Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics
ISSN: 2345-3303 – E-ISSN: 2588-3887 – http://rals.scu.ac.ir
Published by Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

Please cite this paper as follows:

Hashemian, M. (2021). A cross-cultural study of refusal speech act by Persian L2 learners and American native speakers. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *12*(1), 81-98. https://doi.org/10.22055/RALS.2021.16726

Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

Research Paper

A Cross-Cultural Study of Refusal Speech Act by Persian L2 Learners and American Native Speakers

Mahmood Hashemian

Shahrekord University, Shahrekord, Iran; *hashemian-m@sku.ac.ir*

Received: 18/06/2019 Accepted: 10/03/2021

Abstract

Refusals are utterances spoken to perform the action of refusing. This face-threatening act has a significant function in societal interaction. This pragmatic study investigated Iranian English learners' (IELs) behavior in realizing refusals on the basis of a cross-cultural comparison of American native speakers (ANSs) and Iranian Persian speakers (IPSs) in terms of production performance. Data came from 40 ANSs, 40 IPSs, and 40 IELs, elicited from a DCT varied with contextual factors of power and distance. Data were analyzed in terms of frequency and content of semantic formulas. Results indicated that, although all the groups employed a similar range of refusal strategies in responding to the refusals elicited by different initiation acts, cross-cultural variation was evident in the frequency and content of semantic formulas. In some cases, the IPSs and the IELs refused similarly in Persian and English, but differently from the ANSs, suggesting pragmatic transfer in the Persian groups. These differences in Persian and English refusals may cause pragmatic failure when Persian speakers rely on their L1 culture-specific refusal strategies in interacting with English native speakers. Thus, the development of L2 students' pragmatic knowledge should become one of the priorities of the educational system.

Keywords: Refusals; Speech Acts; Cross-Cultural Pragmatics; Pragmatic Transfer

1. Introduction

In order to have successful communication in an L2, speakers should employ different, but appropriate, linguistic choices in different contexts because both linguistic form and function must match in each specific situation. Unfortunately, nonnative speakers (NNSs) may not be fully aware of all the sociolinguistic rules governing the appropriateness of speech acts in an L2 (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1996). Especially with speech acts, as they are closely associated with the culture of a specific speech community (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2011), NNSs tend to transfer the form-function mapping common in their own culture into their L2 usage (Kasper, 1992; Tanck, 2002). As the form-function map gets distorted, interlocutors find themselves in a broken-down communication in which intentions are not well understood and pragmatic failure is common (Thomas, 1983).

Therefore, the need to be successful in communication and to avoid pragmatic failures has given rise to an area of research called *interlanguage pragmatics* defined as the study of NNSs' acquisition and use of linguistic action patterns in an L2 (Roever, 2007). As such, the main focus of interlanguage pragmatics is the investigation of performing and comprehending speech acts. The study of refusals, which were the current study's focus, is especially important as their notoriously hard-to-master nature requires a high level of pragmatic competence (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990).

The complexity of refusals is driven mainly by their quality as face-threatening acts (FTAs) which tend to risk the interlocutor's positive or negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As Chang (2008) states, to be successful in conveying the refusal message and reducing the risk of face, a speaker needs to strike a balance between clarity and politeness. On the same note, Brown and Levinson (1987) believe that appropriate use of a refusal act corresponds to the weight or the social situation that it has occurred in. For example, the social distance or the power that each participant

holds determines how direct and efficient or indirect and inexplicit (to save the face) he or she is. With that being said, the politeness value and type of linguistic forms tend to vary across languages and cultures (Chang, 2008), despite the universality of refusals and concepts such as power dynamics. This difference has empirical support from cross-cultural studies (e.g., Al-Eryani, 2007; Chang, 2008; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Honglin, 2007; Wannaruk, 2008).

Likewise, several studies within the context of Iran have attempted to investigate Iranian EFL learners' use of refusal speech acts. Some of these studies tend to look at patterns associated with Iranian learners' use of refusal speech act with regard to their general English level (e.g., Sahragard & Javanmardi, 2011; Tabatabaei, 2020), strategies (e.g., Farashaiyan & Muthusamy, 2017; Sahragard & Javanmardi, 2011), and the effect of instruction (Tamimi Sa'd & Gholami, 2017), whereas other studies take a contrastive analysis approach to the matter to understand what is the difference between NSs and NNSs' refusals (e.g., Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Keshavarz, Eslami, & Ghahraman; 2006; Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016). The implications of these studies usually come down to the following two points: (1) Learners, even the ones categorized as advanced, do not have a proper command of pragmatic knowledge in English, and (2) they tend to prefer indirect speech acts as opposed to direct ones.

Compared to previous inquiries, the present study is, somehow, unique in that it combines the two types of studies mentioned above to get both a cross-cultural perspective as well as providing an analysis of EFL learners. Also, the inclusion of a reference Persian-speaker group to better control for the effect of the L1 transfer of pragmatic knowledge has been rarely used within the literature.

The aim of this study was to investigate the refusal speech act as performed in English and Persian by NSs and Iranian EFL learners, and how Iranian EFL learners think and react when refusing in cross-cultural interactions. So, the current study was an attempt to (1) find (possible) differences in the content and frequency of semantic formulas of the refusal strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and the NSs of English and Persian, and (2) uncover the effect of Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge of L1 in realizing the speech act of refusal.

2. Method

The present study followed a quasi-experimental design in order to understand how patterns of the refusal speech act tended to manifest themselves in the L2 use of Iranian EFL learners. To this end, a group of English speakers (from a Persian native background) and two reference groups of monolingual native speakers (Persian and English L1s) were recruited to conduct several chi-squares as well as a semantic analysis of their sample refusal speech acts.

2.1. Participants

The participants included three groups: Iranian English learners (IELs), Iranian Persian speakers (IPSs), and American native speakers (ANSs). The IELs were 60 M.A. students majoring in TEFL who were studying in two Iranian universities. Their selection was done based on the language courses they had passed at the M.A. level, which focused partly on subject-specific courses and partly on their English language proficiency, as well as their performance on a simulated TOEFL test (Sharp, 2001). They took a complete version of the test and 40 students whose scores fell between 550 or above were selected for the next phase of the study. The 40 monolingual IPSs participants were all B.A. non-English major students who were studying Persian literature in Iran. The ANSs consisted of 40 graduates of English, living in Washington, D.C. in the U.S. They were all engineers in different branches working in Micro-Net company. They were consulted via e-mail by the researcher, and the DCT was handed directly to them by an Iranian who was working in that company.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Beebe et al. (1990) proposed a taxonomy to classify refusals used in many studies. As such, the strategies of the head acts of refusals are classified into two major categories: direct and indirect formulas. Then, each category of the strategies of the speech act of refusals is divided into subcategories. Direct refusals consist of expressions which include performative verbs like *no* or *I refuse*. In the category of indirect refusals, refusers avoid saying no directly; therefore, the speakers of a conversation may have to take several turns until the initiator recognizes the refuser's intention of rejection. Indirect refusals may consist of verbal and nonverbal behavior which implies a refusal. Also, there are adjuncts to refusal, which are basically an accompanying and supporting element to the main act (i.e., head) that do not stand by itself.

2.3. Instruments

The instruments were a TOEFL test (Sharp, 2001) and a discourse completion test (DCT). The TOEFL test was used to select the participants based on their performances. The test included grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension at the advanced level. The DCT was the modified version of the DCT employed by Beebe et al. (1990), which is widely used in pragmatic studies. The DCT consisted of 12 different situations that were classified into four stimulus types eliciting a refusal: four requests, four invitations, two offers, and two suggestions. The selection of the refusal situations was based on the relative power and social distance of the interlocutors (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Power is an asymmetric variable, which is either of equal, lower, or higher status and refers to "the degree to which the hearer can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of the speaker's plans and self-evaluation" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 77).

Social distance is a symmetric variable that deals with the similarities/differences between interlocutors and is specified under the conditions that the interlocutors may or may not know each other. Thus, the questionnaire varied in terms of power with three levels: low (L), high (H), and equal (E), and social distance with two levels: acquaintance (A) and stranger (S).

The DCT was prepared in terms of six possible combinations. In order to obtain more reliable data, the DCT included two situations for each variable combination. The distribution of the contextual factors is listed in Table 1. In addition, showing how the L1 conventions affected the L2 learners' refusal performance (i.e., pragmatic transfer), the same DCT was translated into Persian by the researcher. The translation was kept as close as possible to the original English version with the necessary changes in the names of the people and the places to make them more similar to the Persian respondents' situations:

Table 1. *Description of DCT Items*

Item	Eliciting Acts	Status of the Interlocutor		Code	Situation
		Power	Distance		
1	Request	+P	-D	HA	Requesting for a Raise
2	Invitation	+P	+D	HS	Fancy Restaurant
3	Request	=P	+D	ES	Asking for a Lift Home
4	Suggestion	+P	+D	HS	More Conversation
5	Request	-P	+D	LS	Asking for Smoking
6	Offer	=P	+D	ES	Paying for a Broken Phone
7	Request	+P	-D	HA	Looking for a Substitute in Job
8	Invitation	=P	-D	EA	Dinner at Friend's House
9	Suggestion	-P	+D	ES	Writing Little Reminders
10	Invitation	=P	-D	EA	Friend's Invitation to Dinner
11	Offer	-P	-D	LA	Promotion With a Move to a Small Town
12	Invitation	-P	-D	LA	Boss's Party

2.4. Procedure

2.4.1. Data Collection

First, a pilot study was conducted in which the DCT was administered to two Persian learners of English and two NSs of English, and the necessary changes regarding the clarity of the items and the format of the questionnaire were made. Next, the participants' pragmatic competence was challenged on the effective use of refusal strategies by means of the finalized version of the DCT in which they had to write down what they would say in the given contexts.

The IELs and the ANSs responded to the English version of the DCT, and the IPSs responded to the Persian version. The questionnaires were handed directly to the IELs and IPSs; however, on the part of the ANSs, 13 English NSs completed the electronic version (via e-mail), whereas the other 27 were directly given the DCT.

2.4.2. Data Analysis

To analyze the data gathered from the three groups (i.e., IELs, IPSs, and ANSs), the refusal responses were categorized based on a sequence of the semantic formulas provided by Beebe et al. (1990). Hence, to test the statistical differences that were found, the taxonomy developed by Beebe et al. (1990) was modified based on the corpus of the present study. For example, categories such as direct performative, guilt trip, and nonverbal avoidance were dropped from the classification scheme because these were not reflected in the data, and a new category, that is, use of address forms, was identified in the data. This coding system is a universally valid scale of directness, previously been empirically tested and successfully used by many researchers (e.g., Al-Eryani, 2007; Chang, 2008; Keshavarz et al., 2006; Kwon, 2004; Wannaruk, 2008).

In order to identify pragmatic transfer, the method proposed by Kasper (1992) was used in a way that when there was a lack of statistically significant difference in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature in L1, L2, and interlanguage (IL), it was defined as positive transfer, whereas when there were statistically significant differences in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature between IL-L2 and L1-L2 and a lack of statistically significant difference between IL and L1, it was defined as a negative transfer.

2.5. Statistical Procedure

After the coding was completed, the descriptive-analytical procedures were undertaken. The data were submitted to SPSS for frequency analysis and chi-square test. The frequency analysis was conducted to identify the proportion and percentage of the refusal strategies used by the NSs/NNSs in the six combinations. A chi-square test was performed in order to establish whether the differences in the frequency of strategies made by the participants were statistically significant. The alpha level was set at .05 or less. Then, the standardized residual (*SR*) value was utilized to detect the direction and strength of the differences among the groups.

3. Results

3.1. Type and Frequency of Semantic Formulas

To identify the type and the frequency of the refusal strategies used by the three groups, the analyzed data were examined from two perspectives: First, the semantic formulas were grouped as direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjuncts to refusals. The mean number and the standard deviation of the direct refusals, the indirect refusals, and the adjuncts to refusal used by each group were calculated and compared (see Table 2):

Table 2. *Mean and Standard Deviations of Direct Refusals, Indirect Refusals, and Adjuncts to Refusals Used by Each Group*

Refusal Strategies	Statistics	Groups		
		ANSs (n = 40)	IELs (n = 40)	IPSs (n = 40)
Direct	*M*	132.5	38	30
	SD	45.96	19.8	14.14
Indirect	*M*	36.875	46.4	44.6
	SD	74.34	80.08	102.3
Adjunct	*M*	30	31.4	33.8
	SD	24.48	22.65	21.51

As shown in Table 2, these results indicated that the ANSs utilized substantially more direct strategies (i.e., direct no and negative ability/willingness) than did the other two groups.

Table 3. *Chi-Square Value and Frequencies of Direct Refusals, Indirect Refusals, and Adjuncts to Refusals Among Three Groups*

Refusal Strategies	Group				Group				Group			
	ANSs (*F*)	IPSs (*F*)	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	ANSs (*F*)	IELs (*F*)	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	IPSs (*F*)	IELs (*F*)	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Direct	266	76	0	105.556	266	61	0	128.517	76	61	.2	1.642
Indirect	582	657	.033	4.54	582	670	.013	6.185	657	670	.721	.127
Adjunct	74	162	0	32.814	74	114	.004	8.511	162	114	.004	8.348

$p < 0.05$; Critical value = 3.84146; $df = 1$

By looking at Table 3, this difference was found to be statistically significant between the ANSs and the IELs as well as the ANSs and the IPSs. The difference between the IPSs and the IELs was not statistically significant, except for the use of the adjuncts to refusals in which the IELs showed a higher frequency.

Table 4 shows the results of the chi-square conducted to examine the groups' differences in the overall frequency of each individual semantic formula (i.e., subcategories of direct, indirect, and adjuncts refusal strategies):

Table 4. *Overall Frequencies, Percentages, and Standardized Residual of All Groups*

Semantic Formulas	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Direct No	100 (10.3%)	52 (5.6%)	40 (4.6%)
	3.7	-1.3	-2.7
Negative Ability/Willingness	165 (17.0%)	24 (2.6%)	21 (2.4%)
	10.3	-5.3	-5.6
Statement of Regret	165 (17.0%)	168 (18.3%)	136 (15.9%)
	-.3	1.3	-1.0
Wish	4 (.4%)	12 (1.3%)	13 (1.5%)
	-2.0	.9	1.3
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	272 (28.1%)	325 (35.5%)	393 (46.0%)
	-4.4	.2	4.5
Alternative	16 (1.6%)	26 (2.8%)	23 (2.6%)
	-1.5	1.1	.5
Set Condition	13 (1.3%)	4 (.4%)	5 (.5%)
	1.8	-1.2	-.7
Future Acceptance	29 (3.0%)	32 (3.5%)	8 (.9%)
	.8	2.0	-3.0
Statement of Principle	2 (.2%)	8 (.8%)	3 (.3%)
	-1.2	1.8	-.6
Statement of Philosophy	5 (.5%)	34 (3.7%)	19 (2.2%)
	-3.5	3.5	.1
Criticize	12 (1.2%)	11 (1.2%)	10 (1.2%)
	.0	.1	-.1
Off the Hook	42 (4.3%)	32 (3.6%)	34 (4.0%)
	.5	-.5	.0
Self-Defense	7 (.7%)	17 (1.8%)	23 (2.7%)
	-2.4	.5	2.1
Indefinite Reply	0 (.0%)	17 (1.8%)	0 (.0%)
	-2.5	4.9	-2.3
Postponement	10 (1.0%)	8 (.8%)	10 (1.2%)

	.0	-.4	.4
Hedging	4 (.4%)	8 (.8%)	1 (.1%)
	-.3	1.8	-1.5
Positive Opinion	50 (5.2%)	52 (5.6%)	51 (6.0%)
	-.7	.3	.4
Empathy	5 (.5%)	0 (.0%)	7 (.8%)
	.3	-2.0	1.6
Pause Fillers	13 (1.3%)	31 (3.3%)	2 (.2%)
	-.9	4.2	-3.3
Gratitude/Appreciation	52 (5.4%)	48 (5.2%)	40 (4.7%)
	2.9	4.7	1.7
Title	0 (.0%)	5 (.5%)	14 (1.6%)
	-2.6	-.5	3.2
Total	966 (100%)	914 (100%)	853 (100%)

As shown in Table 4, all the responses fell into 21 identifiable strategies for the three groups. The results of the chi-square test indicated a strong difference in the frequencies of the speech act types produced by all the groups (x^2 = 429.95, df = 40, $p < 0.05$). Then, in order to seek which strategy or strategies were the main contributor (i.e., cause) to this difference, the *SR*s also were computed (see Table 4). *SR*s are comparable to *z* score, that is, *SR*s larger than 2.0 (in absolute value) for a strategy indicate that the strategy is a major contributor to the chi-square value at $p < 0.05$ (Bakeman & Robinson, 1994).

By looking at Table 4, it was concluded that 11 out of the 21 strategies were the major contributors to the chi-square value: direct no, negative ability, wish, excuse/reason/explanation, future acceptance, statement of philosophy, self-defense, indefinite reply, empathy, pause fillers, gratitude/ appreciation, and titles.

3.2. Refusal Strategy

This section explores the choice of the refusal strategies by the participants in response to certain eliciting acts. As such, in each eliciting act, the top four frequently used semantic formulas were presented according to each group of participants and, then, chi-square tests were performed among the three groups in order to examine whether they differed in choosing the top four semantic formulas.

3.2.1. Refusal to Requests

3.2.1.1. Refusing an Acquaintance Interlocutor of Low Status (-Distance, -Power)

Table 5 displays the four most frequently used semantic formulas when the participants refused a familiar interlocutor of low status among the three groups. The results of the chi-square test showed that there were significant differences among the three groups in these four strategies (x^2 = 83.100, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, the results of the *SR*s over each cell indicated that the two strategies (i.e., negative ability and excuse/reason/explanation) were the major contributors to this difference.

Thus, the pair comparison was, further, performed by the chi-square in this strategy. The difference of percentages was statistically significant (i.e., ANSs vs. IPSs: x^2 = 47.675, df = 1, $p < 0.05$; ANSs vs. IELs: x^2 = 52.408, df = 1, $p < 0.05$), whereas the number of occurrence of this refusal strategy was nearly close to the IPSs (6.2%) and the IELs (5.3%; IPSs vs. IELs: x^2 = .333, df = 1, $p > 0.05$). The results imply that the IELs, following their L1 norms, used this strategy less frequently than the ANSs, showing evidence of pragmatic transfer.

Table 5. *Frequencies, Percentages, Standard Residual, and Pair Groups Chi-square of the Four Most Frequent Strategies Used in Refusal of Request (# 1 & 7)*

Refusal Strategies # 1 & 7	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Negative Ability/ Willingness	66 (40.0%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.3%)
	5.3	-3.3	-3.4

Statement of Regret	54 (32.7%)	34 (38.2%)	34 (31.4%)
	.0	.6	-.5
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	40 (24.2%)	51 (57.3%)	72 (67.3%)
	--3.8	1.5	3.2
Positive Opinion	5 (3.0%)	4 (4.4%)	0 (.0%)
	.5	1.1	-1.7
Total	165 (100%)	90 (100%)	107 (100%)

Semantic Formulas # 1 & 7	All Groups		Groups					
			ANSs vs. ISPs		IELs vs. ANSs		IELs vs. IPSs	
	Sig.	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Negative Ability/Willingness	0	92.385	0	47.675	0	52.408	.564	.333
Statement of Regret	.205	1.607	.033	4.545	.033	4.545	1	0
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	. 08	4.73	.002	9.143	.249	1.33	.058	3.585
Positive Opinion	.273	2.6	.102	2.667	.739	.111	.18	1.8
df = 2; critical value = 5.991			*df* = 1; critical value = 3.84146; $p < 0.05$					

3.2.1.2. Refusing a Stranger Interlocutor of Equal Status (+Distance, =Power)

The four most frequently used refusal strategies when the participants refused a strange interlocutor of equal status is illustrated in Table 6. The results of the chi-square test revealed that there was a significant difference among the three groups in this situation ($x^2 = 21.955$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.05$). The *SR*s value over each cell also represented that the two strategies of direct no and excuse/reason/explanation were the major contributors to this difference.

Though a significant difference was found in the three groups' overall use of the regret strategy, the results of the pair groups chi-square (see Table 6) showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the two baseline groups (i.e., ANSs vs. IPSs). Therefore, in the quantitative data, there was no evidence of negative pragmatic transfer.

Regarding the frequency analysis, the most common strategies to refuse an unfamiliar interlocutor of equal status by the IPSs and the ANSs were, respectively, excuse/reason/explanation, regret, and direct no. Also, the IELs preferred the same strategies as the other groups, but the most striking result was the strategy of criticize used by the IELs, whereas it was not found in the responses of the two native data:

Table 6. *Frequencies, Percentages, Standard Residual, and Pair Groups Chi-Square of Four Most Frequent Strategies Used in Refusal of Request (# 3)*

Refusal Strategies # 3	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Direct No	10 (17.9%)	3 (3.6%)	6 (.9%)
	2.1	-1.7	-.1
Statement of Regret	16 (28.6%)	34 (41.0%)	22 (32.8%)
	-.8	.9	-.3
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	30 (53.6%)	38 (45.8%)	39 (58.2%)
	.2	-.8	.7
Criticize	0 (.0%)	8 (9.6%)	0 (.0%)
	-1.5	2.7	-1.6
Total	56 (100%)	83 (100%)	67 (100%)
	All Groups	Groups	

Semantic Formulas # 3			ANSs vs. IPSs		IELs vs. ANSs		IELs vs. IPSs	
	Sig.	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Direct No	.143	3.895	.317	1	.052	3.769	.317	1
Statement of Regret	.03	7	.33	.947	.011	6.48	.109	2.571
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	.505	1.364	.279	1.174	.332	.941	.909	.013
Criticize	.058	3.6	1	0	.02	5.544	.02	5.544
df = 2; critical value = 5.991					*df* = 1; critical value = 3.84146; $p < 0.05$			

3.2.1.3. Refusing a Stranger Interlocutor of High Status (+Distance, +Power)

Here, the chi-square results showed a significant difference among the three groups in the four most frequent strategies. The *SRs* value over each cell indicated that the direct no strategy was the main cause of this difference (see Table 7). Also, this difference was confirmed that the three groups significantly differed in their use of the negative ability/willingness strategy ($x^2 = 27.434$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$), and no significant difference was found in the last three strategies. Thus, further pair group chi-square tests were applied to only the direct no strategy. Referring to this strategy, the results of the pair comparison indicated significant differences were found in pairs of the ANSs vs. the IPSs and the ANSs vs. the IELs, and no significant difference was found in the IPSs vs. the IELs, which suggests L1 influence on the IELs' responses.

Based on the frequency analysis, the excuse/reason/explanation strategy was the dominant strategy used by all the three groups. Moreover, the IELs, like the IPSs, used the alternatives strategy in this situation in the same way and with nearly the same percentage (10.3% and 10.4%, respectively)—more than the ANSs (9.3%). Besides, the IELs, like the IPSs, seemed to use more the excuse/reason/explanation and regret strategies than the ANSs (see Table 7):

Table 7. *Frequencies, Percentages, Standard Residual, and Pair Groups Chi-Square of Four Most Frequent Strategies Used in Refusal of Request (# 5)*

Refusal Strategies # 5	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Negative Ability/Willingness	8 (14.8%)	3(4.4%)	4(6.0%)
	2.3	-1.8	-1.4
Statement of Regret	19 (35.2%)	25 (36.8%)	18 (26.9%)
	-.1	.8	-.7
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	22 (40.7%)	33 (48.5%)	38 (56.7%)
	-1.3	.2	1.1
Alternative	5 (9.3%)	7 (10.3%)	7 (10.4%)
	-.4	.2	.2
Total	54 (100%)	68 (100%)	67 (100%)

Semantic Formulas # 5	All Groups		Groups					
			ANSs vs. IPSs		IELs vs. ANSs		IELs vs. IPSs	
	Sig.	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Negative Ability/Willingness	0	27.434	.007	7.2	.003	8.895	.143	.705
Statement of Regret	.5	1.387	.869	.027	.366	.818	.286	1.14
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	.115	4.323	.039	4.267	.138	2.2	.553	.352
Alternative	.039	4.263	.564	.333	.564	.333	1	0
df = 2; critical value = 5.991					*df* = 1; critical value = 3.84146; $p < 0.05$			

3.2.2. Refusal to Invitations

3.3.2.1. Refusing a Stranger Interlocutor of Low Status (+Distance, -Power)

There were some differences in the distribution of the four most frequently used strategies collected from all the groups. The results of the chi-square test revealed statistically meaningful differences in the distribution of the refusal strategies used by all the groups ($x^2 = 19.968$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.05$). It was concluded that the direct no strategy was the major contributor to the cause of the significant x^2 value. Also, this result was validated by the result of the chi-square tests administered in each strategy among the three groups. That is, the three groups, overall, differed in their use of the direct no strategy ($x^2 = 15.5$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$), but no significant difference was found in the last three strategies.

The pair comparison showed significant differences in the ANSs vs. the IPSs and the ANSs vs. the IELs, but no significant difference was found in the IPSs vs. the IELs. The results implied that the IPSs (10.3%) and the IELs (5.7%) significantly used less the direct no strategy than did the ANSs (34.5%). Besides, the IELs negatively transferred this strategy of L1 to L2 (see Table 8):

Table 8. *Frequencies, Percentages, Standard Residual, and Pair Groups Chi-Square of Four Most Frequent Strategies Used in Refusal of Invitation (# 2)*

Refusal Strategies # 2	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Direct No	19 (34.5%)	3 (5.7%)	6 (10.3%)
	3.2	-2.0	-1.2
Statement of Regret	13 (23.6%)	16 (30.2%)	14 (24.1%)
	-.3	.6	-.3
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	21 (38.2%)	30 (56.6%)	34 (58.6%)
	-1.3	.5	.8
Future Acceptance	2 (3.6%)	4 (7.5%)	4 (6.9%)
	-.7	.5	.3
Total	55 (100%)	53 (100%)	58 (100%)

Semantic Formulas # 2	All Groups		Groups					
			ANSs vs. IPSs		ANSs vs. IELs		IELs vs. IPSs	
	Sig.	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Direct No	0	15.5	.009	6.76	.001	11.636	.317	1
Statement of Regret	.85	.326	.847	.037	.577	.310	.715	.133
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	.209	3.129	.08	3.073	.208	1.588	.617	.25
Future Acceptance	.058	3.6	.414	.667	.414	.667	1	0
df = 2; critical value = 5.991			*df* = 1; critical value = 3.84146; *p* < 0.05					

3.2.2.2. Refusing an Acquaintance Interlocutor of Equal Status (-Distance, =Power)

The result of the chi-square test showed there were meaningful differences in the distribution of the refusal strategies ($x^2 = 19.218$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, the *SR*s values over each cell identified that the negative ability/willingness strategy was the main cause of this difference.

In order to trace the occurrence of L1 influence on the L2 learners' responses, chi-square tests were administered in each strategy among the three groups. As displayed in Table 9, the three groups differed in the negative ability/willingness and excuse/reason/explanation strategies. The results of further pair comparisons revealed that it was in the pair of the IPSs vs. the ANSs ($p < 0.05$) that the significant difference was found, which, further, imply that the IPSs (6.4%) significantly used less the negative ability/willingness strategy than did the ANSs (19.6%):

Table 9. *Frequencies, Percentages, Standard Residual, and Pair Groups Chi-Square of Four Most Frequent Strategies Used in Refusal of Invitation (# 10 & 8)*

Refusal Strategies (# 10 & 8)	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Negative Ability/Willingness	19 (19.6%)	9 (8.4%)	7 (6.4%)
	2.6	-.9	-1.5
Statement of Regret	24 (24.7%)	26 (24.3%)	19 (17.4%)
	.6	.5	-1.0
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	43 (44.3%)	58 (54.2%)	76 (69.7%)
	-1.6	-.3	1.8
Gratitude/Appreciation	11 (11.3%)	14 (13.1%)	7 (6.4%)
	.3	.9	-1.2
Total	97 (100%)	107 (100%)	109 (100%)

Semantic Formulas # 10 & 8	All Groups		Groups					
			ANSs vs. IPSs		IELs vs. ANSs		IELs vs. IPSs	
	Sig.	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Negative Ability/Willingness	.029	7.086	.019	5.538	.059	3.571	.617	.25
Statement of Regret	.568	1.13	.446	.581	.77	.08	.297	.089
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	.01	9.254	.002	9.151	.136	2.228	.12	2.418
Gratitude/Appreciation	.315	2.313	.346	.889	.549	.36	.127	2.33
df = 2; critical value = 5.991					*df* = 1; critical value = 3.84146; $p < 0.05$			

3.2.2.3. Refusing an Acquaintance Interlocutor of High Status (-Distance, +Power)

The result of the chi-square test analyzed the differences among the three groups in this situations and showed there were statistically significant differences in the distribution of the top four refusal strategies used by all the participants (x^2 = 13.684, *df* = 6, $p < 0.05$). Also, the *SR*s value over each cells identified that the negative ability/willingness strategy helped to that significant difference among the participants.

In order to follow the effect of L1 on the L2 learners' refusal production, chi-square was administered over each of these most common refusal strategies among the three groups. As displayed in Table 10, though there were no statistically significant differences among the three groups in the use of each of these most frequent strategies, there were significant differences between the pair groups (i.e., ANSs vs. IPSs and ANSs vs. IELs), and no significant difference between the IPSs vs. the IELs in the negative ability/willingness strategy use. Therefore, it could be said that the pair significant differences implied that the IPSs (1.7%) used the negative ability/willingness strategy significantly less than the ANSs (18.3%) and the IELs (1.6%). Also, following their L1 norms, they used less this direct refusal strategy than did the ANSs:

Table 10. *Frequencies, Percentages, Standard Residual, and Pair Groups Chi-Square of Four Most Frequent Strategies Used in Refusal of Invitation (# 12)*

Refusal Strategies # 12	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)

	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Negative Ability/Willingness	11 (18.3%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.7%)
	3.7	-1.3	-1.3
Statement of Regret	16 (26.7%)	18 (28.1%)	14 (23.3%)
	.2	.2	-.5
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	30 (50.0%)	37 (57.8%)	38 (63.3%)
	-.5	.0	.5
Gratitude/Appreciation	3 (5.0%)	8 (12.5%)	7 (11.7%)
	-1.1	.6	.4
Total	60(100%)	64 (100%)	60 (100%)

Semantic Formulas # 12	All Groups		Groups					
			ANSs vs. IPSs		ANSs vs. IELs		IELs vs. ANSs	
	Sig.	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Negative Ability/Willingness	.058	3.6	.02	5.44	.02	5.44	1	0
Statement of Regret	.779	.5	.715	.133	.732	.118	.48	.5
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	.581	1.086	.332	.941	.392	.731	.908	.013
Gratitude/Appreciation	.311	2.33	.206	1.6	.132	2.273	.796	.067
df = 2; critical value = 5.991					*df* = 1; critical value = 3.84146; $p < 0.05$			

3.2.3. Refusal to Suggestions

3.2.3.1. Refusing a Stranger Interlocutor of High Status (+Distance, +Power)

Tables 11 show the results of the chi-square analysis that revealed a significant difference among the three groups in this situation ($x^2 = 19.598$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.05$). Also, the results of the *SR*s over each cell revealed that the future acceptance strategy was the main contributor to this difference. In addition, this noticeable difference was validated by the results of the chi-square test over each of these top common strategies among the three groups overall (future acceptance strategy: $x^2 = 16.598$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$; the last three strategies: $p > 0.05$).

As presented in Table 11, the result of the paired comparison showed, with regard to the future acceptance strategy, that both pairs of the ANSs vs. the IPSs and the IELs vs. the ANSs significantly differed, whereas the IELs vs. the IPSs did not. The results implied that the ANSs (26.2%) prevailingly used the future acceptance strategy more than did the IPSs (2.6%) and the IELs (13.5%), evidencing pragmatic transfer:

Table 11. *Frequencies, Percentages, Standard Residual, and Pair Groups Chi-Square of Four Most Frequent Strategies Used in Refusal of Suggestion (# 9)*

Refusal Strategies # 9	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	18 (29.5%)	12 (32.4%)	19 (48.7%)
	-.8	-.3	1.4
Future Acceptance	16 (26.2%)	5 (13.5%)	1 (2.6%)
	2.0	-.4	-2.1
Positive Opinion	13 (21.3%)	10 (27.0%)	15 (38.5%)
	-1.0	-.1	1.3
Gratitude/Appreciation	14 (23.0%)	10 (27.0%)	4 (10.3%)
	.4	.9	-1.4
Total	61 (100%)	37 (100%)	39 (100%)

Semantic Formulas # 9	All Groups		Groups					
			ANSs vs. IPSs		ANSs vs. IELs		IELs vs. IPSs	
	Sig.	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	.416	1.755	.869	.027	.273	1.2	.209	1.581
Future Acceptance	0	16.455	0	13.235	.016	5.762	.102	2.667
Positive Opinion	.607	1	.705	.143	.532	.391	.317	1
Gratitude/Appreciation	.066	5.429	.018	5.556	.414	.667	.109	2.571
df = 2; critical value = 5.991			*df* = 1; critical value = 3.84146; $p < 0.05$					

3.2.3.2. Refusing a Stranger Interlocutor of Low Status (+Distance, -Power)

The data gathered from this situation is presented in Table 12. The result of the chi-square test showed there was a significant difference among the three groups in this situation ($x^2 = 40.332$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.05$). Again, the results of the *SR*s introduced the negative ability/willingness strategy as the main source of difference. Moreover, the result of the chi-square test over each strategy again indicated that the negative ability/willingness strategy was the primary cause of this difference among the three groups.

Further, in order to find L1 influence on the Iranians' L2 production and to examine which pair of three groups differed in their strategy use, the pair comparisons were performed by chi-square tests on the top four common used strategies. With regard to the negative ability/willingness strategy, significant differences were found in the ANSs vs. the IPSs and the ANSs vs. the IELs, but not in the IPSs vs. the IELs. The results indicated that the ANSs, unlike the other two groups, significantly used this strategy when refusing an unfamiliar individual with lower status (see Table 12):

Table 12. *Frequencies, Percentages, Standard Residual, and Pair Groups Chi-Square of Four Most Frequent Strategies Used in Refusal of Suggestion (# 4)*

Refusal Strategies # 4	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Negative Ability/Willingness	22 (41.5%)	4 (11.2%)	7 (14.0%)
	4.1	-2.0	-2.8
Excuse/Reason/Explanation	26 (49.1%)	19 (52.7%)	26 (52.0%)
	-.6	.2	.5
Criticize	3 (5.7%)	8 (22.3%)	8 (16.0%)
	-1.7	1.4	.7
Self-Defense	2 (3.8%)	5 (13.8%)	9 (18.0%)
	-1.8	.4	1.6
Total	53 (100%)	36 (100%)	50 (100%)

Semantic Formulas # 4	All Groups		Groups					
			ANSs vs. IPSs		IELs vs. ANSs		IELs vs. IPSs	
	Sig.	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Negative Ability/Willingness	0	36.75	0	19.174	0	16.667	.564	.333
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	.085	5.338	1	0	.297	1.089	.298	1.089
Criticize	.063	5.895	.132	2.273	.132	2.273	1	0
Self-Defense	.099	4.625	.035	4.445	.257	1.286	.285	1.143
df = 2; critical value = 5.991			*df* = 1; critical value = 3.84146; $p < 0.05$					

3.2.4. Refusal to Offers

3.2.4.1. Refusing a Stranger Interlocutor of Equal Status (+Distance, =Power)

The four most frequent responses given by all the three groups when refusing a stranger interlocutor with equal status are presented in Table 13. The results of the chi-square analysis revealed there were significant differences among the three groups in these four strategies ($x^2 = 28.092$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.05$). Also, the results of the *SRs* over each cell revealed that the direct no, excuse/reason/explanation, and statement of philosophy strategies were the main contributors to this difference. In addition, this conspicuous difference was validated by the results of the chi-square test over each of these top common strategies among the three groups overall (direct no: $x^2 = 9.33$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$; excuse/reason/explanation: $x^2 = 11.231$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$; statement of philosophy: $x^2 = 7.8$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$; off the hook: $p > 0.05$).

Again, the pair comparisons were performed by chi-square tests and the results showed, with regard to the direct no strategy, that both pairs of the IPSs vs. the IELs and the IELs vs. the ANSs significantly differed, whereas the ANSs vs. the IPSs did not. Concerning the excuse/reason/explanation strategy, both pairs of the ANSs vs. the IPSs and the ANSs vs. the IELs significantly differed in their use of excuse/reason/explanation strategies, but the IELs vs. the IPSs ($p > 0.05$) did not. Thus, a negative transfer from L1 can be observed.

As to the statement of philosophy strategy, both pairs of the ANSs vs. the IPSs and the IELs vs. the IPSs significantly differed in their use of the statement of philosophy strategy expressions like *This kind of things happens*, but no significant difference was found between the pair of the IELs vs. the IPSs. It can be concluded that the IELs (7.4%) and the ANSs (14.3%) used the statement of philosophy strategy less frequently in this situation than did the IPSs (26.2%).

Concerning the off the hook strategies, the three groups did not differ in their use of this strategy, and there were no significant differences between the pairs, either. It seems that all the groups had started out with an effort to 'let the interlocutor off the hook' by expressing sentences like *It's okay*, *Don't worry*, and *No problem*:

Table 13. *Frequencies, Percentages, Standard Residual, and Pair Groups Chi-Square of Four Most Frequent Strategies Used in Refusal of Offer (# 4)*

Refusal Strategies # 6	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Direct No	4 (5.9%)	12 (21.4%)	2 (3.1%)
	-1.0	2.9	-1.7
Excuse/Reason/Explanation	22 (32.4%)	5 (8.9%)	12 (18.5%)
	2.1	-1.9	-.4
Statement of Philosophy	5 (7.4%)	8 (14.3%)	17 (26.2%)
	-1.8	-.3	2.1
Off the Hook	37 (54.4%)	31 (55.4%)	34 (52.3%)
	.0	.1	-.2
Total	68 (100%)	56 (100%)	65 (100%)

Semantic Formulas # 6	All Groups		Groups					
			ANSs vs. IPSs		ANSs vs. IELs		IELs vs. IPSs	
	Sig.	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Direct No	.009	9.33	.414	.667	.046	4	.008	7.143
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	.004	11.231	.04	3.941	.001	10.704	.09	2.882
Statement of Philosophy	.02	7.8	.011	6.545	.405	.692	.03	3.924
Off the Hook	.767	.529	.722	.127	.467	.529	.710	.138

3.2.4.2. Refusing an Acquaintance Interlocutor of High Status (-Distance, +Power)

As the result of the chi-square test revealed (see Table 14), there were no significant differences in the distribution of the responses collected from all the three groups concerning the four most frequently strategies in this situation ($p > 0.05$). Also, the *SR*s values confirmed the result of the chi-square test in that that none of these values over each cell was greater than 2.00 (in absolute value). However, the chi-square tests applied to the three groups' use of each

of these four common refusal strategies displayed slightly different results. The three groups significantly differed in their use of the excuse/reason/explanation strategies, but not in the regret, positive opinion, and gratitude/appreciation strategies.

Thus, further chi-square tests were applied to examine which pair contributed statistically to significant differences in the excuse/reason/explanation strategies. The results of the pair comparison indicated that the IELs (47.1%), due to their L1 influence (like the IPSs: 57.4%), significantly used more the excuse/reason/explanation strategies than did the ANSs (34.6%), whereas the IELs and the IPSs did not differ in their use of these strategies in this situations:

Table 14. *Frequencies, Percentages, Standard Residual, and Pair Groups Chi-Square of Four Most Frequent Strategies Used in Refusal of Offer (# 11)*

Refusal Strategies # 11	ANSs	IELs	IPSs
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
	SR	*SR*	*SR*
Statement of Regret	14 (26.9%)	13 (19.1%)	12 (17.6%)
	1.0	-.3	-.6
Excuse/Reason/Explanation	18 (34.6%)	32 (47.1%)	39 (57.4%)
	-1.3	.0	1.2
Positive Opinion	6 (11.5%)	7 (10.3%)	4 (5.9%)
	.6	.3	-.9
Gratitude/Appreciation	14 (26.9%)	16 (35.5%)	13 (19.1%)
	.6	.1	-.6
Total	52 (100%)	68 (100%)	68 (100%)

Semantic Formulas # 11	All Groups		Groups					
			ANSs vs. IPSs		ANSs vs. IELs		IPSs vs. IELs	
	Sig.	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square	*Sig.*	Chi-Square
Statement of Regret	.926	.154	.695	.154	.847	.037	.841	.04
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	.021	7.708	.005	7.737	.048	3.92	.406	.69
Positive Opinion	.662	.824	.527	.4	.782	.077	.366	.818
Gratitude/Appreciation	.58	.326	.695	.154	.847	.037	.841	.04

df = 2; critical value = 5.991 | *df* = 1; critical value = 3.84146; $p < 0.05$

3.3. Content of Semantic Formulas

The differences between the ANSs and the IPSs were identifiable not only at the level of the frequency of semantic formulas, but also at the content level of semantic formulas. Excuses were the most common semantic formula used to refuse a speech act (the majority of refusals by all groups in all situations contained excuses).

Although both Iranian and English NSs used excuses in their refusals, the degree of the specificity in their excuses differed. The American excuses were less specific than the Iranian excuses, and this appears to have transferred into English spoken by the Iranians. For example, in the situation refusing the boss's invitation to a party (# 12), one American said: *We already have a prior engagement*. Another responded: *We will be out of town that day*. Others said: *I have other things to do* or *We already booked on that day*. Thus, they gave vague excuses regardless of the refuser's status.

Compared with the Americans, the Iranian excuses were more specific. The IPSs used expressions like *need to take my wife to dentist*, *I have to attend my bothers' weddings*, or *We arranged to see my grandmothers that day*, but used unspecific excuses when they refused an individual of lower or equal status. This probably indicated that social status and social distance played a role in the degree of specificity of the Iranian groups' excuses.

Concerning the other two semantic formulas (i.e., statement of principle and statement of philosophy) which distinguished the IPSs and the IELs from the ANSs in terms of formality, the findings were in line with those of Beebe at

al. (1990, as cited in Wannaruk, 2008). Like their study, the Iranian participants sounded more formal than the American counterparts because of their more frequent use of statement of principle and statement of philosophy, which are formal by nature. Specifically speaking, they used the statement of philosophy strategy in situations in which they had to turn down an offer of payment for the broken cell phone (# 6), whereas the American participants rarely made statement of philosophy in such refusals. A typical statement of philosophy by an IPS was translated as: *Things with shapes eventually break*, or *Things break any way*, or *This kind of things happens*. Comparing the IELs with other two native groups, it was found they were more like the Iranian speakers and mostly L1-based.

Another difference in the content of the semantic formulas was the degree of directness. It is interesting to find the preference of the American participants for direct responses in comparison with the IPSs and the IELs. In the situation where one had to refuse the employee's request for a raise in salary, a majority of the American participants said: *No, I can't do this month*, *Can't do it right away*, or *That's impossible*, whereas the Iranian speakers declined the request by responding: *The business was not doing well* and *we don't have the budget to support our charges*. The excuses of the English learner groups were similar to those of the IPSs in the content of the semantic formulas. Therefore, in comparing with the ANSs, the IELs' attitudes toward the refusing situations were L1-based.

4. Discussion

The results from a comprehensive analysis of the refusal strategies revealed similarities as well as differences in refusal strategy use among the three groups of the current study. Concerning the similarities, it became apparent that the Americans and the Iranians employed the same range of semantic formulas and followed a similar trend in using direct and indirect refusal strategies. Both the Iranians and the Americans preferred to choose indirect refusal speech acts, rather than direct refusal speech acts. Both speech communities tried to obey the cooperative principle and the politeness principle in order to avoid misunderstanding and even offenses that would have occurred.

However, there were differences between the American and Iranian refusal strategies, which existed in the frequency and content of the semantic formulas. The results revealed that the IPSs and the IELs differed from the English speakers in terms of the directness level of the refusals they used. The Americans were more direct than the Iranians. This finding is in line with the many studies done within the context of Asia, including Iran (e.g., Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Keshavarz et al., 2006; Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016). According to Triandis (1995), collectivist cultures such as that of Iran prefer a more implicit way of communication that puts the weight of correct interpretation on the hearer.

The Iranian culture, in particular, has concepts such as *taorof* (which is the Iranian ritualistic code of politeness; Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016) and *rudarbaayesti* (defined as a sense of shame that results in limiting one's wants and need; Sahragard, 2003) that dictates a strong sense of respect toward acquaintances, especially the ones with a higher power, social class, and age. This explains the founding here regarding the almost nonexistent direct refusals in situations of +power and -distance from the IPSs and the IELs. Because the abovementioned concepts do not necessarily hold true for out-members in the Iranian culture, the Persian-native groups had more incidents of the direct refusals (i.e., the situations of +power and +distance) than the Americans. Also, the Iranians used addressing terms which are adjuncts to the refusal in refusing higher status persons' requests, suggestions, invitations, or offers like *sir,* which again shows their attention +power dynamics.

As a whole, the influence of social distance on refusal speech acts plays a more important role than that of social power in American English. The selection of refusal speech acts based on social distance is quite different. The more distant the social distance, the more indirect the refusal speech acts. The Americans possibly used more assistant speech acts and rhetorical utterances to weaken the frankness of refusals, especially toward strangers with higher status.

When it comes to the use of strategy, the excuse/reason/explanation strategy was frequently used in all the 12 eliciting acts. The IPSs and the IELs employed this strategy more than the ANSs. Also, the IPSs and the IELs were much more specific, which was also observed by Chan (2008) who believed this might cause problems because specific excuses trigger a further conversation regarding the details of the excuse and lead to the speaker's exposure. It is speculated that the Iranians give a variety of reasons in order not to disappoint their acquaintances.

With regard to the regret strategy, which is an indirect refusal strategy, although no statistically significant differences were found in the pair comparisons, the ANSs used this strategy more frequently than did the IPSs in all the

situations of invitations and requests, especially for those interlocutors who were socially distant (i.e., stranger), regardless of their social power, whereas the Iranians cared more for their acquaintances and used the regret strategy more for making the interlocutors' loss of face. They were very careful when they refused their acquaintances. On the other hand, both native groups used this strategy to high-, lower-, and equal-status persons when refusing their invitations or requests. Obviously, both NSs did not show sensitivity to social power when apologizing to turn down their interlocutors' requests or invitations.

On the other hand, similar to Chan's (2008) study, the IELs, following their L2 norms, used the regret strategy more than did the IPSs and the ANSs. They apologized when refusing an invitation or request by a person of higher, lower, and equal status. This can be justified that L2 learners, sometimes, experience communication breakdown due to overgeneralizing stereotypes of the L2 culture. That is, they tend to overuse the regret indirect strategy considered to be politer. The possible reason might be the fact L2 learners are not taught pragmatic knowledge adequately in order to perform appropriately in all situations.

Concerning the use of the gratitude/appreciation strategy, which is adjunct to the refusal strategy, Nelson, Al Batal, and El-Bakary (2002) found that the English participants in their study used this strategy much frequently than did the Arabic participants in refusing invitations, offers, and suggestions. Likewise, though no statistically significant differences were found, the present study revealed that the ANSs used the gratitude/appreciation strategy more frequently than the Iranians in refusing invitations, offers, and suggestions by high- or equal-status persons, especially to those who were not socially distant (i.e., acquaintance).

Surprisingly, the IELs fell between the other two groups. In line with Kwon's study (2004), they diverged from the L1 norms expressing the gratitude/appreciation strategy by saying *thank you* much more frequently than did the IPSs and less than the ANSs. It can be inferred that L2 learners are more comfortable thanking verbally when speaking English and try to be politer in an L2. Also, this phenomenon of being politer in an L2 was found in Bou Franch's study (1998) in which the Spanish learners in the U.K. were found to be often considered impolite due to their infrequent use of *sorry* and *please*. However, when they go back to Spain, they are considered too polite or unnaturally polite because they say *sorry* or *please* in Spanish too frequently.

Furthermore, the Americans and the Iranians were different in their tones of speaking. Certain tones were found only in the IPSs, whereas they were absent in the ANSs. For example, in refusing a student's suggestion to include more conversations and less grammar in language class (question # 4), the IPSs explicitly emphasized their position as a teacher and, sometimes, sounded critical toward the students. Then, they elaborated more to emphasize the importance of grammar, whereas the ANSs rarely cited their status as teachers and referred to the curriculum of the school as rationales for their refusals.

The Iranians' use of criticizing tone toward the student may be due to the fact that they value social hierarchy (teachers vs. students). The Iranians emphasize this: Honor the teacher and revere his teachings. Teaching in the university is a prestigious job in Iran and, as the ones who sacrifice themselves for students in any level of teaching, teachers are regarded respectful. Hence, the Persian culture stresses great respect for them. It is the teacher's responsibility to criticize students' misbehavior. Also, teachers tend to use relatively more direct refusal speech acts to decline students in such situations, whereas students probably dare not choose the direct refusal speech acts to refuse their teachers.

As the final note, it should be mentioned that the analysis of the data revealed that the stimulus type restricts the occurrence of certain semantic formulas. For example, the gratitude/appreciation strategy (e.g., *thank you*) was not employed in refusing requests, and off the hook strategy only occurred in the situation where one had to refuse a stranger classmate's offer to pay for the broken cell phone. Likewise, the data showed that the self-defense and criticism formulas were used only in situations where the teacher had to refuse his or her student's suggestions to have a conversation class.

Therefore, it could be argued that the selection of semantic formulas depends on not only the initiating act of refusals (i.e., requests, invitations, suggestions, and offers), but also the refuser's power and social distance. For example, the direct no strategy never occurred when refusing the boss's suggestion to write little reminders or the student's suggestion to have a conversation class, whereas both refusers were socially distant (i.e., stranger to the interlocutor's suggestion). These findings that stimulus types eliciting a refusal and the refuser's power and social distance have an

impact on the selection of refusal strategies signify the importance of introducing these important elements in L2 pragmatic instruction.

5. Conclusion

These findings are significant for two reasons: First, they provide clear evidence that even L2 learners with an advanced level of linguistic proficiency rely on their L1 norms of speech, thus risking committing pragmatic failure. Therefore, it is not necessarily true that linguistic proficiency in an L2 guarantees linguistic appropriateness in the same language. These findings support similar claims made by researchers such as Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) and Takahashi and Beebe (1987) who assert that even the speech acts of L2 learners with a fairy advanced level of proficiency still contain nonnative pragmatic features arising from pragmatic transfer. Interestingly, studies like Tabatabaei (2020) and Keshavarz et al. (2006) found that the higher-level students actually showed a greater level of negative L1 transfer than those who were still in the beginning phases of L2 learning. It seems that because L2 learners with a larger repertoire of L2 skills have the ability to easily express themselves but, at the same time, their development is not accompanied by further growth in terms of pragmatics. They tend to more easily reveal their underdeveloped knowledge of speech acts through their otherwise fluent communicative skills.

Second, the findings regarding the selection in the semantic formulas showed that the refusal responses given by the L2 group appeared to reflect the characteristics of the Iranians' communication styles. The findings are significant from a cross-cultural point of view because they provide strong indications that whereas the act of refusal is universal, ways of performing it are, in most cases, cultural-specific (Al-Eryani, 2007; Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Chang, 2008; Honglin, 2007; Keshavarz, Eslami-Rasekh, & Ghahraman, 2006; Kwon, 2004; Wannaruk, 2008).

References

Al-Eryani, A. A. (2007). Refusal strategies by Yemeni EFL learners. *Asian EFL Journal, 9*(2), 19-34.

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

Bakeman, R., & Robinson, B. F. (1994). *Understanding log-linear analysis with ILOG: An interactive approach*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Beebe, L., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals. In R. C. Scarcella, E. Andersen, & S. D. Krashen (Eds.), *Developing communicative competence in a second language* (pp. 55-73). New York: Newbury House.

Bou Franch, P. (1998). On pragmatic transfer. *Studies in English Language and Linguistics, 3*, 5-20.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* Cambridge University Press.

Chang, Y. F. (2008). How to say no: An analysis of cross-cultural difference and pragmatic transfer. *Language Sciences, 31*(4), 477-493.

Eisenstein, M., & Bodman, J. (1986). "I very much appreciate": Expression of gratitude by native and nonnative speakers of American English. *Applied Linguistics, 7*(2), 167-185.

Farashaiyan, A., & Muthusamy, P. (2017). An investigation of Iranian learners' utilization of politeness strategies and power relations in refusal speech act across different communicative situations. *Canadian Center of Science and Education*, *13*(1), 1-9.

Gao, G., & Ting-Toomy, S. (1998). Communicating effectively with the Chinese. *Journal of Asian Culture, 12*, 100-134

Honglin, L. (2007). A comparative study of refusal speech acts in Chinese and American English. *Canadian Social Science, 3*(4), 64-67.

Kasper, G. (1992). Pragmatic transfer. *Second Language Research, 8*(3), 203-231.

Keshavarz, M. H., Eslami-Rasekh, Z., & Ghahraman, V. (2006). Pragmatic transfer and Iranian EFL refusals: A cross-cultural perspective of Persian and English. In K. Bardovi-Harlig, J. Felix-Brasdefer, & A. S. Omar (Eds.), *Pragmatics language learning* (Vol. 11; pp. 359- 402). U.S.: University of Hawaii Press.

Kwon, J. (2004). Expressing refusals in Korean and American English. *Multilingual, 23*, 339- 364.

Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.

Liao, C., & Bresnahan, M. I. (1996). A contrastive pragmatic study on American English and Mandarin refusal strategies. *Language Sciences, 18*, 703-727.

Nelson, G. L., Al-Batal, M., & El-Bakary, W. (2002). Directness vs. indirectness: Egyptian Arabic and U.S. English communication style. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 26*, 39-57.

Sahragard, R. (2003). *A cultural scripts analysis of a politeness features in Persian*. Paper presented at 8th Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics, Japan.

Sahragard, R., & Javanmardi, F. (2011). English speech act realization of refusals among Iranian EFL learners. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, *7*(2), 181-198.

Sharifian, F., & Jamarani, M. (2011). Cultural schemas in intercultural communication: A study of the Persian cultural schema of sharmandegi "being ashamed." *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *8*(2), 227-251.

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

Tabatabaei, S. (2020). Language proficiency and appropriateness of using refusal speech acts by Iranian EFL learners. *Applied Linguistics Research Journal*, *4*(1), 35-45.

Takahashi, S., & Beebe, L. (1987). The development of pragmatic competence by Japanese learners of English. *JALT Journal, 8*, 131-155.

Tamimi Sa'd, S. H., & Gholami, J. (2017). Teaching Iranian elementary e-learners to say no politely: An interlanguage pragmatic study. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, *21*(1), 1-24. Retrieved January 7, 2019 from the World Wide Web: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318419291_Teaching_Iranian_Elementary_EFL_Learners_to_Say_'No'_Politely_An_Interlanguage_Pragmatic_Study/link/597f45ceaca272d568188307/download

Tanck, S. (2002). *Speech act sets of refusal and complaint: A comparison of native and nonnative English speakers' production*. Paper presented at TESL 523 Second Language Acquisition, American University, Washington, D.C.

Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics, 4*(2), 91-109.

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

© 2021 by the authors. Licensee Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0 license). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).