The Role of Cultural Background in the Use of Refusal Strategies by L2 Learners

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Abstract

This study intends to investigate the role of culture in the acquisition of pragmatic competence by EFL learners. It investigated the refusal of requests and offers used by Bahraini and Indian learners of English compared to those employed by native speakers of English. It also explored the similarities and differences between refusal strategies used by Bahraini and Indian L2 learners on the one hand and native speakers of English on the other. The participants included 20 Bahraini and 20 Indian learners of English (ILE) and 12 British and American native speakers of English (NE). Two instruments were used to collect the data: a discourse completion test (DCT) and open-ended Role Plays. The data were classified using widely used refusal strategies classifications and were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings indicated that there were differences between the two EFL groups and the NE control group in the frequency and number of pragmatic strategies.

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1. Introduction

People communicate with each other for many reasons, including maintaining relationships and fulfilling needs. One of the most complex speech acts is the refusal of requests. It requires speakers to have adequate pragmatic competence in a language that enables an interlocutor to mitigate the use of direct strategies to prevent any misunderstanding or offensive interaction (Morkus, 2009). Rubin (1983) emphasized the role of a wide variety of cultural values in the realization of different speech acts. Therefore, the cross-cultural factor is likely to have a strong influence on how an individual selects refusal strategies. Thus, this study which focuses on the functions of refusal strategies is important for its cultural and linguistic value, and furthermore, it investigates the use of refusal strategies using a foreign/ second language in order to find out how the pragmatic component is learned and utilized. The current study is, however, limited to refusals to offers and requests; other types of refusal, such as refusal of suggestions or invitations, were not included as they are considered a sub-type of the "offers" category (Morkus 2009). This study focuses on the cultural factor and its effects on the choice of refusal strategies used by each group. The study was conducted specifically to investigate the similarities and differences in the refusal strategies used by speakers of Bahraini English and Indian English as opposed to those used by native speakers of English. A survey of the research conducted indicates that the topic has not been researched in the Bahraini context. Therefore, the study aims to answer the research questions to fill in this gap in studies. The study is an attempt to answer the following questions:

1) What are the refusal strategies used by Bahraini and Indian L2 learners?

2) What are the similarities and differences in refusal strategies used by the two EFL learners - Bahraini and Indian?

3) What are the similarities and differences between refusal strategies used by the EFL learners on the one hand and native speakers of English on the other?

2. Theoretical Framework

Refusal can be defined as a response or reaction to a request, invitation, offer, or suggestion. (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). Searle (1977) determined that refusal is a commissive act that commits the interlocutor to stop or reject performing an action. Ellis (2008) gave a less evaluative definition stating that refusal "occurs in the form of responses to a variety of illocutionary acts such as invitation, offers, requests, and suggestions" (p. 186). Face, thus, has a crucial role in determining the continuation of an interactional act. While the preferred response saves face, the unpreferred or undesirable response, e.g., refusal, can damage the interlocutor's face (Heritage, 1984). Requests and offers can thus be simultaneous commissive, and directive speech acts, rendering both the speaker's and hearer's roles equally important. For this reason, this research investigates both requests and offers in the act of refusal, especially as refusals normally threaten face and are influenced by social and cultural norms and values.

Refusal is hypothesized to be culturally sensitive and, hence, may affect cultural communication. Therefore, it is plausible to investigate the phenomenon with reference to EFL learners of different cultural backgrounds. Refusals are not always direct negative FTAs as they can involve indirect strategies in an attempt to maintain interpersonal relations. Since cultural factors are embedded in refusal strategies, EFL learners may face a problem known as cultural awareness insufficiency. Thus, this study is expected to have a significant contribution to our knowledge of culture and learning foreign languages.

A number of theoretical frameworks are used in the analysis of speech acts. This study employed Brown, Levinson's politeness framework (1987), Culpeper's suggested list of positive and negative impoliteness (1996), and a modified version of Beebe et al.'s (1990) patterns of refusal classifications (direct, indirect, and adjunct refusals) and speech act coding schemes (1990). These frameworks are still deemed valid and significant as they are used and referenced in the latest studies, such as those by Tavakoli and Shirinbakhsh (2014), Kreishan (2018), Amirrudin (2016), Tuncer (2016), Saad et al. (2016), Han (2016), Chunli

(2016), Huwari (2015), Jiang (2015), Moaveni (2014), Ghazanfari (2013), Adolrezapour (2012), and Hashemian (2012).

A number of studies have been conducted on this topic. Al- Okla (2018) investigated the refusal strategies used by people in the United Arab Emirates when offered different promotions. Naturalistic data was collected from oral interactions of 137 residents in Dubai, including Arab, Indian, Filipino, and other ethnicities. The results revealed that the participants preferred to refuse the promotions non-verbally by avoiding, nodding, and using hand gestures. Al- Okla attributed this to two factors: cultural background, which seemed to indicate that offers of promotion are seen as an imposition on the participants' privacy, and the level of English proficiency. Similar findings were reported by Azwan (2018) in his study of refusal strategies by the Ambonese people of Indonesia in refusing requests. His study also showed that the participants combined two or three strategies in refusing requests.

Al-Mahrooqi and Al-Aghbari (2016) investigated the refusal speech acts among Omani EFL college students (p.1). Their study was conducted with 41 Omani EFL learners using only a DCT consisting of 12 scenarios of request, suggestion, invitation, and offer situations. The results revealed that inappropriacy and inaccuracy responses could be attributed to the effect of native culture and language; the responses were a mere translation of the refusal utterances used in Omani Arabic.

Al-Shboul and Huwari (2016) investigated the similarities and differences in the use of refusal strategies in Jordanian Arabic and American English. The findings show that both groups preferred to use indirect strategies and adjuncts, while the least favorable method was the direct strategy. However, Jordanians tended to use indirect strategies more than Americans, who preferred direct strategies. In an earlier study, Al-Shboul et al. (2012) investigated the similarities and differences in the use of refusal strategies by Jordanian and Malay EFL learners. The findings revealed that the groups used some similar strategies, including statements of reason, explanation, and excuse. However, Malay participants used fewer direct strategies and expressed Gratitude more frequently than Jordanians.

Morkus (2009) researched refusal strategies among Egyptian native speakers of Arabic and American native speakers of English. He found that the communication style of Egyptians is heavily dependent on excuses, especially family-related ones, since family plays an important role in Arab culture. Al-In contrast to this, Eryani (2007) investigated refusal strategies among Yemeni EFL learners and compared them with those of American native speakers of English. Yemeni speakers were reluctant and less direct in refusing, in contrast to the American participants, who tended to be blunt. Similar conclusions were drawn from Al Shalawi's study (1997), which examined refusal strategies used by Saudi and American males. He discovered a cultural influence on communication styles, reflected in the selection of refusal strategies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 40 students enrolled at the University of Bahrain. Twenty of them were Bahrainis whose first language was Arabic, and 20 Indians whose first language was one of the Indian spoken languages. All the participants had been learning English for at least ten years. All were first-year students in the College of IT and Engineering, aged 18 to 21, with 10 males and 10 females in each group. English is a second language in both Bahrain and India. It is the language of business and education in most programs at universities in the two countries. A control group of 12 native speakers of English, aged 18 to 40 and with at least a Master's degree in the English language were recruited from the university's English Department and English Language Centre.

3.2. Instruments

The data was collected using DCT and Role Plays. The open-ended DCT is a speech act with no rejoinders. It consists of 36 refusal situations, 18 for refusing requests and 18 for refusing offers. A description of each situation was provided, followed by a blank in which participants wrote their refusal responses. In addition, the open-ended Role Plays were used to simulate real-life interactions at the level of discourse (Tran, 2006). An audio recording was

used instead of a camera not only to prevent any sensitivity and tension on the part of the participants but also because facial and body expressions were not considered in this study. To conclude, the use of multiple instrumentations for data collection is reliable in removing bias. Both instruments helped to avoid any false influence and in examining refusals in spoken and written language.

3.3. Procedure

3.3.1. Data Collection

A number of steps were taken to carry out the present study. Data collection took place at three locations: the College of IT, the College of Engineering for the students, and the English Language Centre (ELC) for the native speakers of English. DCT data was collected from the Bahraini learners of English (BLEs) and Indian learners of English (ILEs) over two weeks, within four 40-minute sessions, and from the native speakers of English (NEs) over a single week. A month was spent recording the Role Plays scenarios. The researchers did not participate in the scenarios so as not to influence the natural response of any interaction. A consent form describing the research and its procedure and stating that participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time was signed by each participant. The instructions were also explained orally. The participants were then asked to respond to the DCT situations as naturally as possible, and 1,656 tokens were collected overall. In acting out all nine situations in the Role Plays, a total of 198 exchanges of refusal responses were recorded. The pairings in the Role Plays are detailed in Section 3.2. The acts were recorded with an

iPhone 7 audio recording app called Voice Memos, transcribed by Rev.com service.

3.3.2. Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the data. For quantitative analysis, the frequency percentage of the refusal strategies, the rank, and the length of semantic formulae used were calculated. For quantitative analysis, Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework as well as Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness theory, and Beebe et al.'s (1990) coding scheme were used. The frequency and number of refusal semantic formulae used in the DCT and Role Play by Bahraini and Indian L2 learners and native speakers in each refusal response were calculated, analyzed, and described. The data of the native speakers of English were compared with those of both Bahraini and Indian L2 learners.

4. Results

Refusal strategies varied among groups in terms of frequency and number. Frequency and percentage are calculated to present the differences and similarities in the performance of each group.

4.1. Holistic View

The 2 data collection techniques used yielded a substantial number of tokens and types of strategies for each group, as shown in Table 1. However, the number of tokens of strategies employed varies among groups; each of the EFL learner groups employed more than twice (1463 for BLEs and 1552 for ILEs) the number of tokens of strategies used by native speakers (655 instances).

Table 1
Number of Tokens (Instances) of Strategies for Each Group

	BLEs	ILEs	NEs
DCT	1315	1365	452
Role Play	148	187	203
TOTAL	1463	1552	655

BLE = Bahraini Learners of English ILE = Indian Learners of English NE = Native English speakers

The overall number of tokens of Indirect refusals is remarkably lower than Indirect Refusals, as seen in Table 2 below. The same

overall pattern is also true of each group; however, the Indian EFL learners (ILEs) showed a higher percentage of Direct Refusal

(approximately a quarter of the tokens (24.6%)) in contrast to a slightly less than one-fifth (close to 20%) of the total number of tokens for the

Bahraini EFL learners and the native speakers' group.

Table 2
Number and Percentage of Tokens (Instances) of Types of Strategies

	BLEs		ILEs		NEs	
Indirect Strategies	1191	81.41	1170	75.39	526	80.31
Direct Strategies	272	18.59	382	24.61	129	19.69
Total	1463	100	1552	100	655	100

4.2. Detailed Analysis of the Use of Strategies

In the following sections, an overview of the instances of strategies for each strategy type (Direct Refusals, Indirect Refusals, and Adjuncts) is presented in terms of percentages for each group.

4.2.1. Direct Refusals

The summary statistics in Table 3 include the cumulative number of instances and their percentages for the three broad types of Direct Refusals: Direct No, Performative Refusal, and Negative Ability. The percentages were

calculated out of the total instances of strategies for each group and not out of the total instances for the whole sample of subjects. As seen, the instances of Negative Ability seem to be similarly used by the two groups indicating a clear pattern that they form approximately one-tenth of the instances of this strategy; however, the actual number of tokens varies considerably. A similar pattern of group similarity is also clear in the use of Performative Refusals, which are the least used by each of the three groups. In contrast to these two strategies, the use of Direct No seems to slightly distinguish ILEs (10.05%) from BLEs (7.03%) and NEs (8.39%).

Table 3
The Number of Percentages of Tokens (Instances) of Direct Refusal Strategies

	BLEs		ILEs		NEs	
Type of Strategy	Tokens	%	Tokens	%	Tokens	%
Negative Ability	151	10.30	156	10.05	67	10.22
Direct No	103	7.03	156	10.05	55	8.39
Performative Refusals	18	1.22	70	4.51	7	1.06

Examples of expressions of Direct No:

1. *No, I can't, I have to go out with my family.* (DCT, BLEs, F1)

2. *No, I can't give my laptop to you since you and I have an assignment.* (RP, ILEs, M6)

3. *No, no, no, don't worry it is not a problem; accidents happen at work.* (RP, NEs, M7)

These examples and all the tokens yielded indicate that speakers rarely use one strategy in response to offers and requests. In example 1 above, the first part is direct "No" followed by Negative Ability "I can't" and then followed by an expression of Indirect Refusal giving a

reason/impeding event" I have to go out with my friend". The same applies to example 2.

Examples of Performative Refusals:

In this strategy, a refusal contains a direct verb of refusal, e.g., *I decline, I refuse,* rather than the refusal word *No.*

4. *I have to decline your offer since I can't leave my hometown.* (RP, BLEs, M1)

5. *I really have to decline that and I apologize.* (RP, NEs, F3)

6. *I am really busy. I have to decline.* (RP, ILEs, F2)

These examples also illustrate the same tendency of using more than one strategy in response to offers and requests; for instance, example 1 is a combination of an expression of Direct Refusal "I have to decline your offer" followed by an expression of Indirect Refusal "since I can't leave my home". However, the examples from both EFL learner groups start with Direct Refusals followed by an explanation, whereas the example by native speakers is the opposite.

Performative Refusals are the least used by all the groups; however, the data demonstrate that there are more instances of the use of this strategy by ILEs (4.51) in contrast to 1.22% by BLEs and 1.06 by NEs. This result is consistent with the general tendency of ILEs to be more direct in refusing in the case of optional offers than the other two groups.

Examples of Negative Ability expressions:

7. *I can't because I am desperately needing rest.* (DCT, BLEs, M9)

8. *I'll not be able to work for extra hours as I have to go home early. I'm sorry Boss.* (DCT, ILEs, F11)

9. *I am sorry, but I won't be able to do that, I need them for revision.* (RP, NEs, F4)

Example 9 illustrates the same tendency of native speakers to either give a reason or express feelings of apology and then directly express refusal as opposed to EFL learners' examples which express a direct response to requests and offers and then give reasons or express sorrow.

The overall picture of the percentages and general tendencies discussed above is slightly different when each of the Direct Refusal strategies is considered in relation to refusals of requests and offers used in DCT. Table 4 gives detailed numbers and percentages of each strategy for requests and offers.

Table 4
Direct Refusal Responses to Requests and Offers

	Responses to Requests						Responses to Offers					
	BLEs		ILEs		NEs		BLEs		ILEs		NEs	
	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
Negative Ability	15.40	103	13.30	88	15.90	35	4.50	29	3.70	26	3.90	9
Direct No	4.20	28	6.80	45	4.10	9	8.10	52	14.20	100	15.50	36
Performative Refusals	0.30	2	2.10	14	1.40	3	1.70	11	7.90	56	0.90	2

Negative Ability ranks the highest in responses to requests, whereas it is one of the least used in responses to offers for the three groups. In contrast, Direct No forms 15.5 of the responses of NEs and 14.2% of the responses of these groups to offers compared to only 4.20% by ILEs, indicating a possible cultural effect. Performative Refusals are the least used by the three groups for both requests and offers.

4.2.2. Indirect Refusals

Table 5 gives a summary of the cumulative use of 14 Indirect Refusals yielded by both DCT and Role Play tasks. As clear from the data in

Table 5, a wide range of Indirect Refusal expressions were employed by the samples of subjects included in the study, including Statement of Impeding Events, Excuses, Reasons, and Explanations, Statement of Alternative, Avoidance, Putting the Blame on a Third Party, General Principle and Common Saying, Negative Consequences to Requester/ Offerer, Request for Information and/or Clarification, Request for consideration and/or Understanding, Counter Factual Conditionals for Acceptance, Wish, Reprimand or/and Criticism, Let Interlocutor Off the Hook, It's My Treat, and Indicate Unwillingness.

Table 5
The Number and Percentage of Tokens (Instances) of Indirect Refusals

Strategies	BLEs		ILEs		NEs	
	%	Tokens	%	Tokens	%	Tokens
Let off the Hook	2.39	35	4.90	76	6.11	40
It is my Treat	0.89	13	0.45	7	0.15	1
Indicate Unwilling-ness	3.08	45	0.58	9	1.22	8
Statement of Impeding Events	27.61	404	24.03	373	18.02	118
Counter-Factual Conditionals	0.27	4	0.26	4	0.15	1
General Principle	0.96	14	0.32	5	0.92	6
Alternative	8.82	129	9.73	151	9.92	65
Avoidance	4.31	63	3.29	51	7.18	47
Putting the Blame on a Third Party	1.03	15	2.06	32	1.68	11
Request for Information/Clarification	0.55	8	0.19	3	0.31	2
Request for Consideration or Understanding	0.00	0	0.06	1	0.46	3
Negative Consequences to Requester	0.62	9	0.39	6	1.07	7
Wish	0.07	1	0.32	5	0.61	4
Chiding/Criticism	2.19	32	1.10	17	0.76	5
Statement of Regret/ Apology	14.97	219	13.34	207	12.52	82
Invoking the Name of God	0.07	1	0.06	1	0.31	2
Statement of Positive Opinion, Feeling or Agreement	1.85	27	1.87	29	5.50	36
Gratitude/ Appreciation	10.59	155	9.92	154	12.67	83
Statement of Empathy/ Concern	0.68	10	0.26	4	0.46	3
Getting Interlocutor's Attention	0.48	7	2.26	35	0.31	2

Overall, Indirect Refusal expressions form a remarkably higher percentage in both DCT and Role Play data than Direct refusals. This general pattern is consistent with previous studies (Al Issa, 1998; Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2016; Amirrudin & Salleh, 2016; Çiftçi, 2016; Izadi & Zilaie, 2015; Jasim, 2017; Morkus, 2009; Nelson et al., 2002). These strategies were employed the most by BLEs in the DCT (54.3%, 715 instances), while in the Role Plays NEs have the highest percentage (53%, 108 instances). The results show that approximately one-third of the responses for each group belong to the Statement of Impeding Events, Alternative, and Avoidance; 40.7 for BLEs, 38.66% for ILEs, and 35.12% for NEs. These three are at the top in the ranking of Indirect Refusals for each of the three groups. However, Native speakers used slightly more expressions of Avoidance (7.18%) than BLEs (4.31%) and ILEs (4.9%).

The most used strategy is Statement of Impeding Events, Excuses, Reasons, and Explanations, forming slightly more than a quarter of the responses of BLEs (27.6), a similar percentage for ILEs (24.03%), and 18.2% of the responses by native speakers. This indicates that although this strategy is the most used by the three groups, the 2 EFL learner groups used it more than native speakers. Another observation is that BLEs and ILEs gave reasons related to family, while most of NEs' reasons were about their personal life. This observation is consistent with Rezvani et al. (2017), Montero (2015) as well as Al-Ghamdi and Alqarni (2019), and Al Shalawi (1997), who found that Saudis gave more family-related reasons in comparison to Americans who preferred to give reasons about their personal life. They argued that Saudis' refusals manifest collectivistic culture, while individualistic culture is clearly revealed in American refusals. However, it contradicts Umale (2011), who found that the British used this strategy more frequently than Omanis.

This overall picture varies when the percentages of responses to requests in contrast to responses to offers are scrutinized, as shown

in Table 6. The table lists the strategies that form 5% and above of the responses for one or more groups. The others are not included because they either occur with a low percentage or because they do not seem to differentiate between the groups. Table 6 demonstrates that the Statement of Impeding Events is the most used for refusing requests and offers by the three groups; however, BLEs used it the most (30.7%), albeit NEs used it less than the EFL groups. Avoidance, on the other hand, was used more in refusing requests than offers for the three groups. Interestingly, NEs and ILEs gave alternatives to requests more than BLEs, while BLEs provided slightly more Alternatives to offers than ILEs and NEs.

Table 6
The Number and Percentage of Tokens (Instances) of Indirect Responses to Requests and Offers

	Responses to requests						Responses to Offers					
	BLEs		ILEs		NEs		BLEs		ILEs		NEs	
	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
Statement of Impeding Events	30.70	206	28.90	191	22.30	49	24.40	157	19.10	135	11.20	26
Alternative	7.00	47	9.80	65	11.80	26	12.30	79	11.60	82	10.80	25
Avoidance	7.20	48	5.90	39	9.50	21	1.60	10	0.10	1	2.60	6
Indicate Unwillingness	1.90	13	0.30	2	1.40	3	5.00	32	0.60	4	0.90	2
Let off the Hook	0.60	4	1.40	9	2.30	5	4.00	26	8.40	59	11.60	27

The following examples from the data illustrate the use of Giving Reasons/Impeding Events.

10. *No, it's for adult, you can't use it.* (DCT, BLEs, M13)

11. *So sorry, I might not have enough time to pass your message.* (DCT, ILEs, F8)

12. *I can't, as you know Mom, I have an exam tomorrow.* (DCT, BLEs, F7)

13. *I have some other plans for evening.* (RP, ILEs, F3)

14. *No, I can't, I have other work to do.* (RP, BLEs, F1)

These examples give another evidence that rarely is one strategy used. In example 14, the speaker starts with a Direct No, followed by Negative Ability, and then followed by giving a reason. This is similar to the examples below.

Statement of Alternative:

15. *I can't. I can barely turn them on. You should ask someone else.* (RP, ILEs, F4)

Avoidance:

16. *Oh! Sorry, I don't know how to copy.* (DCT, BLEs, M3)

17. *Um…I'm sorry, I… (hesitant-see if she catches on) Why wouldn't you?* (DCT, NEs, M2)

Example (13) seems to be an exception among a few expressions indicating the use of one strategy as shown in the following examples of Alternative and Avoidance.

Alternative:

18. *You'll have to find someone else.* (RP, NEs, F8)

Avoidance:

19: *Relocating to York?* (RP, ILEs, F1)

4.2.3. Adjuncts to Refusals

Adjuncts were the second most used strategies in this study. Adjuncts were used by BLEs and NEs more frequently than ILEs. This observation can be related to the sensitivity of

refusal for BLEs and NEs. Most of the participants from these groups verbally shared their inability or the difficulty in refusing requests and offers. Some of NEs participants wrote that "Would never say no if it's a real request". In Bahraini culture, people are encouraged to accept offers or respond to requests for help. Thus, the increased frequency of adjuncts between Bahrainis could be attributed to their tendency to maintain social relations. In the data yielded by DCT, the instances of adjuncts strategies are 32.7% for NEs' (148 instances), followed by BLEs (28%, 375 instances), while it is 381 instances (27.9%) for ILEs. In the Role Plays, it was used most by NEs (30%, 60 instances) and BLEs (30%, 44 instances), while it forms 26% (48 instances) for ILEs'. The combined use of these strategies (Table 5).

Table 7

The Number and Percentage of Instances of Adjuncts to Refusals

Strategies	BLEs		ILEs		NEs	
	%	No	%	No	%	No
Statement of Regret/ Apology	14.97	219	13.34	207	12.52	82
Invoking the Name of God	0.07	1	0.06	1	0.31	2
Statement of Positive Opinion, Feeling or Agreement	1.85	27	1.87	29	5.50	36
Gratitude/ Appreciation	10.59	155	9.92	154	12.67	83
Statement of Empathy/ Concern	0.68	10	0.26	4	0.46	3
Getting Interlocutor's Attention	0.48	7	2.26	35	0.31	2

The most employed strategies by the three groups are Statement of Regret/ Apology and Gratitude/ Appreciation. However, Statement of Regret/ Apology is most by BLEs (14.97%), followed in the ranking by ILEs (13.34%) and NEs (12.5%). In contrast, Gratitude/ Appreciation is used most by NEs (12.67) followed by the two EFL groups. The use of apology by native speakers is also well documented in relevant research. Morkus (2009) and Von Canon (2006) found that Americans frequently used Statement of Regret in their refusals. The following are samples of Adjuncts to refusal expressions from the two tasks. These percentages are also valid when the responses for requests and offers are compared. Table 8 shows that the most used strategy for refusing requests by the three groups is Statement of Regret/ Apology while Gratitude/ Appreciation is the most used by the three groups in response to offers. NEs have the highest percentage (31%) of the use of Gratitude/ Appreciation in response to offers.

Table 8

The Number and Percentage of Instances of Adjuncts to Refusals of Request and Offers

	BLEs		ILEs		NEs		BLEs		ILEs		NEs	
	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
Statement of Regret/ Apology	20.70	139	19.70	130	23.20	51	7.00	45	6.00	42	0.40	1
Invoking the Name of God	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.20	1	0.00	0	0.00	0
Statement of Positive Opinion, Feeling or Agreement	0.90	6	1.10	7	1.80	4	3.00	19	1.70	12	7.30	17
Gratitude/ Appreciation	0.10	1	0.00	0	0.00	0	22.80	147	21.40	151	31.00	72
Statement of Empathy/ Concern	0.60	4	0.20	1	0.50	1	0.90	6	0.40	3	0.00	0
Getting Interlocutor's Attention	0.90	6	4.40	29	0.00	0	0.20	1	0.90	6	0.90	2

Invoking the Name of God: 20. *I swear! I have enough money, I'm not a child anymore mommy.* (DCT, BLEs, F7)

Invoking the Name of God: 21. *You don't have to do that. Oh my God, it's just a statuette. Please, no. You can't.* (RP, ILEs, F7)

Statement of Regret and/or Apology: 22. *No. Sorry, I can't.* (RP, BLEs, F1)

Statement of Empathy and/or Concern: 23. *I understand, but I am sorry I can't.* (DCT, BLEs, F11)

Statement of Positive Opinion, Feeling or/and Agreement: 24. *You know, it would be a great opportunity to have the party but I have some extra work that I need to do, I apologize for this.* (RP, NEs, F2)

5. Discussion

The number of semantic formulae in refusing a request or offer differs in each instance, it can be one, two, three, or four semantic formulae in a single response (instance). However, all groups preferred to use two semantic formulae in their refusal responses which are comparable to the previous study, such as Azwan (2018), Jasim (2017), and Morkus (2009). In the DCT data, the maximum number of pragmatic strategies in refusing requests and offers was five, while in Role Plays the maximum number was six. As in Table 2, all groups preferred to use two pragmatic strategies in refusing requests and offers, which is consistent with the results of Azwan (2018), Jasim (2017), and Morkus (2009). Unlike Jasim (2017), who found that British English speakers favored the use of one pragmatic strategy, in this study, there was no occurrence of one pragmatic strategy in NEs refusals of requests, while 71% (59 instances) contained two and 25% (21 instances) were three pragmatic strategies. It is worth mentioning that all groups tended to favor the use of the Statement of Regret in the first position. BLEs tended to use two pragmatic strategies in refusing offers (157 instances, 76.6%) which were normally combined with adjuncts like Statements of Gratitude and of Regret; 14.6% (30 instances) of the responses consisted of three pragmatic strategies, and 8.3% (17 instances) consisted of a single pragmatic strategy. Both NEs and ILEs

tended to favor the use of Direct No in the first position, followed by the Statement of Impeding Events, while BLEs used Statements of Impeding Events more frequently in the first position.

All groups used three pragmatic strategies in Role Plays more than in the DCT: 28.6% (14 instances) for BLEs, 24% (12 instances) for NEs, and 30.8% (16 instances) for ILEs. There was no occurrence of any response containing only one pragmatic strategy for BLEs; it was 8% (4 instances) for NEs and 7.7% (4 instances) for ILEs. BLEs favored the use of the Statement of Impeding Events in the second position, and NEs and ILEs in the first. However, BLEs, in contradiction to the DCT result, favored the use of Direct No in the first position, while NEs mostly used statements of regret and ILEs preferred Negative Ability. Note that adjuncts are excluded from the calculation of the number of pragmatic strategies as they cannot be considered as a refusal if they stand alone.

In general, strategies such as "It's my Treat", "Wish", "Chiding", "Statement of Empathy/ Concern", and "Request for Consideration" were used only in refusal of requests. However, Invoking the Name of God, Gratitude, Request for Information, and Getting Interlocutor's Attention appeared only in refusal to offers. The strategy used the most by the three groups was the "Statement of Impeding Events" in both the DCT and Role Plays data. BLEs employed this strategy more frequently than the other groups, which indicates that BLEs tried to maintain relationships by providing reasons for their refusals. In addition, BLEs and ILEs utilized excuses related to family, while NEs used personal excuses.

The three groups used adjuncts in their refusals in the DCT and Role play. Statement of Regret and Apology were used more frequently by BLEs and ILEs than NEs in the DCT. Gratitude and appreciation, on the other hand, were used in refusal to offers, while it was not used in declining a request by NEs. This observation is related to the need to express their appreciation and save the face of the offerer. In the Role Plays, BLEs, and ILEs failed to adopt some refusal strategies that were used by NEs, such as Negative Consequences, Wish, Chiding, Statement of Empathy, and Concern. The

failure of adopting these strategies in Role Plays scenarios may refer to their lack of linguistic competence in the common semantic formulae used by native speakers. Furthermore, the expressions of declining a request/offer can be interpreted differently depending on pragmatic and contextual factors. Therefore, it is evident that the EFL learner groups, in contrast to the native speakers, use different strategies reflecting different cultural styles and choices. Generally, the findings of this study indicated that BLEs, ILEs, and NEs were different in their choices of refusal strategies indicating a clear trace of cultural background.

In summary, the study indicates similarities as well as differences between the two experimental groups as well as between the control group on the one hand and the experimental group on the other, indicating an obvious influence of cultural background on the pragmatic performance of L2 learners. Furthermore, in consistence with the results of the studies by Morkus (2009), Al Eryani (2007), and Al Issa (1998), the present study demonstrated that BLEs utilized indirect strategies more than ILEs and NEs in the DCT. However, Direct Refusals were used more frequently by ILEs and NEs than BLEs. In Role plays results, direct strategies were used more frequently by BLEs and ILEs than NEs who used indirect strategies companied with adjuncts. Based on frequency, some strategies were used only in refusal of requests and some in refusal to offers. However, the most used strategy by the three groups was the Statement of Impeding Events in the DCT and Role Plays data.

The same tendencies are reflected in the choice and number of semantic formulae. All groups preferred to use two semantic formulae in declining requests and offers, which is consistent with the results of Azwan (2018), Jasim (2017), and Morkus (2009). This is especially important to prevent the occurrence of any pragmatic failure, i.e., pragmatic incompetence, in communication. The results of the study are of potential value for both EFL learners and EFL classroom practitioners. It highlights the significance as well as the relevance of the role of culture in communication. This understanding of the socio-cultural background is vital in preventing any cultural clashes. This is essential because

"culture is a means of communication and that interaction among the members of a group, and the analysis of a culture reflects its people's lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, and ways of thinking" (Pishghadam et al., 2020). Knowledge of the culture of the target language is also emphasized by Mashudi et al. (2021), and this is supported by their study of Indonesian EFL learners.

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