polite manner as seen in the following responses:

-Situation 2: "Your friend (or a staff member) invites you to go to the movie, how would you refuse it?"

-"That's a good idea. But I'm really sorry I can't".

-"Oh! I wish I could".

In a nutshell, most of the various strategies of refusing invitations were employed by Iraqi EFL university intermediate-level students in a way that suits the inviter and did not threaten his face.

3. 1. Social status-related differences in the strategies used for declining an invitation in face-to-face interactions

In the next step, the researcher attempted 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 5 Percentage of declining strategies used in male to male interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in face to face contexts

			Direct Strategies	Indirect Strategies	Adjunct Strategies	
Social status (Male-Male)	High-Low	Count	2	14	4	20
		% within st	28.6%	34.1%	33.3%	33.3%
	Low-High	Count	2	14	4	20
		% within st	28.6%	34.1%	33.3%	33.3%
	Equal Level	Count	3	13	4	20
		% within st	42.9%	31.7%	33.3%	33.3%
	Total	Count	7	41	12	60
		% within st	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In order to find 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 used in male to male interactions for declining an invitation at the three levels of social status is 0.053 and the approximate significance is 0.987. This is not meaningful. It indicates that the kind of strategy does not have a meaningful relationship with social status in male to male interactions. In other words, social status of the participants does not play any role in the selection of the strategies by the interlocutors in male to male interactions. With each other in all levels, males employed indirect strategies to show their refusals. They did not focus on the social status differences that might exist between the two participants. Let's take few examples:

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

-"That's so kind of you, but I can't thank you".   (Adjunct, non-performative)

-"Oh! I'm sorry Sir. I wish I could but I have some work to do".   (Statement of regret, wish, and reason)

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

-"I'm so sorry to say it, but I can't".   (Regret and non-performative)

-"I hope you have a nice time. I wish I could".   (Adjunct and wish)

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

-"Thank you, you don't need to".

-"Please, next time".   (Postponement)

Very few responses, which could not be overgeneralized, belonged to direct refusal especially in responding to an equal level inviter such as:

-"No, I can't".

Table 6 Cramer's V for male to male interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in face to face contexts

	Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal Phi	.075	.987
Cramer's V	.053	.987
N of Valid Cases	60	

In the same vein, the probable 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 7 Percentage of declining strategies used in male to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in face to face contexts

			Direct Strategies	Indirect Strategies	Adjunct Strategies	
Social status	High-Low	Count	2	13	5	20
(Male-Female)		% within st	18.2%	39.4%	31.3%	33.3%
	Low-High	Count	5	11	4	20
		% within st	45.5%	33.3%	25.0%	33.3%
	Equal Level	Count	4	9	7	20
		% within st	36.4%	27.3%	43.8%	33.3%
	Total	Count	11	33	16	60
		% within st	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In order to examine the relationship between social status and the choice of declining strategies by the interlocutors in male to female interactions, the Cramer's V was employed. The size of Cramer's coefficient between strategies used in male to female interactions for declining an invitation at the three levels of social status is 0.155 and the approximate significance is 0.579. Again, this indicates that the kind of strategy does not have a meaningful relationship with social status in male to female interactions and social status does not play any role in the choice of strategies by the interlocutors for declining an invitation in male to female interactions. Females, regardless of their social status, tend to show their politeness, prestige and etiquette when responding or talking to males. This is the characteristic that most Iraqi males feel and believe in. Responses collected from participants in situation 9 were as follows:

-Situation 9: "Fatemah, your boss, Falah, invites you to have a cup of tea with him":

-"Many thanks dear Sir, unfortunately I can't because I have something to do".

-"Sorry Sir, I wish I could".

Equal level participants, as indicated in table 4.48, employed indirect and adjunct refusal strategies in their responses as in:

-Situation 7: "Zaineb, your classmate, Ahmed, invites you to his birthday party":

-"Happy birthday dear, I wish I could".

-"Oh dear! I'm really sorry, I promise I will attend next time".

Table 8 Cramer's V for male to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in face to face contexts

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.219	.579
	Cramer's V	.155	.579
N of Valid Cases		60	

Accordingly, 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 face to face contexts.

Table 9 Percentage of declining strategies used in female to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in face to face contexts

			Direct Strategies	Indirect Strategies	Adjunct Strategies	
Social status	High-Low	Count	5	14	1	20
(Female-Female)		% within st	29.4%	46.7%	7.7%	33.3%
	Low-High	Count	7	10	3	20
		% within st	41.2%	33.3%	23.1%	33.3%
	Equal Level	Count	5	6	9	20
		% within st	29.4%	20.0%	69.2%	33.3%
	Total	Count	17	30	13	60
		% within st	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Then, like the previous cases, in order to examine the relationship between social status and the choice of declining strategies by the interlocutors in female to female interactions, the Cramer's v was employed. As Table 10 reveals, the size of Cramer's coefficient between strategies and social status in female to female interactions is 0.312 and the approximate significance is 0.02. This is meaningful; it 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. With each other, females seek to prove themselves, i.e. reflect their prestigious jealous nature and social status via using a certain strategy. High-level females preferred using indirect and adjunct refusal strategies to show their refusal as in:
-Situation 6: "Fatemah, your younger sister, Saja, invites you to go to the market":
-Sunday? Oh, I'm so busy.   (repeating a part of the invitation)
-Sorry dear, I can't.
Equal level females, on the other hand, distributed their responses among the three types of strategies, direct, indirect, and adjunct as seen below:
-Situation 5: "Hadeel, your friend, Sarah, invites you to her birthday party":
-Why don't you invite Dina?   (alternative)
-No, I can't you know I don't like such things. (Direct and then giving justification)
-Happy birthday dear, I wish I could.   (adjunct)

Table 10 Cramer's V for female to female interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in face to face contexts

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.441	.020
	Cramer's V	.312	.020
	N of Valid Cases	60	

Finally, the possible 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 face to face contexts.

Table 11 Percentage of declining strategies used in female to male interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in face to face contexts

			Direct Strategies	Indirect Strategies	Adjunct Strategies	
Social status (Female-Male)	High-Low	Count	0	17	3	20
		% within st	0.0%	40.5%	30.0%	33.3%
	Low-High	Count	2	13	5	20
		% within st	25.0%	31.0%	50.0%	33.3%
	Equal Level	Count	6	12	2	20
		% within st	75.0%	28.6%	20.0%	33.3%
	Total	Count	8	42	10	60
		% within st	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Similarly, to investigate the possible relationship between social status and the choice of declining strategies by the interlocutors in female to male interactions, Crammer v was employed. As Table 12 demonstrates, the size of Cramer's coefficient between strategies and social status in female to male interactions is 0.280 and the approximate significance is 0.052 that can be considered meaningful. This indicates that the kind of strategy has meaningful relationship with social status in female to male interactions and social status of the interlocutors play a role in the choice of strategies by the interlocutors for declining an invitation in female to male interactions. Low-level males, in responding to high-level females' invitations, were very polite and showed high level of respect. They did not employ any direct strategy in their responses, instead, they employed indirect ones and to a lesser degree adjuncts as seen below:

-Situation 12: "Ziad, your boss, Tabarak, invites you to have a drink with her":

-I'm really sorry, I have a lot of things to do.   (Regret and reason)

-I wish you have a good time, I feel sorry because I can't. (adjunct, and regret)

-Thank you Sir. But I can't because I have a lot of to do.

Table 12 Cramer's V for female to male interactions across different (high to low, low to high and equal) social status in face to face contexts

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.396	.052

Cramer's V	.280	.052
N of Valid Cases	60	

In the next step, the relationship between the strategies used by the participants for declining an invitation and their gender was examined. Table 13 demonstrates 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 face to face interactions.

Table 13 Cross-tabulation of declining strategies across 4 gender conditions in face-to-face interactions

			Direct Strategies	Indirect Strategies	Adjunct Strategies	
gender	Male-Male	Count	2	10	6	18
		% within st	33.3%	25.6%	22.2%	25.0%
	Female-Male	Count	2	8	8	18
		% within st	33.3%	20.5%	29.6%	25.0%
	Female-Female	Count	1	13	4	18
		% within st	16.7%	33.3%	14.8%	25.0%
	Male-Female	Count	1	8	9	18
		% within st	16.7%	20.5%	33.3%	25.0%
	Total	Count	6	39	27	72
		% within st	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The size of Cramer's coefficient between strategies and gender (all cases of gender variation) is 0.178 and the approximate significance is 0.6. This is not meaningful; it indicates that strategy does not have meaningful relationship with gender in general. Responding to a male or the vice versa, both males and females try their best to reflect their Islamic social nature and show respect to the opposite sex. Indirect strategies were, as seen in table 13 above, the most commonly used refusal strategies, though there were some differences that could not be overgeneralized to include all males or females. Gender, as opposed to social status, did not have an influential effect in deciding which strategy or type of strategies to employ.

Table 14 Cramer's V to find the association among declining strategies across 4 gender conditions in face-to-face interactions

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.252	.600
	Cramer's V	.178	.600
	N of Valid Cases	72	

3. 2. Gender-related differences in the strategies used for declining an invitation in face-to-face interactions

Figure 4 provides a whole picture of the strategies used by the participants in order to decline an invitation in face-to-face interactions across the four gender conditions (male to female, male to male, female to male and female to female). The interesting point about Figure 4. 6. is that it shows the most frequently used strategy of each category (direct, indirect and adjunct) based on the gender condition; that is, whether the interaction happens in male to male, male to female, female to female or female to male conditions:
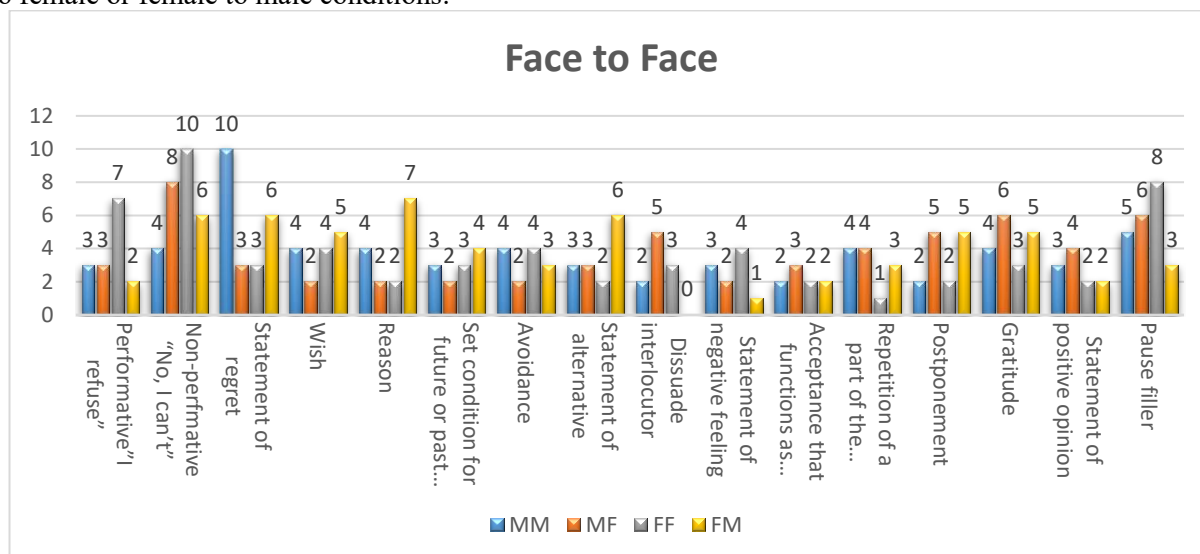

Figure 4 Strategies used to decline an invitation in face-to-face interactions across the four gender conditions (male to female, mal to male, female to male and female to male)

As indicated above, the type of strategies employed by the participants were different in various gender conditions. Table 15 illustrates the frequencies and percentage of three categories of the strategies across the four gender conditions.

Table 15 Percentage of three categories of the strategies across the four gender conditions in face to face interactions

			Direct Strategies	Indirect Strategies	Adjunct Strategies	
gender	Male-Male	Count	4	10	6	20
		% within	13.8%	31.3%	26.1%	23.8%
	Female-Male	Count	8	10	7	25
		% within	27.6%	31.3%	30.4%	29.8%
	Female-Female	Count	11	6	3	20
		% within	37.9%	18.8%	13.0%	23.8%
	Male-Female	Count	6	6	7	19
		% within	20.7%	18.8%	30.4%	22.6%
	Total	Count	29	32	23	84
		% within st	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In order to find out whether the differences in the strategies used by the participants across the four gender conditions is statistically meaningful or not, a chi-square test was employed. The results were not statistically significant (p-value=0.334>0.05). In other words, gender conditions were not associated with the kind of the strategy selected by the participants of this study (see Table 15).

Table 16 Chi-square test to find the association among the strategies across gender (all conditions)

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.863[a]	6	.334
Likelihood Ratio	6.843	6	.336
Linear-by-Linear Association	.455	1	.500
N of Valid Cases	84		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.20.

Such differences that are based on gender difference were noticed in case of two female participants. The majority of females (11 out of 20) preferred using direct refusal strategies when declining another female's invitation, whereas in responding to males' invitations, they employed adjunct refusal strategies with lesser occurrences of direct and indirect ones (7, 6, 6 times) respectively. Males, on the other hand, were more careful and showing more respect than females when declining invitations. When responding to a male's or a female's invitation, males used indirect refusal strategies (10 times) to decline the invitation. Islamic, social and cultural norms and habits all govern males in all their behavior especially when treating females. In our society it might be embarrassing to refuse a female's invitation since this might be regarded as a face-threatening act, though this is not always the case. For instance, in Iraqi society, it is very difficult to let a female pay the bill or fees instead of you in a restaurant. Therefore, males are very careful in treating females. Examine the following situation:

-Situation 10 "Ahmed, your colleague, Hadeel, invites you to her birthday party"

Most males responded politely in a way that did not cause an embarrassment to the female inviter such as:

-I'm really sorry Miss. I think I gonna go with my friends

-Sorry, I cannot, I hope you understand my situation.

-I'm so sad because I can't attend. I have a night job.

Most of males started with showing apology and regret and then gave reasons and justifications.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify the most commonly used strategies for refusing invitations by the Iraqi intermediate-level EFL university students in face-to-face interactions. It also tried to shed light on the effects of social status and gender of the two participants on the choice of acceptance and declining strategies. Most noticeable and influential were the studies tackling refusal strategies employed by various participants. The great number of these studies reflect the important role the refusal strategies have in everyday life since refusal is considered as an inviter's face-threatening act, so cultural and social norms all insist on not to do that. As a result, most participants, as can be noticed in chapter four, preferred employed indirect strategies or more than one strategy when refusing invitations.

Carefully reviewing the results of the statistical analyses in chapter four reveals that the majority of Iraqi EFL University intermediate-level students employed indirect strategies to express their refusal in face-to-face interactions. This result is also corroborated by the studies of Felx Brasdefer, 2003, Al-Khatib (2006), Farnia and Xiaonjuan (2012), Abdulsattar and Farnia (2014), Sarfo (2018), and Azezah and Sudana (2021) who all have found that indirect refusal strategies were the most commonly used ones by various participants.

Among the various indirect strategies employed here, Statement of regret, then wish, reason, and justifications were the most prominent ones that used by the majority of participants. The employment of (regret) is to soften the prelocutionary impact of the face-threatening act on the invitee for refusing his/her invitation. Regretting or saying sorry is considered as a significant act of politeness and hence a redressing strategy (Abdulsattar and Farnia, 2014). This result is also consistent with that of Challob and Mohammed (2011) and Farnia and Xiaonjuan (2012) who studied refusal strategies employed by Chinese and Malay respondents. The latter employed (statement of regret, reasons, and excuse) to

show their refusal or inability to come. As opposed to this result, Kitao reached a result that (statement of regret) was clearly noticed with equal level rather than lower or higher one.

In most cases, some participants preferred using more than one strategy to express their being sorry for not able to attend. In addition to saying (sorry), they give reasons or justifications to reflect the idea that the inviter is highly respected. This result is also approved by Al-Khatib (2006), Farnia and Xiaonjuan (2012) and Abdulsattar and Farnia (2014) as well.

Direct and adjunct refusal strategies were the favorite type noticed among friends or equal level female-participants. In face-to-face interactions, most participants employed indirect and in lesser degree, adjunct refusal strategies. In his study, Sarfo (20018) supports this result of the employment of direct refusal strategies among friends, but what is different here is that in both contexts, equal level male participants preferred using indirect strategies, mainly (statement of regret, wish, and reasons) to express their declining. Challob and Mohammed (2011) also support this result in their study. Moaveni (2014) provides different result concerning the use of direct strategies. He states that direct refusal strategies followed by a reason formula were preferred by males more than females. Our prophet Mohammed (MPBUH) says:

-رفقا بالقوارير

-"Be gentle with ladies"

As a result, most Iraqi people, in general, and EFL university students in particular, are governed by the social norms especially when treating females.

In her study, Eslami (2010) states that although different cultures may share similar refusal strategies, the choice of directness, mitigation and the reasons for refusing may vary across cultures. In all the previously stated studies, the same refusal strategy-types are employed but within each society a certain type might be preferred.

4.1. Effects of Social status and Gender variables

In face-to-face interactions, social status variable was proved to be of great influence on the selection of refusal strategies in two cases only, i.e. (female-female) and (female-male) interactions. In a male-male interaction, the social status did not prove to be effective since in all three levels, the most frequently employed strategies were the indirect ones (51 out of 60 times repeated). Negatively responding to males' invitations, females were not highly affected by the social status in face-to-face interaction. They also used indirect strategies (33 times) in all levels.

This point was striking that when an interaction occurred between two females or females responding to males, social status had a significant role to play in selecting the declining strategies. In the case of female-female, social status was the dominant factor behind the strategies employed. Males, when refusing females' invitations, also took the social status into highly consideration. It was proved that there was a strong positive relationship between social status and males-females in face-to-face interactions. This result is corroborated by the various studies such as; Felix Brasdefer (2003), Al-Khatib (2006), Eslami (2010), Moaveni (2014), Sarfo (2018), Grain and Mahdi (2021), and Challob and Mohammed (2021) who all emphasize the role social status has in determining the type of strategies to be employed.

Male participants showed a high degree of respect and politeness to the opposite sex and other males. This clearly reflects the positive social norms placed on them towards others in general and females in particular. Females, on the other hand, try to show their prestigious nature and high-social position which they possess when declining males' invitations. In responding to a low-level male, some females employ direct non-performative declining strategies, whereas the others employed indirect and adjunct refusal strategies. Grain and Mahdi (2021) state that the degree of social distance, as compared with other variables such as age and gender, is of great effect on the type of strategy employed when declining invitations.

Gender variable was not as influential as the social status was. Gender conditions were not associated with the type of strategies selected by participants. When responding to females, male participants employed all three types of refusal strategies (Direct 10, Indirect 8, and Adjunct 7). Females, on the other hand, used direct strategies in most of their responses to females' invitations, whereas all three types of refusal were employed when responding to males' invitations. In their study, Abdulsattar and Farnia (2014) did not consider the effect of gender. Sarf (2018), on the other hand came to a conclusion that sex is influential in case both participants are not friends.

It is worth mentioning here that, in face-to-face interactions, females in most cases were smiling and using a lot of good wishes while refusing an invitation. In other words, they used mitigation as much as they could in order to be able to turn down the invitation. This was to soften the effect of declining process (avoid face-threatening act). This result is supported by Al-Khatib (2006), Grain and Mahdi (2021). In his study, Moaveni (2014) believes that the role gender plays in the selection of a declining strategy is culture-specific. He states that direct refusal statements are highly preferred by the American females more than used the Chinese females. Farnia and Xiaonjuan (2021) stated that Refusal is described as "a major cross-cultural 'sticking point' for many non-native speakers', and it is very complicated act due to its relationship with many factors such as gender.

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