

The Speech Act of Refusal A Cross-Cultural Study

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Abstract

The study investigated refusals of forty Iraqi learners of English in Iraq and forty German learners of English in Germany when declining requests, invitations, and suggestions in three levels of social status(equal, unequal and higher and lower). A Discourse Completion Test(DCT) was used to collect the learners' refusals. The DCT was taken from Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990). Data were analyzed in terms of the frequency, content and order of semantic formulas and were categorized according to the refusal taxonomy by Beebe et al. (1990). Results suggested that there is a certain degree of interlanguage variation in the use of preference for refusal strategies among the two groups. Regarding the preference for direct strategies, Iraqi learners of English were more direct than the German learners. It was noted that the preference for direct and indirect strategies was conditioned by the social status of the situation in the Iraqi learners' responses more than those of the German learners. In other words, German learners did not pay much attention to the social status of the person they refuse. Thus, Iraqi and German learners' responses were attested in terms of generality(vagueness) and specificity(clearance) where German learners' refusals sounded less transparent than those of the Iraqi learners. In addition, German learners stated positive opinions and expressed gratitude for a proposed action more frequently than Iraqi learners who often apologized before refusing.

1. Introduction

The notion of communicative competence represents a major challenge in the acquisition of the sociocultural values of any language. This concept was introduced by Hymes to refer to the acquisition of competence as to when to speak and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where in what manner (1972 : 277). Extending this notion to second language (L2) context, Hymes (ibid.) observed that communicative competence involves the social and the cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have which enables them to use and to interpret linguistic forms. As it is stated by Gass and Selinker 2001, communicative, or pragmatic competence is the ability to use language forms in a wide range of environments, factoring in the relationship between the speakers involved and the social and cultural context of the situation . As an important aspect of communicative competence was described by Searle (1969), who suggested that speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises and so

on. Full mastery of communicative competence requires a native-like knowledge of sociocultural rules. Cohen and Olshtain referred to sociocultural ability as the respondents' skill at selecting speech act strategies that are appropriate given :

- (a) The culture involved .
- (b) The age and sex of the speaker .
- (c) Their social class and occupations .
- (d) Their roles and status in the interaction (1994 : 145).

Achieving effective communicative competence in a L2 constitutes a complex task and a continual concern for language learners (Cohen 1996: 383) because it implies a knowledge of the social values of the target culture and the ability to produce appropriate speech act strategies in a particular situation.

The literature of first language (L1) and (L2) speech act performance has examined cross-culture variation of different speech acts in numerous languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Jordanian, Korean and Spanish) (Cohen and Olshtain 1981). This literature suggests that speech act performance in an L2 is a complex task for non-native speakers (NNs) because their speech needs to reflect the appropriate strategies used by native speakers (NSs) of the target language. Failing to speak appropriately according to the strategies used by NSs or the inability to understand what is meant by what is said will result in a communicative or pragmatic failure (Beebe et al. 1990 : 56). Pragmatic failure may lead to a transfer of the pragmatic strategies used in the L1 to L2 . From a sociolinguistic perspective , pragmatic transfer refers to the transfer of L1 sociocultural communicative competence in performing L2 speech acts or any other aspect of L2 conversation , where the speaker is trying to achieve a particular function of language (cited in Beebe et al. 1990 :56-66).

Kasper distinguished two types of pragmatic transfer: positive transfer occurs when learners' production of a pragmatic feature is the same (structurally, functionally, distributionally) as a feature used by target language speakers in the same context and when this feature is paralleled by a feature in learners' L1(1998 : 193). Negative transfer, on the other hand, is observed when a pragmatic feature in the interlanguage is (structurally, functionally, distributionally) the same as in L1 but different from L2 (1998 :194). Instances of negative pragmatic transfer in L2 may be motivated by three main factors:

- 1) Low level of linguistic proficiency in the L2 (Scarcella 1979) .
- 2) Lack of L2 sociocultural knowledge (Beebe et al. 1990).
- 3) The level of the social status (equal and unequal) in the situation (ibid.).

2. The Speech Act of Refusal

Comparisons of speech acts from different cultures (e.g., Barnlund and Arark, 1985: Wolfson, 1989) have revealed that the same speech act may be realized differently across cultures following norms of usage which are specific to the given speech community.

Refusals have been called a major cross-cultural 'sticking point' for many non-native speakers (Beebe et al., 1990 : 56) due to their inherently sensitive nature, and a pragmatic break-down in this act may easily lead to unintended offense and / or breakdowns in communication. In other words, failure to refuse appropriately can risk the interpersonal relations of the speakers. Refusals are also of interest due to their typically complex constructions. They are often negotiated over several turns (semantic formulas / speech act sets) and involve some degree of indirectness. In addition to this , their form and content tends to vary depending on the type of speech that elicits them (request, offer, etc.) and they usually vary in degree of directness depending on the status of the participants (ibid.).

The speech act of refusal (semantic formula) occurs when a speaker directly or indirectly says 'No' to a request or invitation. Refusals as it is stated above is a face-threatening act to the listener /requestor / inviter; because it contradicts his or her expectations, and is often realized through indirect strategies. Thus it requires a high level of pragmatic competence (Ellis, 1994 : 178).

Beebe et al., (1990), studying refusals produced by American English speakers and Japanese EFL learners, analyzed the refusal as a formulaic sequence, comprised- in the case of refusing an invitation or , etc- of (1) an expression of regret, followed (2) an excuse, and ending with (3) an offer of alternative. In studying these refusals, they found that Japanese speakers of English and native speakers differed in three areas: the order of semantic formulas, the frequency of formulas and the content of the utterances. While the Japanese speakers appropriately produced the same semantic components as their American peers, the quality of the utterances was very different. American subjects tended to offer specific details when giving explanations, while the Japanese subjects often produced explanations that might be interpreted as vague by Americans.

3. Methodology

3.1. Subjects:

Forty German learners of English in Germany and Forty Iraqi learners of English in Iraq participated in this study. The native speakers of German were between 20 and 25 years of age. All of them were university students in Giessen university, Germany. For the native speakers of Iraqi dialect, they were between 20 and 24 years of age. All of them were university students in, AL-Anbar university, Iraq. The subjects represent a sample of convenience and can not be generalized to all age groups of native Iraqi and German speakers. However, they would seem to be representative of young, educated Iraqi and German English speakers or learners .

3.2. Materials and Procedures :

All subjects were asked to fill out a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The DCT was a written questionnaire consisting of 9 situations. The 9 DCT situations were divided in to three types: three requests, three invitations, and

three suggestions. Each type included three status differentials: higher, lower, and equal. Each situation could only be answered by a refusal. The directions were written out on the DCT. DCTs are written questionnaires including a number of brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialog with an empty slot for the speech act under study (Kasper and Dahl 1991 : 221). The dialog usually begins with an 'opener' followed by a blank indicating an unfinished dialog. In the blank, the subjects provide the speech act under study to complete the dialog. Following the blank a rejoinder is supplied which makes it difficult to write anything sociolinguistically appropriate other than the speech act under study. A DCT is employed as an instrument of data collection in the present study because it is a controlled elicitation method which meets the demand for cross-cultural comparability (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989) and it allows researchers to control the variables of the situation (e.g. status of interlocutors). Furthermore, it has been proved to be quick and efficient in gathering a large amount of data (Beebe and Cummings 1996) .

3.3. Data Analysis :

Data analysis of this study was guided mainly by that of Beebe et al. (1990) in their study of pragmatic transfer in Japanese ESL refusals. After the DCTs data was collected, the subjects' refusals were analyzed in terms of frequency of semantic formulas, content of semantic formulas and order of semantic formulas. A semantic formulas refers to a word, phrase or sentence that meets a particular semantic criterion or strategy; any one or more of these can be used to perform the act in question (Cohen 1996 : 256). In coding refusals in terms of semantic formulas, the taxonomy of refusals formulated by Beebe et al. (1990) was used. They are the following :

Direct:

Performative (e.g., 'I refuse')

Non performative statement

1- ' NO ' .

2-Negative willingness / ability ('I can't ' , ' I don't think so ') .

Indirect:

Statement of regret (e.g., 'I am sorry' ... / 'I feel terrible ... ')

Wish(e.g., I wish I could help you ... ') .

Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g. My children will be home that night; 'I have a headache') .

Statement of Alternative:

1- I can do X instead of Y (e.g., 'I 'd rather ... ' , 'I 'd prefer ...') .

2- why do not you do X instead of Y (e.g., ' Why do not you ask some one else ? ') .

Set conditions for future or past acceptance (e.g., 'If you had asked me earlier, I would have ... ') .

Promise of future acceptance (e.g., 'I 'll do it next time', 'I promise I 'll ...' , or ' 'next time I 'll ... ') .

Statement of principle (e.g., 'I never do business with friends').

Statement of philosophy (e.g., 'One can't be too careful').

Attempt to Dissuade Interlocutor:

1- Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (e.g., 'I won't be any fun tonight' to refuse an invitation).

2- Guilt trip (e.g., waitress to customers who want to sit a while : 'I can not make a living off people who just order coffee').

3- Criticize the request \ requester etc.

(Statement of negative feeling or opinion); insult /attack (e.g., 'Who do you think you are' ? 'That 's a terrible idea !').

4-Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request

5- Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g., 'Don't worry about it', 'That 's okay' , 'You don't have to').

6- Self-defense (e.g., 'I 'm trying my best ' , 'I 'm doing all I can do').

Acceptance that Functions as a Refusal:

1- Unspecific or indefinite reply .

2- Lack of enthusiasm .

Avoidance:

1-Nonverbal

a- Silence .

b- Hesitation .

c- Do nothing .

d- Physical departure .

2- Verbal .

a- Topic switch .

b- Joke .

c- Repetition of part of request etc. (e.g. ' Monday ? ').

d- Postponement of part of request etc. (e.g. ' I 'll think about it ').

e- Hedging (e.g. Gee , I do not know , I 'm not sure).

Adjuncts to Refusals :

1- Statement of positive opinion / feeling or agreement (e.g., 'That 's a good idea ...' , 'I 'd love to ...'). 2- statement of empathy (e.g. ' I realize you are in a difficult situation ') .

3- Pause fillers (e.g., : uhh , well , oh , uhm) .

4- Gratitude / appreciation.

Passive negative willingness (e.g. It will be difficult).

Elaboration on the reason (e.g. : 'If I do n't show up on time, my wife will kill me').

Statement of relinquishment (e.g., 'I can't do anything about it').

In addition, the researcher also discovered and labeled other semantic formulas of refusals found in the data from the present study. They are the following :::

Statement of irresponsibility (e.g., 'I am not in charge of ... ') .

Saying facts / things honestly / seriously (e.g., 'To be honest with you ...').

4. Results:

4.1. Refusals of Requests

Situation (1) Refusing an equal status person's request "A workmate asks his mate to lend him some money to buy some lunch" .

Situation (2) Refusing a higher status person 's request " A boss asks his worker to lend him his expensive sports car for a day".

Situation (3) Refusing a lower status person 's request "A student asks an official in his first day in a job at the university about something" (registering in courses).

4.1.1. Frequency of Semantic Formulas

Table (1) below presents the frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of requests from a higher, an equal and a lower status person. While a great part of the semantic formulas of the Iraqi Learners (ILs) of English are mentioned within the direct refusals category where they represent (90 percent) with a higher status person, German Learners (GLs) of English used direct refusal formulas least frequently with a higher status person where they represent (25 percent). German learners apologized (I 'm sorry) (100 percent) frequently to an equal person and (57 percent) to a higher status person, while in Iraqi learners' responses, " statement of regret " stands for (80 percent) with an equal status person and (57 : 5 present) with a higher status person. German learners used the semantic formulas " statement of alternative " much less frequently with an equal status person where it represents (17:5) and (22 : 5 percent) and (37 : percent) with higher and lower status persons respectively. On the contrary, Iraqi learners ' responses lacked a great number of the semantic formulas of " the statement of alternative " where the highest rate represents(10 percent) with a lower status person. As shown in the table below, Iraqi and German learners used the semantic formulas of " excuse, reason or explanation " more frequently with an equal status person where it stands for (100 percent) for the German learners and (80 percent) for the Iraqi learners of English. German learners stated " promise of future acceptance " to equal and higher status persons (7 : 5 percent) and (22 : 5 percent) respectively while it stands for (5 percent) with a lower status person, while Iraqi learners tended to use this category very little with (7 :5 percent) with a higher status person and (5 percent) with a lower status person. German learners tended to use " a statement of principle" much more frequently with a higher status person (32 percent) whereas they did not use any with equal and lower status persons. In Iraqi responses, this category represents (5 percent) with a higher status person and with (0 percent) with an equal status person and a lower status person . German learners also criticized the request / requester (12 : 5 percent) slightly more frequently with a higher status person than with a lower status person,

but with no occurrences in the Iraqi learners' responses. German learners stated unspecific or indefinite reply with a higher status person to refuse the request (15 percent) whereas they use it with (2 : 5 percent) with a lower status person. This category represents (2 :5 percent) with equal status person in the Iraqi learners' data. German learners used hedging (10 percent) with a lower status person and with no occurrences in the Iraqi learners' responses. German learners of English used "statement of positive opinion / feeling or agreement" more frequently to a higher status person(15 percent) than to equal and lower (10 percent) and (5 percent) respectively. Iraqi learners used them very little where it represents (7 : 5 percent) with a higher status person and (2 : 5 percent) with an equal. German learners used "pause fillers" much frequently with a higher status person (27 : 5 percent), an equal status person (17 :5 percent) and a lower status person (15 : 5 percent), while Iraqi learners responses contained a small number of pause fillers where it represents (12 percent) with an equal status person. German learners of English express "statement of irresponsibility" much more frequently with a lower status person (40 percent) and the same thing for the Iraqi learners' responses where it represents (40 percent) with a higher status person, while it represents the highest rate (15 percent) with an equal status person in the German learners' responses. For other percentages of other categories or semantic formulas, see table (1) below.

Semantic Formulas	Equal GLs% ILs		Higher Gls%ILs		Lower GLs% ILs	
Direct Refusal Formulas	27:5	85	25	90	30	82:5
Statement of Regret	100	80	57	57:5	80	60
Wish	0	7:5	0	7:5	2:5	7:5
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	100	97:5	50	80	52	52:5
Statement of Alternative	17:5	5	22:5	2:5	37:5	10
Promise of Future Acceptance	7:5	0	10	7:5	0	5
Statement of Principle	0	0	32:5	5	0	0
Statement of Philosophy	0	0	2:5	0	0	0
Guilt Trip	0	0	0	0	2:5	0
Criticize The Request /Requester etc.	0	0	12:5	0	11:5	0
Request For Help, Empathy and Assistance By Dropping or Holding The Request .	2:5	0	0	0	0	0
Unspecific or Indefinite Reply	0	0	15	0	2:5	0

Postponement	0	0	2:5	0	10	0
Statement of Positive Opinion, Feeling or Agreement .	10	2:5	15	7:5	5	0
Statement of Empathy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pause Filler	17:5	12:5	27:5	5	15	2:5
Gratitude / Appreciation	0	0	7:5	0	0	0
Elaboration on Reason	15	25	0	27:5	2:5	5
Statement of Relinquishment	0	0	0	0	7:5	0
Statement of Irresponsibility	0	0	2:5	0	40	40
Saying things honestly	0	2:5	0	0	0	0

Table (1) Frequency of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Requests

4.1.2. Content and Order of Semantic Formulas:

The forty German subjects produced a total of 357 refusal semantic formulas for requests, while Iraqi learners or subjects produced a total of 352 refusal semantic formulas for request. Of the 29 categories of refusal formulas contained in the coding classification, only seven of these were used more frequently than others by German learners and only four categories were used more frequently than others by the Iraqi learners of English. The category "statement of regret" "I am sorry" contained the most responses in the Iraqi and German learners' responses. It accounts for 96 occurrences (26,89 percent) of the total of the German learners' responses, while it accounts for 115 occurrences (32,5 percent) of the total of the German refusal formulas falling in situations of requests. As the table indicates, most refusal statements included "statements of regret", as well as additional semantic formulas such as excuse, reason or explanation ”.

Semantic Formulas	Excuse, Reason or Explanation	
I am sorry	I have something to do	Other formula

In terms of the order of semantic formulas, "statement of regret" occurred at the beginning of refusal formulas with 60 occurrences (62 percent) out of 96 occurrences in the German learners' responses. In Iraqi learners' responses, this category occurred at the beginning with 51 occurrences (44,5 percent) out of 115 occurrences. Furthermore, a statement of regret never occurred alone and was found at the end of the refusals in 10 occurrences (2,5 percent) in the German learners' responses and 10 occurrences (3 percent) in the Iraqi learners' responses. The second most common type of refusal formulas in the German learners' responses was a statement of "excuse, reason or explanation" which occurred (85) (23,50 percent) of the total responses, while in Iraqi learners' responses, the second semantic formula was the category of "direct formulas" where it occurred 103 (29,5 percent) of the total responses, while the third common type of refusal formulas in the Iraqi learners' responses was the category of "excuse, reason or explanation" where it represented (26,5 percent)

out of the total number of refusals falling in situations of request. In providing a "statement of excuse, reason or explanation" to refuse the workmate's request to lend him some money to buy lunch, German learners usually asserted their excuse to the workmate as in "I need the money to pay a bill before I go home" as it is hinted for in the situation. Those responses which were differed from the one above mostly concentrated on the refusers' declaration that either he has not money at this moment or that his workmate can have lunch with him. It should be noted here that the researcher supplied implicit excuses in some situations in the questionnaire to see whether the subjects will commit themselves to them or try to find another or other reasons. Iraqi learners tended to use the implicit reason that the researcher supplied as their choice to soften their refusals. In situation (2) where the boss asks his official to lend him his new sports car to drive it for a day, most of the German learners use a statement of principle "I never lend car to any one" to refuse the boss' request, while Iraqi learners used other reasons to mitigate their refusals to the boss request. They asserted their refusals with excuses as "you are not good driver", "you may make an accident", "I need my car this week" , "I need to take my father / brother to hospital this week" , "It dose not work now, there is some thing wrong whit it". In situation (3) where a student asks an official in his first day in a job to help him in registering for courses, German and Iraqi learners asserted their excuse to the student as in "It is my first day here" as it is mentioned in the situation. The third most commonly used formula in German subjects' refusals falls in direct refusal formulas (33 occurrences) (9,24 percent) out of the total responses for situations of requests. In terms of direct refusals, German learners favored either negative willingness (e.g., "I can't" or "no") as their choice of direct formulas, 19 occurrences took place at the beginning of the refusals of requests. As for the Iraqi learners' responses, they contained 103 occurrences. Of the 103 occurrences of the direct formulas, 37 occurrences were "no" formulas and 66 occurrences were "negative willingness" formulas. In addition, of the 103 occurrences, 52 occurrences took place at the beginning of the refusals of requests (the formula of "no" with 37 occurrences and the formula of "negative willingness" with 15 occurrences". "The statement of alternative" was the fourth most commonly used formula with 31 occurrences (8:68 percent) of the refusal formulas to requests in the German learner's data. Moreover, in stating an alternative to refuse the boss' request to drive the new sports car, German learners provided "I can drive you with me if you like" while most of them used "You can have your lunch me" to assert their alternative to refuse the workmate's request to borrow some money for lunch. And in providing a "statement of alternative" to refuse the student's request, most of them asserted their alternative to the student as in "You can ask X / secretary or somebody else". In Iraqi subjects' responses, Iraqi learners used this category very little with 7 occurrences. In providing an alternative to refuse the boss' request, Iraqi subjects provide, "I will lend you it next time" to mitigate their refusal to a higher status person's request. For Iraqi learners, the category of "elaboration of reason" was the fourth commonly used formula with 38 occurrences (10,5

percent) of the refusal formulas to requests. The fifth semantic formula that was used by German subjects was “pause fillers” with 24 occurrences (16:72 percent). In the 24 refusals which used pause fillers, this formula occurred at the beginning of the refusal with 15 occurrences (62 percent) of the total number of pause fillers. Pause fillers were followed by a number of different semantic formulas. This variety of following formula is not unexpected as pause fillers are typically used to give the speaker time to form their reply. "The statement of irresponsibility" was the fifth formula that was used by Iraqi learners with 16 occurrences (4,5 percent) of the refusal formulas to requests. The sixth commonly used formula in German subjects refusals was “The statement of irresponsibility”. Of the total of 357 refusal formulas for requests, "the statement of irresponsibly" occurred 16 with (4:48 percent). Of the 16 occurrences of the statement of irresponsibility, 15 occurrences were used to refuse or avoid the student's request to help him in registering for courses. In terms of order, of the 16 occurrences of the statement of irresponsibility, 10 occurrences (62:50 percent) occurred immediately after the statement of regret, while 5 occurrences (31:25 percent) occurred before the statement of regret. Of the 16 occurrences of the “statement of irresponsibility” in Iraqi learners' responses, most occurrences took place immediately after the statement of regret or any one of the direct formulas. In terms of content, most of the Iraqi learners avoided to be in position of irresponsibility where they asserted their refusals by finding another type of reason or excuse like “I have some thing to do at this moment” or “I have no information where to register” or “You can come later” to mitigate the refusal to a lower status person. A further point which seems remarkable in the German subjects' formula was the use of “the statement of principle”. In refusing the boss' request to drive the new sports car for a day, they asserted their principle as in “I never lend my car to any one” although the refusal is directed towards a higher status person. This category of semantic formulas was the seventh that more used by German learners of English. The eighth used formulas in German subjects' refusals falls in “ The adjunct” section, exactly in stating a "statement of positive opinion / feeling or agreements". They accounted for (3:36 percent) (12 occurrences) of the refusal formulas of the 12 occurrences of the statement of positive opinion, 5 occurrences took place at the beginning of the responses.

4.2. Refusal of Invitations:

Situation (1) refusing a lower status person 's invitation "A student invites his teacher to dinner on Saturday".

Situation (2) refusing a higher status person's invitation "The owner of a supermarket invites one of his workers to an exclusive restaurant" .

Situation (3) refusing an equal status person's invitation "One invites his friends to flying".

4.2.1. Frequency of Semantic Formulas

Table (2) below presents the frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of invitations from higher, equal and lower status persons. German learners used direct formulas more frequently (35 percent) to a lower status person than to a higher status person (9 percent). In terms of direct formulas, German learners favored either negative willingness e.g., "I can not "or "no" as their choice of direct formulas. Of the 14 occurrences of the direct formulas to refuse the invitation of a lower status person, 7 occurrences account for "no". Iraqi learners used direct formulas more frequently (75 percent) to a higher status person and (75) percent to an equal status person than to lower status person (67:5 percent). In Iraqi learners' responses, of the 37 occurrences of the direct formulas to refuse the invitation of a lower status person, 9 occurrences account for "no" and of the 30 occurrences to refuse the invitation of the higher status person, 9 occurrences account for "no" and of the 28 occurrences to refuse the invitation of an equal status person, 7 occurrences account for "no". German learners also tended to use "the statement of regret" "I 'm sorry" more frequently to a lower status person (57 percent) and to a higher status person (50 percent) than to an equal status person (22:5 percent). The same thing for Iraqi learners who tended to use "the statement of regret" more frequently to a lower status person (47,5 percent) and to a higher status person (37,5 percent) and to an equal status person (37, 5 percent). German learners gave more reasons and excuses more frequently to a lower status person (92 percent) than to a higher status person (77 percent), whereas Iraqi learners gave reasons and excuses more frequently to an equal status person (92 percent) than to a higher status person. German learners used a statement of alternative only to an equal status person (15 percent) and the same thing for Iraqi learners with (7,5 percent). Across all status types, German learners always stated positive opinions more frequently to an equal status person (50 percent) and to a higher status person (40 percent) than to a lower status person (20 percent). On the contrary, Iraqi learners used this category with little percentages where they used (20 percent) with a lower status, (9 percent) with a higher status person, and (6 percent) with an equal status person. On the contrary, German learners stated a "statement of gratitude" more frequently to a lower status person (30 percent) than to a higher status person (17:50 percent) and to an equal status person (17: 50 percent) while the Iraqi learners used the highest percentages with the higher status person (27, 5 percent) and (17, 5 percent) and (15 percent) to an equal status person and to a lower status person respectively. As for "pause fillers", German learners used them more frequently with a lower status person (32 percent) than to a higher status person (17: 50 percent), while Iraqi learners used them more frequently with a higher status person (27, 5 percent) than to a lower status person (15 percent) and to an equal status person (9 percent). And for the category of stating things honestly / seriously, German learners used them more with an equal status person(15 percent) than to lower and higher

status person (5 percent and 2,5 percent) respectively. For other percentages of other categories, see table (2) above.

Semantic Formulas	Equal Gls%ILs		Higher Gls%ILs		Lower Gls%ILs	
Direct Formulas	27:5	70	22:5	75	35	27:5
Statement of Regret	22:5	37:5	50	37:5	57:5	47:5
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	85	92	77:5	80	92:5	85
Statement of Alternative	15:5	7:5	0	0	0	0
Set Conditions for Future or Past Acceptance	0	0	10	0	5	0
Criticize the Request / Requester	10	0	10	0	0	0
Promise of Future Acceptance	0	2	7:5	8	5	15
Wish	0	7:5	0	2:5	0	2:5
Request for Help, Empathy and Assistance	0	0	5	0	0	0
Unspecific or Indefinite Reply	7:5	2:5	2:5	0	0	0
Lack of Enthusiasm	2:5	0	0	2:5	0	0
Repetition of Part of Request	0	0	2:5	0	5	0
Postponement	0	0	2:5	0	2:5	0
Statement of Positive Opinion, Feeling or Agreement	50	15	40	22:5	20	20
Pause Fillers	17:5	22:5	7:5	15	32:5	7:5
Gratitude / Appreciation	7:5	17:5	5	27:5	30	15
Elaboration of Reason	7:5	25	5	30	15	15
Stating Things Honestly	15	7:5	2:5	0	5	2:5
Hedging	0	2:5	0	2:5	0	2:5

Table (2) Frequency of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Invitations

4.2.2. Content and Order of Semantic Formulas

German subjects or learners produced a total of 338 refusal semantic formulas for invitations. As shown in table (2), out of 338 refusal tokens, the most commonly used refusal category was "Excuse , reason or explanation" with (30,18 percent of the formulas). This is followed by a "statement of regret" at (15,38 percent), "statement of positive opinion, feeling or agreement" (13, 2 percent), "direct refusal formulas" (10,6 percent), "statement of gratitude" (7,69 percent) and "pause fillers" with (6,80 percent). See table (2) for percentages of other categories.

Iraqi subjects produced a total of 369 refusal semantic formulas for invitations. Similar to German subjects, the most commonly used refusal category was "Excuse, reason or explanation" with (27,5 percent) of the formulas. This is followed by direct refusal formulas where the subcategory of negative willingness represented (16,5 percent) and the other subcategory of "no" represented (7,5 percent) statement of regret with (7,5 percent), statement of gratitude with (7,5 percent), statement of gratitude with (24 percent) and statement of future acceptance (42, percent).

In refusing a lower and higher status person's invitation, German learners and Iraqi learners varied this statement of excuse, reason or explanation. German learners usually asserted their refusal to a lower status person as in "I have other things to do to night" or "I am busy to night". Similarly, some Iraqi learners chose the same reasons, but others specified them by saying "I have an appointment with dean or the manager" or "I have to visit my brother or my uncle now" etc. German learners usually used the following in refusing a higher status person's invitations "Today is my mother's birthday and I have to go" or "I have to visit my mother, she is sick in hospital". In other words, some German learners gave reasons or excuses that are specific to refuse or mitigate the refusal of a higher status person's invitation, whereas they gave general reasons or explanations with a lower status person. On the contrary, most Iraqi subjects gave specific reasons in refusing the higher status person's invitation where they asserted their refusal as in "I am busy to night, I have to visit my father" etc. Some Iraqi learners gave reasons which are general, then followed by other specific reasons which elaborate them.

In terms of order of semantic formulas, of the 52 occurrences of the statement of regret in the German learner's responses, 29 occurred at the beginning of refusals. In Iraqi learners' responses, this category accounted for 49 occurrences. Out of this number, 33 occurrences took place at the beginning of the refusals. As for the direct formulas, in German learners' responses, it accounted for 34 occurrences and with 87 occurrences in Iraqi learners' responses. Out of 34 occurrences, only 14 occurrences took place at the beginning of the refusal while it occurred 33 out of 87 in the Iraqi learners' responses.

4.3. Refusal of Suggestions:

Situation (1) refusing a higher status person's suggestion "A boss suggests that one of the officials should try to organize himself by writing little notes".

Situation (2) refusing a lower status person's suggestion "A student suggests that it is better if his teacher gives the class more practice in conversation and less on grammar".

Situation (3) refusing an equal status person's suggestion "A workmate suggests to remove a tomato stain on his colleague's shirt".

4.3.1. Frequency of Semantic Formulas

Table (3) below presents the frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of suggestions from higher, lower and equal status persons. German and Iraqi subjects used direct formulas more frequently with equals than to lower and higher status persons. German subjects used (37,5 percent) with equals, (30 percent) with lower status person and (10 percent) with higher status person; while Iraqi subjects used (65 percent) with equals, (17 percent) for lower status person and (17 percent) for higher status person. German subjects tended to use the "statement of regret" less frequently with higher status person (5 percent) than to lower status person (15 percent). Iraqi subjects tended to use the "statement of regret" more frequently with higher status person (15 percent). German learners gave somehow similar number of "statement of reason, excuse or explanation" to lower and equal status persons where they stand for (95 percent) and (90 percent) respectively. As for Iraqi learners, they used few numbers of "statement of reason" as compared to German learners. Iraqi learners used it more frequently with higher and equal status persons with (47,5 percent and 47,5 percent) respectively. As for the "statement of philosophy", German learners used them with lower status person with a rate of (30 percent), whereas Iraqi learners used it with a rate of (15 percent) with lower status person. A further important point in the responses of the German subjects is the great number of uses of "statement of self defense" to refuse a higher status person's suggestion. They used (15 percent) of self defense statement to refuse a higher status person's suggestions. And as for "gratitude or appreciation", German learners favored to present or use gratitude, appreciation more frequently to an equal status person 's suggestion (100 percent) than to lower status person (22,5 percent) and to higher status person's (10 percent). Iraqi learners used the same category very little where it represents (40 percent) with an equal status person and (12,5 percent) with higher status person. Furthermore, German learners used the "statement of elaboration of reason" more frequently with lower and higher status person than to higher status persons. See table (3) for other percentages of other categories.

Semantic Formulas	Higher Gls%ILs		Lower Gls%ILs		Equal Gls%ILs	
Direct Refusals	10	67:5	30	67:5	37	63
Statement of Regret	5	15	15	7:5	0	2:5
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	37:5	47:5	95	40	90	47:5
Statement of Alternative	15:5	7:5	17:5	7:5	5	5
Set Conditions for Future or Past Acceptance	0	0	5	0	2:5	0
Promise of Future Acceptance	0	2:5	7:5	10	0	0
Statement of principle	0	0	5	5	0	0
Statement of Philosophy .	5	2:5	30	15	2:5	0
Criticize the Request / Requester	10	2:5	5	5	7:5	7:5
Request for Help, Empathy and Assistance	2:5	0	0	0	0	0
Let Interlocutor Off the Hock	0	0	2:5	2:5	2:5	0
Self Defense	30	30	7:5	0	0	0
Lack of Enthusiasm	2:5	0	0	0	0	0
Topic Switch	2:5	0	0	0	0	0
Joke	7:5	0	0	0	0	0
Postponement	2:5	0	2:5	0	0	0
Hedging	2:5	2:5	0	2:5	0	0
Statement of Positive Opinion, Feeling or Agreement	22:5	2:5	27:5	2:5	7:5	7:5
Statement of Empathy	0	0	7:5	0	0	0
Pause Fillers	17:5	10	15	5	20	7:5
Gratitude / Appreciation	22:5	12:5	10	0	100	40

Elaboration of Reason	2:5	5	17:5	10	15	12:5
Wish	0	0	0	2:5	0	2:5

Table (3) Frequency of Semantic Formulas Refusals of Suggestions

4.3.2. Content and Order of Semantic Formulas

The German subjects produced a total of 398 semantic formulas for the refusals of suggestions. Of the 29 categories of the refusal formulas, only six were used more frequently than others in situations of suggestions. The category “statement of gratitude / appreciation” contained the most responses with 113 occurrences (28:39 percent) of the total of the German refusal formulas falling in refusals of suggestions. In terms of the order of semantic formulas, of 113 of the semantic formulas of the statements of gratitude or appreciation, 23 occurrences took place at the beginning of the responses and 8 occurrences took place at the end of the responses. As for Iraqi subjects, they produced a total of 251 categories, only six were used more frequently than others in situations of suggestions. The category “Direct formulas” contained the most responses with 80 occurrences (31percent) of the total of the German refusal formulas falling in refusals of suggestions. Out of 80 occurrences, 48 occurrences (19 percent) represent the category of “Non performative (NO)” and 32 occurrences (12 percent) represents “Negative willingness”. The second category of semantic formulas that was more frequently used by German subjects is “The statement of reason, excuse or explanation” which occurred 89 (22:36 percent) of the total responses. In providing a statement of excuse, reason or explanation to refuse the student’s suggestion to have more practice in conversation and less on grammar, German subjects usually used obligation structures like "You have to ... ; You must ...; You should ...; we should ...", to oblige the student to study grammar before conversation and most of the answers concentrated on the importance of grammar as an a important step to master conversation and in refusing the workmate’s suggestion to remove the tomato stain on his colleague's shirt, they asserted (Most of them (90 percent) their explanation as in “I will change it when I go home”. Similarly, for Iraqi subjects, the second category of semantic formulas was “The statement of reason, excuse or explanation” which occurred 54 (21,5 percent) of the total responses. In providing a statement of excuse, reason or explanation to refuse to the statement’s suggestion to have more practice in conversation and less on grammar. Iraqi subjects used statement like “I am the teacher and it is me who should decide” or “It is my way of teaching my student” and that “grammar is more important than conversation”. The third commonly used formula in German subjects’ responses is the statement of self defense with 33 occurrences (8:29 percent) of the total responses of situations of suggestions. In their self-defense statement, most of the responses concentrated on “I have my way of organizing my self” or “I will spend my day searching little notes”. In Iraqi learner’s responses, the category of “gratitude / appreciation” was the third with 21 occurrences (8,5 percent) of

the total responses of situations of suggestions. The fourth semantic formulas that was used by German learners in situations of suggestion is "Direct category of refusal" with 31 occurrences (7,5 percent) of the total number of formulas falling in situations of suggestions of 31 occurrences, 18 occurrences ("NO" category) took place at the beginning of the semantic formulas. In Iraqi responses, the category of "Silence" was the fourth one that is adopted by Iraqi learners in some specific situations with 19 occurrences (7,5) out of the total number of semantic formulas falling in situations of suggestions. The fifth semantic formula that was used by German learners in situations of suggestion is the statement of positive opinion which occurred 23 with (5,5 percent) of the total responses of situations of suggestions. Of 23 occurrences of the positive opinion statement, 12 occurrence took place at the beginning of the semantic formulas. The category of the statement of self-defense was the fifth among Iraqi learners' responses. On the contrary to German learners' responses, Iraqi learners refused either by acceptance that functions as a refusal or partial disagreement and a promise to find a way of organizing themselves as part of their self defense statements.

5. Discussion And Conclusion

The present study compared refusals between German and Iraqi learners of English in terms of the frequency, content and order of semantic formulas. The two groups favored similar pragmatic strategies in refusing requests, invitations and suggestions. The difference, however, was in the preference for and frequency of use and content of these strategies (Semantic formulas). In other words, the results indicated that German and Iraqi learners of English displayed cross- cultural variation in these aspects of refusals.

According to Beebe et al. (1990), both Japanese learners of English and native speakers of Japanese tended to respond differently to higher versus lower status interlocutors, while native speakers of English were sensitive to status equals versus status unequal (higher and lower), However, German learners of English in the present study did not seem to be particularly sensitive to one certain status versus another across different situations (i.e. requests, invitations and suggestion). Iraqi learners of English, on the other hand, tended to take a more mitigating and sensitive approach in dealing with high and equal status persons than with low status person. Evidence for Iraqi learners' sensitivity as well as German learners' non-sensitivity to a particular status may be found in the relative frequency of mitigating formulas used to a higher status person and an equal status person. Upon examining the total number of uses of each semantic formula, Iraqi learners stated positive feelings, apologized and elaborated their reasons significantly more frequently to higher and equal status persons than the lower status person to soften the force of refusals, while German learners, not in all cases, did not shift the frequency of these formulas noticeably according to status of interlocutors. In addition, Iraqi learners used "intensifiers" such as (very) and (so) in their apology particularly when they refused an invitation or request from a higher status person. Thus, for Iraqi

learners, the social status of the situation (Equal / Unequal) did play a role in the selection of the semantic formulas in providing refusals, while German learners tended to vary their refusal strategies according to social distance rather than status.

With respect to the level of directness, major differences were attested among the two groups. German refusal might be less direct and resort to their own inclinations other than explanation, while Iraqi learners resort to explanations or elaboration of explanation as reasons for their refusals. As far as the direct formulas are concerned, although Iraqi learners' responses contained a great number of direct formulas of refusal, readers touch the tone of directness within the responses of the German learners more than the Iraqi learners' and this leads us to the point of the transfer of L1 sociocultural knowledge. Thus, analysis of the speech act performance of the Iraqi learners in English and native language (Arabic) showed that lack of L2 sociocultural knowledge represented an important factor affecting the interlanguage system of many of the Iraqi learners of English. Even though the majority of Iraqi learners displayed an advanced level grammatical competence, the frequency and content of the responses showed that several very advanced Iraqi learners did not know how to refuse an invitation or request. Analysis of the Iraqi learners' responses in the Arabic questionnaire showed that they, as opposed to the English questionnaire, have a very good ability to use the indirect strategies to mitigate the force of the refusals. Thus, because of the short, if not the complete absence, of residence in English speaking countries, Iraqi learners did know how to make use of the indirect strategies of refusals when speaking English. As a result, they resorted to the frequent use of direct strategies as "No" or "I can't" as their way of refusing. As for the German learners of English, findings in this study, suggested that although they are non-native speakers of English, they had acquired a higher level of pragmatic fluency due to having already spent more than a year in a certain English speaking countries as it is evidenced through the information the subjects in question provided in the page entitled "Demographic Information ". Iraqi learners, in their native dialect, were too sensitive to the social status of the persons and their refusals showed different use and frequency of semantic formulas and with different order.

In terms of the total frequency of adjuncts (i.e., gratitude, statements of positive opinion, pause fillers), German learners of English expressed gratitude much more frequently than did Iraqi learners. Similarly, German learners also stated positive opinion and pause fillers much more frequently than did Iraqi learners who typically used these formulas much more frequently in the Arabic questionnaire as an evidence that Iraqi learners of English lack the pragmatic fluency that native speakers of English have. As far as reasons are concerned, giving a reason is probably central to refusals in German learners' responses as in Iraqi learners' responses. Yet the content of reasons given by each group differed for example, in refusing requests and invitations from a higher status person, German learners usually referred to plans or appointments tonight or Saturdays with their friends, husbands and children. They also cited their

mothers and friends' birthday party as reasons for their refusals. Iraqi learners typically mentioned plans with fathers, brothers or uncles or the sickness of father. They also mentioned their own sickness and their need to go to the hospital or to see the doctor as grounds for their refusals. The frequent use of father, brother and sickness as their reason for refusing requests or invitation in general, and for refusing a higher status person's request or invitation in particular may be explained by Iraqi learners' sensitivity to this status. Since refusing a higher status person's request or invitation may be highly face-threatening, they may have to come up with reasons which involve matters that are absolutely more urgent than a request or invitation from a higher status person. For Iraqi people, mentioning their duty and piety for their parents might be one of them. This duty or piety begins with the fact that children owe unpayable debt to their parents, who gave them life, nurtured them as infants and took care of them in childhood. Therefore, their lives, adult children in Arabic culture in general assume the responsibility of supporting and caring for their parents, to whom they are eternally indebted and grateful. The notion of loving and respecting of their parents thus holds a major place in Arabic (Iraqi) moral values (ibid.). Therefore, Iraqi learners may have decided that mentioning matters related to their duty and obligation to their parents, brother, uncle or sickness would be the most appropriate and face-saving content of reasons when refusing a higher status person like a boss or a teacher. Furthermore, some Iraqi learners, in refusing a student's suggestion to include more conversation in a language classroom, explicitly emphasized their positions as teachers and some times sounded critical towards the student as in "It is me who decides what the most important thing. I am the teacher, and I think grammar is the most important thing". German learners, on the other hand, occasionally cited their status as teachers, but mostly they gave other reasons to refuse the student's suggestion as in "that is right, but grammar is the first step to master conversation" and they showed their commitment to the curriculum to mitigate their refusals..

Another aspect of Iraqi learners' responses is that they tended to use reasons that are specific to refuse people's request or invitation. They also tended to elaborate more and more on their reasons when they refuse their teacher's or boss' request or invitation. On the contrary, German learners favored general reasons which have made them somehow vague.

Further, German learners tended to use a certain tone in their refusing their boss' suggestion to try to write for himself little notes to remind him of things. In their self-defense statements, most of the responses concentrated on "I have my way of organizing myself" or "I will spend my day searching little notes". Thus, German learners seem to use a tough tone if they have been portrayed as untidy even by a higher status person. And in most of the occurrences of the self-defense statement, German learners favored to use them at the beginning of their responses. In addition, the reader touches the joke in some responses as in "Then I will lose the little notes", It seems that suggestions which have German subjects in an untidy shape or in an inferior position reflect insulting and

attacking responses from the German learners as in “I know how to organize my self ”.

Finally, in refusing the teachers’ request to borrow his student’s new sport car to drive it for one day, German learners did not bother themselves to find reasons to mitigate their refusals towards the higher status person’ request, instead they were too direct in their responses when most of them asserted their refusals as in “I never lend my car to any one”. And what is noticeable here is that most of the responses lacked the statement of regret “I am sorry” which confirms that they not only refuse the teacher’s request, but criticize the requester.

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Appendix

Refusals

Directions: Please write your refusals to the following situations in the blank area. Do not spend a lot of time thinking about what answer you should provide; instead, please respond as naturally as possible and try to write your response as you feel you would say it in the real situation.

Requests:

1. You have got money with you, but you need it to pay a bill before you go home.

Workmate: I meant to get some cash on my way, but I forgot. Can you lend me some so I can buy some lunch?

You: _____

Workmate: Well, I'll see if someone else can help me out.

2. You have just bought an expensive sports car and are very proud of it.

Your Boss: Wow, I always wanted to drive one of those. Would you lend it to me for a day?

You: _____

Your Boss: Ok, I'll drive my car.

3. It is your first day in an administrative job at the university. A student comes into your office and asks about something you are not in charge of.

Student: Excuse me, can you help me with registering for courses?

You: _____

Student: It is Ok.

Invitations

1. You are a teacher in the Department of Linguistics. Your student invites you to dinner, but you really don't like the other guests.

The student: Simon and Angela are coming round to dinner on Saturday. Would you like to join us?

You: _____

The student: Ah well, maybe some other time then.

You are a worker in a supermarket. The owner of the supermarket invites you to an exclusive restaurant.

The owner: There is so much I would like to talk to you about – if you care to take the time. I was wondering if you would like to be my guest tonight.

You: _____

The owner: Well, I'll call you again next week. Perhaps we'll find another opportunity.

3. You would love to travel, but are scared of flying, although you have never told anyone that. A good friend of yours has won a trip for two.

Friend: You know I told you about the flight to Madeira that I won? My wife doesn't want to go, so I wondered if you'd come with me instead.

You: _____

Friend: But it's a fantastic opportunity!

Suggestions

1. You're at your untidy desk trying to find a report that your boss just asked for. While you're looking for it, your boss walks over.

Boss: You know, maybe you should try and organize yourself better. I always write myself little notes to remind me of things. Perhaps you should give it a try!

You: _____

Boss: Well, it's an idea, anyway.

2. You're a language teacher at a university. Halfway through the course, a student approaches you.

Student: Excuse me, some of the students were talking after class recently and we were wondering if the class would be better if gave us more practice in conversation and less on grammar.

You: _____

Student: OK, I see your point. It was only a suggestion.

3. A Workmate notices that you have got a tomato stain on your shirt/blouse.

Workmate: That mark is a nuisance, isn't it? I've got a good stain remover here if you'd like it.

You: _____

Workmate: Oh well, suit yourself.