3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature® The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies
Vol 30(2), June 2024 http://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2024-3002-14

Politeness Strategies in Declining Invitations: A Cross-Cultural Analysis between Iraqi Arabs and Kurds

NUR RASYIDAH MOHD NORDIN *
School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
nurrasyidah@uum.edu.my

MUHAMMAD HUSSAIN HAMZA
School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

ZALMIZY HUSSIN
School of Applied Psychology, Social Work and Policy
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

In this study, we investigate the politeness strategies used by Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds when declining invitations from superior interlocutor positions to understand their refusal strategy's similarities and differences. Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) were employed among 40 fourth-year undergraduate Iraqi students (Arabs and Kurds). Three contexts are included in the WDCT where contributors of higher social status declined invitations from interlocutors with lower social status concerning close, familiar, and distant societal distances. The study used descriptive analysis from WDCT, which drew upon Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification of semantic formulas, including Brown and Levinson's (1987) categories of politeness strategies. The main findings demonstrated that Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds) utilised positive and negative politeness strategies. The findings might be utilised to raise awareness across the two groups concerning the differences and similarities in realisations of the speech act of invitation refusals, as well as enhance solidarity between them. Further research can be carried out to examine other factors such as gender, education level, formality, age, and region, which might also impact invitation refusals. An investigation into invitation refusal by Iraqi Turkmen in the Iraqi Arabic dialect might better be conducted; as the third primary group in Iraq, they speak Arabic as a second language and have different languages, cultures, and ethnicities.

Keywords: declining invitation; Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds); societal and cultural norms; societal position and distance; strategies of politeness

INTRODUCTION

Beebe et al. (1990) define refusal as a "major cross-cultural sticking point in cross-cultural communication" (p. 56). Besides, Kwon (2004) sees refusal as "a tricky speech act to perform linguistically and psychologically since the possibility of offending the interlocutor is inherent in the act itself" (p. 340). It is necessary to have a deeper understanding of the kind of refusal needed in certain scenarios to develop awareness and pragmatic competence in cross-cultural communication (Gohar, 2021). Because interlocutors' social relationships can be endangered if rejecting is not done properly, speakers usually use various strategies to avoid offending the listener and threatening his/her face. However, people from numerous languages and cultures may have different strategies to choose from (Iliadi & Larina, 2017; Litvinova & Larina, 2023). Brown

and Levinson (1987) suggest a group of strategies that people can use to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) to save face. The utilisation of these strategies is extremely built on societal distance social status and faces threatening levels of obligation. Four strategies are proposed, namely positive politeness, negative politeness, on record, and off record.

Brown and Levinson (1987) point out that, firstly, the strategy of on-record involves performing speech acts in a direct way without any reduction to the imposition on the listener's face through unambiguous, clear, and concise ways. Employing a recording strategy means that the speaker tends to perform FTA efficiently to a large maximum and more than s/he tends to satisfy the face of the hearer. Secondly, a positive politeness strategy is utilised to save and satisfy the desire to be liked and appreciated, upholding the listener's positive face. In contrast, the strategy of negative politeness is used to satisfy the wants of the hearer to be respected and not imposed upon; negative politeness is targeted at the listener's negative face to preserve deference and distance. Thirdly, the off-record strategy is used by the speaker to appear vague in interactions, using indirect use of language. The off-record strategy involves speakers who generally intend a face-threatening act, evading accountability and giving the listener a chance to decide and interpret the said interaction. That is, the hearer must make an inference to find out what was, in fact, intended by a given utterance. Positive and negative politeness strategies mitigating devices as compensation for an FTA, therefore, are the main strategies as posited by Brown and Levinson (1987).

The current paper focuses on invitation refusals among Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds) who belong to linguistically and culturally different systems. Firstly, Iraqi Arabs practice Arabic culture and speak Arabic as their native language. Secondly, Iraqi Kurds speak primarily Kurdish and use Arabic as a second language. Communication among these two main groups in Iraq occurs daily as many areas in Iraq prompt multi-ethnic interactions in which Arabic becomes the main tool of communication. Accordingly, misunderstandings between these two dialects are inevitable when refusing invitations. To reduce any possible misconception, it is necessary to investigate politeness strategies involving invitation refusals with reference to interlocutors with lower social status who maintain anear, acquainted, and reserved communal remoteness with the listener. The current paper, therefore, is motivated by the following research questions:

1. What are the politeness strategies utilised by Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds) when rejecting an invitation by an interlocutor with a lower social status?
2. What are the similarities and differences between invitation refusals among Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relevant literature on refusal is rich, as many studies have been pervasive, increasing significantly following the seminal work of Leslie Beebe and her colleagues (Beebe et al., 1990), who focus on cross-cultural variances between native speakers of English in America and Japanese ESL learners. However, refusal is generally presented in several aspects: 1) intercultural studies, which focus on refusal in cross-cultural contexts among people of different cultures or languages; 2) intralingual studies, which concentrate on refusal in a single language or culture; and 3) EFL leaner-centered studies which aim to investigate refusal realisation by a non-native speaker of English. Nevertheless, studies concerning separate invitation refusals as one eliciting refusal that

cover multiple stages of societal distance are, in practice, rare. The present paper, therefore, examines invitation refusals from a cross-cultural standpoint as it focuses on invitation refusals among Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Arabs who are different in their cultural and linguistic systems. The reviewed studies indicate that WDCT is the most frequently used instrument when refusal as a speech act is investigated, as used in combination with observations, post-interviews, The Oxford Placement Test, and The Scaled Response Questionnaire.

Several studies investigated EFL learners' performance of refusals across different languages and cultures, including Iranian EFL learners (Farashaiyan & Muthusamy, 2017), Algerian speakers (Benbouya & Rabab'ah, 2022), Omani EFL learners (Al-Mahrooqi & Al-Aghbari, 2016), Indonesian EFL teachers (Hartuti, 2015; Rusdi et al., 2022), and Malaysian and Chinese college students (Farnia & Wu, 2012). Studies have also examined refusals from various cross-cultural perspectives. For instance, Lin (2014) investigated the cross-cultural difference between the Americans and Chinese in expressing their refusals and how the Chinese EFL learners perceive and perform refusals. Findings showed that the Chinese frequently make excuses prior to expressing regrets and demonstrating negative willingness, while the Americans prefer to initiate refusals by regrets seconded by excuses or negative willingness. Another cross-cultural study conducted by Kwon (2004) examined the refusal speech act in Korean and American English. Results revealed that although both groups share an analogous variety of the semantic formulas used, cross-cultural variances were obvious in the occurrence and content of the refusal strategies used. For example, the Koreans seemed to be more hesitant, and they seem to have used less direct refusals compared to Americans. In addition, the Koreans tended to employ negative politeness strategies frequently by using "pause fillers" and "apologies," whereas the Americans favoured "positive opinion" and "gratitude" as positive politeness strategies. Moreover, the Americans expressed direct refusals using "no" and "negative willingness," while the Koreans used passive "negative willingness" or performative. The Koreans used mitigating devices more often to state positive feelings, apologise, and elaborate their motives to a person of a superior rank than the one with equivalent and inferior social status. In contrast, the Americans did not appear to be reactive to the social rank of the participants, keeping their approach constant across the three social status levels.

Finally, refusals have also been investigated from an intralingual perspective, as reported by Izadi and Zilaie (2015) concerning refusals among Iranians whose native language is Persian. The data was collected from observation of naturally occurring interactions that took place on campus during regular academic hours. The participants of this study comprised 393 college pupils and academic and non-academic university staff. The elicited data were classified and analysed using refusal strategies (Beebe et al., 1990). The main findings showed that Iranians emphasise indirect refusals in their responses to the four different acts (requesting, inviting, offering, and suggesting). The most prominent strategies were "explanation/reasons/excuse" of the indirect category and "gratitude" of the adjunct category. "Returning the act" was a newly added strategy that was excluded in Beebe et al., and it was highly used in invitations and offers as it was heavily valued in the context of Iranian society and hospitality. A different study sought to pinpoint potential sources of L1 interference with regard to five speech acts in speech production. A discourse completion assignment comprising five speech acts, namely, compliments, requests, refusals, apologies, and complaints, as well as an interview to learn the reasons behind the students' L1 interferences, were used to gather data. The results showed lexical, discourse, and syntactic interferences in the students' speech, where they had trouble grasping the disparities in Chinese and English semantic systems, impacting their cultural background, and transmitting L1 linguistic

rules to the L2 (Krish & May, 2020). Similar to refusals, the responses to compliments are also problematic if used inappropriately. It appears that students try their hardest to avoid looking foolish by giving canned or predetermined answers in response to compliments. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that assimilation of replying to compliments becomes more problematic the greater the cultural divide between the two codes and between Arabic and English (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2019).

The review of the literature showed variations among speakers from numerous languages and cultures who varied in using refusals, particularly when they employed different semantic formulas. It also showed different preferences for semantic formulas between EFL learners and native speakers of the same language and culture. However, the results also revealed a common orientation towards employing indirect strategies, as indirectness was the most prominent strategy, namely through the high use of the *excuse* of the indirect category and *gratitude* in the adjunct category. These two strategies are related to the category of positive politeness, where the speaker endeavours to keep and preserve the hearer's positive face to show friendliness, closeness, solidarity, and harmony. This study, therefore, aims to use semantic formulas (Beebe et al., 1990) to investigate interactions across two groups, Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds, and classify them according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The societal distance in relation to social status has not been taken into consideration, as many reviewed papers focus solely on societal position. Moreover, the focus was on the production of refusal, sidelining the refusals' perception, particularly in relation to social and cultural norms that underlie invitation refusals. In other words, this study combines production and perceptive aspects of invitation refusals while investigating the social and cultural norms underlying this speech act.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

To collect the data, this study utilised an open-ended *Written Discourse Completion Task* (WDCT) (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Commonly, WDCT is utilised to gather data to investigate pragmalinguistic aspects of refusal. A descriptive qualitative analysis was conducted to analyse the data obtained from WDCT, which involved three various scenarios associated with societal status and societal distance. Contextual factors of societal status and societal distance of the interlocutors are summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Description of WDCT Situations

The situation of invitation refusal	Refusal status relative to interlocutors	Hearer's status	Distance
1. Having dinner at home	professor-student	lower	Close
2. Graduation party	professor-student	lower	Familiar
3. Having lunch at a restaurant	professor-student	lower	Distant

This study was carried out in the first four months of 2019 at two public universities in Iraq after obtaining permission from the classroom instructors. The WDCT was filled by forty Iraqis (20 for each, Arabs and Kurds) who were asked to decline an invitation to an inferior position individual who was near, acquainted, and societally distant from the invitee. The participants of

the study were fourth-year undergraduate students, and they were approximately the same age, i.e., 22 to 24 years old. The participants were also all male and were of the same level of education. The information gained from WDCT was first coded and classified according to Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification of semantic formulas. However, the resulting semantic formulas were examined based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) four strategies of politeness. Also, Beebe et al.'s (1990) modified classification of semantic formulas was analysed according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Beebe et al.'s (1990) Classification of Semantic Formulas and Brown and Levinson's (1987) Categorizations of Strategies of Politeness

No.	Politeness Strategies	Category of Strategy	Examples
	On Record	a. **Direct strategy**	I refuse your invitation.
		i. Performative	
		ii. Flat no	No, thank you
1.	**Positive Politeness**	a. **Indirect Strategy**	I wish I could attend the party.
		i. Wish	
		ii. Excuse	I have a lecture
		iii. Promising of future or past consent	I will do it next time if God willing
		iv. Postponement	Is it possible to postpone it to another time?
		b. **Adjunct to Refusals**	
		i. Positive Opinion/feeling or agreement	That is great. Surely, it would be a good party.
		ii. Gratitude/ Appreciation	I am grateful for you.
		iii. pray	May Allah save and protect you
		iv. Invoke God's name	If God willing
		v. Swear	By God, I swear I cannot.
		vi. Well–wishes	I wish you happiness and the best of luck.
		vii. Congratulate	A thousand congratulations
		viii. Address term	dear
		ix. Define the relation	My dear friend
		x. Compliment	It is a big honour that I am one of your inviters
2.	**Negative Politeness**	a. **Direct Strategy**	I cannot come
		i. Negative ability/willingness	
		b. **Indirect Strategy**	I apologise
		i. Apology/regret	
		ii. Statement of principle	I do not attend student parties.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study presents the results of the strategies of politeness used by Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds) when declining invitations given by a lower-position individual who has near, acquainted, and societal distance from the invitee. The politeness strategies are coded according to Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification of semantic formulas, which are classified according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness strategies. The last sub-section is devoted to investigating social and cultural norms that underlie the refusal of invitation in relation to the productions and perceptions side of this speech act.

Table 3 clarifies the distinctions between both groups when invitations are declined by a lower-status interlocutor (student) who invites his supervisor (professor), who was his friend, to have dinner at home.

TABLE 3. Specific Politeness Strategies Employed in Declining Invitations of Lower Status Persons with Near Societal Distance

No.	Politeness Strategies	Category of Strategy	Iraqi Arabs		Iraqi Kurds	
			No	%	No	%
1.	**On Record**	a. **Direct strategy**			2	3.63
		i. Performative				
		ii. Flat "no"	-	-	1	1.81
	Total		**-**	**-**	**3**	**5.45**
2.	**Positive Politeness**	a. **Indirect Strategy**	2	3.03	-	-
		i. Wish				
		ii. Excuse	20	30.30	8	14.54
		iii. Promise of future or past acceptance	8	12.12	3	5.45
		iv. Postponement		-	1	1.81
		b. **Adjunct to Refusals**	-	-	1	1.81
		i. Feeling or agreement/ Positive Opinion				
		ii. Appreciation/Gratitude	4	6.06	14	25.45
		iii. Invoke God's name	3	4.54	2	3.63
		iv. Swear	1	1.51	2	3.63
		v. Address term	5	7.57		
		vi. Define the relation	-	-	1	1.81
	Total		**43**	**65.15**	**32**	**58.18**
3.	**Negative Politeness**	a. **Direct Strategy**	6	9.09	11	20
		i. Negative willingness/ability				
	Total	b. **Indirect strategy**	17	25.75	8	14.54
		i. Regret/Apology				
		ii. Statement of principle	-	-	1	1.81
	Total		**23**	**34.84**	**20**	**36.36**
4.	**Off-record**		**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
	The overall number of semantic formulas		66	100	55	100

Generally, Table 3 results reveal that both groups were similar in the number of politeness strategies; that is, 66 strategies were used by the former group, and 55 strategies were used by the latter. Both groups showed their preference for employing the strategies of *positive* and *negative* politeness rather than on-record. However, the *on-record* strategy, which is considered the most face-threatening strategy for the positive and negative faces of the hearer, was only employed by Iraqi Kurds, with a lower percentage of 5.45%. Positive politeness strategies are used to mitigate the threat to the positive face of the hearer, while negative politeness strategies are utilised to reduce threats to the negative face of the hearer. Both groups employed positive politeness more than negative politeness, as Iraqi Arabs used 65.15% and Iraqi Kurds used 58.18% of *positive politeness*, whereas negative politeness was used at 34.84% by the former group and 36.36% by the latter group. This indicates that even if the inviter was of lower status, the invitee tended to uphold the hearer's positive face in order to preserve and maintain camaraderie and closeness with him. This may be due to the outcome of the close societal position on the responses of these two groups (Arabs and Kurds). To put it differently, the participants of both groups were cautious of the close social distance when declining invitations. Importantly, strategies from the off-record category were not used by both groups, so the invitee had to be vague and ambiguous when declining an invitation.

However, regarding the particular semantic formulas used by both groups, there were some differences. For example, the *excuse* of the indirect category was the most recurrent strategy utilised by Iraqis (Arabs), about 30.30%. This strategy is a positive politeness strategy, which shows, according to (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008, p.87), "positive facework or involvement with interlocutor, in those offering reasons, explanations, or justifications when refusing an invitation." Therefore, by employing a greater number of *excuses,* Iraqi Arabs attempt to mitigate the negative impact of declining invitations on the positive face of the hearer by indicating their inability to accept the invitation for some reason. *Regret/apology* as an indirect *negative politeness* strategy was the second preferred strategy in terms of percentage at 25.75%, followed by *promise of future or past acceptance* as a positive politeness strategy, which was employed at 12.12%. Farenkia (2019) argues that when a promise is made, "the refuser indicates that the refusal is temporary and that the addressee can expect a positive response another time. In this case, the refusal is mitigated, and social harmony is maintained or restored" (p. 26).

In contrast, Iraqi Kurds employed substantial *gratitude/appreciation* of the adjunct class as the most recurrent strategy at 25.45%, while *negative willingness/ability* from the negative politeness class rank second at 20%, and *excuse* of indirect *positive politeness* class and *regret/apology* of indirect *negative politeness* categories which employed equally rank third at the percentage of 14.54%. The invitee used *gratitude/ appreciation* as a *positive politeness* to display thankfulness for being invited, to mitigate the refusal undesirable effect on the face of the participants and to preserve the rapport (Farenkia, 2019, p.28). As positive politeness strategies, *calling God*'s *name* and *swearing* were utilised minimally by both groups, 4.54% and below.

IRAQIS' (ARABS AND KURDS) STRATEGIES OF POLITENESS: DECLINING INVITATIONS OF LOWER POSITION INTERLOCUTORS WITH FAMILIAR SOCIETAL DISTANCE.

Table 4 shows the differences and similarities between Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds) in using the strategies of politeness when a higher-status interlocutor (professor) declines an invitation of a lower-status individual (student) to celebrate his graduation party.

TABLE 4. Specific Politeness Strategies Employed in Declining Invitations of Lower Position Interlocutors with Familiar Societal Distance

No.	Politeness Strategies	Category of Strategy	Iraqis(Arabs)		Iraqis (Kurds)	
			No	**%**	**No**	**%**
1.	**On Record**	**Direct strategy** i. Flat no	-	-	1	1.72
	Total				1	1.72
2.	**Positive Politeness**	a. **Indirect Strategy** i. Wish	6	9.67	-	-
		ii. Excuse	22	35.48	9	15.51
		iii. Promise of future or past acceptance	1	1.61	1	1.72
		iv. Postponement	-	-	2	3.44
		b. **Adjunct to Refusals** i. Feeling or agreement/ Positive Opinion	3	4.83	1	1.72
		ii. Appreciation/Gratitude	-	-	5	8.62
		iv. Invoke God's name	-	-	2	3.44
		v. Swear	-	-	4	6.89
		vi. Well–wishing	8	12.90	1	1.72
		vii. Congratulation	4	6.45	5	8.62
		viii. Address term	1	1.61	-	-
	Total		**45**	**72.58**	**30**	**51.72**
3.	**Negative Politeness**	a. **Direct Strategy** i. Negative willingness/ability	7	11.29	15	25.86
		b. **Indirect Strategy** i. Regret/Apology	10	16.12	8	13.79
		ii. Statement of principle	-	-	4	6.89
	Total		**17**	**27.41**	**27**	**46.70**
4.	**Off-record**		-	-	-	-
	The overall number of semantic formulas		**62**	**100**	**58**	**100**

The results in Table 4 revealed that, as in the first situation, positive politeness and negative politeness were the main politeness strategies employed compared to the *on-record* category, which was avoided by both groups. Both groups shared the preference to utilise the strategies of positive politeness more than those of negative politeness. However, some divergences among Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds) existed. Arabs seemed to keep constant in their high use of strategies from the positive politeness category as when they decline an invitation of a close social distance person. They used positive politeness strategies approximately twice as much as negative politeness ones, i.e., 72.58% and 27.41%, respectively. In other words, they maintain their orientation to soften the threatening act to the hearer's positive face even if he is of an inferior position and has a familiar societal distance from the invitee. Alternatively, Kurds increased their utilisation of negative politeness strategies compared to the first situation as they showed a balanced use of these two strategies with a slight difference, i.e., 51.72% for positive politeness and 46.70% for negative politeness. That is to say, they focus on both the hearer's negative and positive face and attempt to address his negative and positive face wants.

Similar to the first situation, regarding the specific use of politeness strategies, Flat "no" from the on-record category was used only by Iraqi Kurds, yet minimally at 1.72%. Iraqi Kurds, as in refusing a close status person, keep their dominant use of *negative willingness/abilit*y, which is considered the least face-threatening strategy among direct strategies. Iraqi Kurds employed it at 25.86% compared to Iraqi Arabs who also used it, as in the first situation, less frequently at 11.29%. While this strategy continues to be considered a threat, the listener has no feeling of hurting or embarrassment in comparison to using the performatives directly (Boonsuk & A Ambele, 2019).

Regarding the specific use of indirect politeness strategies, similar to the first situation, Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds) sustained their salient utilisation of *excuse* as indirect positive politeness and *regret/apology* as the strategy of indirect negative politeness. Iraqi Arabs used *excuse*s at 35.48% more than Iraqi Kurds, who employed them at only 15.51%. However, *apology/regret* was employed with a slight difference between the two groups at 16.12% and 13.79, respectively. *Wish* as a positive politeness strategy was used prominently at 9.67 by only Iraqi Arabs. In contrast, only Iraqi Kurds employed a *statement of principle* at a percentage of 6.89, which was the most prominent strategy after excuse and regret/apology.

Concerning adjuncts*,* different from the first situation in which *address term* was ranked first, followed by gratitude/appreciation, Iraqi Arabs in this situation used *well-wishing* as the most prominent politeness strategy, which is used at 12.90%, followed by congratulation at 6.45%, and positive *opinion/feeling or agreement* at 4.83. *Well-wishing* is the strategy of positive politeness meant for the hearer's positive face; that is, Iraqi Arabs employed it to show their concern and closeness to the hearer and to satisfy their desire to be liked, appreciated and acknowledged. By willing good wishes, the inviter, according to Farenkia (2019), "intended to soften the negative impact of the refusal, to flatter the face of the addressee and to maintain social cohesion between the speaker and the addressee"(p. 28). In contrast, Iraqi Kurds, as in the first situation, maintain their use of *gratitude/ appreciation,* ranking it first in combination with *congratulation* at a similar percentage of 8.62%, followed by swearing at 6.89%.

IRAQIS (ARABS AND KURDS) STRATEGIES OF POLITENESS: DECLINING INVITATIONS OF LOWER POSITION INTERLOCUTOR'S DISTANT SOCIETAL DISTANCE

Table 5 shows the employment of politeness strategies by Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds) as the inviting a student is declined by a professor whom he does not know and has seen before, i.e. they have distant social distance.

TABLE 5. Specific Politeness Strategies Employed in Declining Invitations of Lower Position Interlocutors with Distant Societal Distance

No.	Politeness Strategies	Category of Strategy	Iraqis (Arabs)		Iraqis (Kurds)	
			No	**%**	**No**	**%**
	On Record	a. **Direct strategy** i. Performative			1	1.92
	Total				1	1.92
1.	**Positive Politeness**	a. **Indirect Strategy** i. Wish				
		ii. Excuse	18	28.12	11	21.15
		iii. Promise of future or past acceptance	3	4.68	5	9.61
		iv. Postponement	1	1.56		
		b. **Adjunct to Refusals** i. Positive Opinion/feeling or agreement	4	6.26		
		ii. Gratitude/ Appreciation	11	17.18	8	15.38
		iii. pray	2	3.12		
		iv. Invoke God's name	2	3.12	4	7.69
		v. Swear			3	5.76
		vi. Well–wishing	2	3.12		
		vii. Congratulation				
		viii. Address term	1	1.56		
		ix. Define the relation				
		x. Compliment	2	*3.12*		
	Total		**46**	**71.87**	**31**	**59.61**
2.	**Negative Politeness**	a. **Direct Strategy** i. Negative willingness/ability	6	9.37	9	17.30
		b. **Indirect Strategy** i. Regret/Apology	12	18.75	10	19.23
		v. Statement of principle			1	1.92
	Total		**18**	**28.12**	**20**	**38.46**
	Total		**64**		**52**	

As shown in Table 5, similar to declining a close and familiar interlocutor's invitation, both Iraqi groups revealed their tendencies towards high use of *positive politeness*, followed by *negative* ones, while they avoided using the on-record strategy. The *on-record* was used by only one Iraqi Kurdish participant, whereas it was never used by Iraqi Arabs. However, the results showed no noteworthy differences between Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds in regard to positive and negative politeness. The Iraqi group used the strategies of positive politeness more than the Kurdish group, as Iraqi Arabs employed it at 71.87% in comparison to the percentage of 59.61% of Kurds. However, Iraqi Arabs keep the high use of positive politeness constant across the stages of societal distance (i.e., close, familiar, and distant) compared to negative politeness, which, in turn, also kept less frequent across these levels of social distance. This shows that they were more cautious of the positive faces than negative ones, regardless of the different stages of societal distance. On the contrary, Iraqis (Arabs) sustained their substantial use of positive politeness more than negative politeness in declining invitations from a close and distant person (close social distance: 58.1%; distant social distance: 59.61%). In the familiar distance situation, they balanced their use between strategies of positive and negative politeness. Simply put, they were more aware of the hearer's positive face in close and distant social distance than negative ones, whereas, in familiar social distance situations, they balanced their awareness of both the inviter's positive and negative face.

Regarding the specific indirect politeness strategies employed among Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds), Arabs continued their preference for *excuse* from the positive politeness category as the most dominant one, followed by *regret/apology* (18.75%) from the negative politeness category, and then by lower use of promise of future or past acceptance (4.68%) from positive politeness category. They sustained *excuse* and *regret/apology* as the most prominent form of politeness across the stages of societal distance (close, familiar, and distance). Similarly, Iraqi Kurds also demonstrated their preference for these two politeness strategies (reported at 21.15% and 19.23%, respectively), with slightly more use than that of close and distant social distance situations.

With regard to adjuncts, Iraqi Arabs used *gratitude/appreciation* more frequently (17.18%) as opposed to summoning God's name (7.69%) and swearing (5.76%). *Address term* was the most preferred strategy in the close distance declination, followed by *gratitude/appreciation, well-wishing,* and *congratulation* at a familiar social distance. In contrast, Kurds maintained their high utilisation of *gratitude/appreciation*, which was seen as dominant across the three situations. This is followed by summoning God's name (7.69%) and swearing (5.76%). However, *gratitude/appreciation* was employed more frequently at close status (25.45%) and distant distance (15.38%), reporting more than that familiar societal distance (8.62%).

CONCLUSION

The results of the present paper showed that both groups (Arabs and Kurds) employed more positive and negative politeness strategies than on-record ones. That is, they preferred indirectness more than directness. However, *positive politeness* was used more by both groups as they belong to the collectivistic positive politeness culture in which "social harmony has greater value than individual rights and independence" (Chojimah, 2015, p. 915). This is in line with the study by Hartuti (2015), who investigated refusal politeness strategies used by EFL Indonesian teachers in English.

A closer look at the specific politeness strategies demonstrated that *excuse* of indirect positive politeness and *regret/apology* of indirect negative politeness were the most dominant strategies across the three levels of social distance (i.e., close, familiar, and distant). This is similar to the findings of the studies conducted by 1) Farashaiyan and Muthusamy (2017) on the refusal of Iranian EFL learners, 2) Al-Mahrooqi and Al-Aghbari (2016) on Omani EFL learners' realisation of refusal speech act, and 3) Farnia and Wu (2012) on the pragmatic conduct of refusals to invitations by Chinese international university students and Malaysian university students. In addition, both groups shared their preference to use the *promise of future or past acceptance* prominently as an indirect strategy of positive politeness after an *excuse* and *regret/apology* when refusing the invitation by a close and distant lower-status interlocutor. Nevertheless, Arabs have a tendency to utilise it more than Kurds in situations with close social distance. In contrast, Kurds utilised it more than Arabs in socially distant situations.

Concerning the adjuncts category, both groups, Arabs and Kurds, differ in their use of this category across the stages of societal distance. *Address terms* from the positive politeness category were used dominantly by Arabs when they refused invitations involving close societal distance by a lower-status interlocutor, followed by *gratitude/appreciation.* When refusing an invitation involving familiar social distance by a lower-status interlocutor, *well-wishing* as a positive politeness strategy was used. While *gratitude/appreciation* was the most dominant strategy from the positive politeness strategy, *calling God's name* and *swearing* to refuse the invitation involving distant social distance by a lower-status interlocutor were more common. In contrast, Iraqi Kurds employed *gratitude/appreciation* as the most dominant strategy across the three levels of social status. *Negative willingness/ability* as a negative direct politeness strategy was the most prominent of other direct strategies among the two groups across the three situations. Nevertheless, Kurds utilised *negative willingness/ability* more frequently than Arabs.

The pedagogical implications of the study within the EFL and ESL education domains might be seen by allowing learners to act properly in the target language. That is, a pragmatic approach might better take into account the rules of politeness and the application of different strategies of politeness. EFL and ESL teachers might better focus not only on grammatical rules but also on learners' pragmatic awareness. On the basis of the findings of the study, Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds might be better exposed to the idea that social status and social distance have an impact on how they refuse an invitation. In return, students might become more conscious and cautious of social status and social distance differences when refusing daily invitations and interactions. As a result, this will not only enhance their communication performance but also increase their pragmatic awareness, preventing them from appearing intentionally rude or impolite.

The present study focuses on invitation refusal with reference to social status and social distance. Nevertheless, other variables, such as gender, educational level, level of formality, age, and region, might also have an impact. Hence, it is suggested that further studies could focus on these different social variables and how they affect performing invitation refusal by Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds. A fertile area of investigation concerning invitation refusal might be carried out across Iraqi Turkmens, who most likely use the Iraqi Arabic dialect; as the third primary group in Iraq, they speak Arabic as a second language and have different languages, cultures, and ethnicities.

REFERENCES

Al-Ghamdi, N. A., Almansoob, N. T., & Alrefaee, Y. (2019). Pragmatic failure in the realisation of the speech act of responding to compliments among Yemeni EFL undergraduates. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, *25*(4), 227-240.

Al-Mahrooqi, R., & Al-Aghbari, K. (2016). Refusal strategies among Omani EFL students. *SAGE Open*, *6*(4), 1-10.

Beebe, L. M., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatics transfer in ESL refusals. In R. Scarcella., E. Anderson & S. D. Krashen (Eds*.), On the development of communicative competence in a second language* (pp. 55 – 73). Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

Benbouya, A., & Rabab'ah, G. (2022). Refusal strategies used in Algerian spoken Arabic in response to offers. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(4), 715-725.

Boonsuk, Y., & A Ambele, E. (2019). Refusal as a social speech act among Thai EFL university students. *Arab World English Journal*, *10*(2), 213-224.

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

Chojimah, N. (2015). Refusal and politeness strategies in relation to social status: a case of face-threatening act among Indonesian university students. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *5*(5), 906-918.

Farashaiyan, A., & Muthusamy, P. (2017). An investigation of Iranian learner's utilisation of politeness strategies and power relation in refusal speech act across different communicative situations. *Asian Social Science*, *13*(1), 36-44.

Farenkia, B. M. (2019). Canadian English speakers' choices in refusing invitations. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research, 7*(1), 19-32.

Farnia, M., & Wu, X. (2012). An intercultural communication study of Chinese and Malaysian university students' refusal to invitation. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *2*(1), 162-176.

Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2008). *Politeness in Mexico and the United States: a contrastive study of the realisation and perception of refusals.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Gohar, H. (2021). A cross-cultural study of refusal strategies of American and Armenian English speakers. *Armenian Folia Anglistika*, *17*(2), 100-116.

Hartuti, M. (2015). Politeness in interlanguage refusals by English teachers in Indonesia. *Kajian Linguistik dan Sastra*, *27*(1), 48-60.

Iliadi, P. L. L., & Larina, T. V. (2017). Refusal strategies in English and Russian. *Rudn Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, *8*(3), 531-542.

Izadi, A., & Zilaie, F. (2015). Refusal strategies in Persian. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *25*(2), 246-264.

Krish, P., & May, O. C. (2020). A case study of L1 interference in speech acts among Chinese L2 students. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, *26*(1), 106-118.

Kwon, J. (2004). Expressing refusals in Korean and in American English. *Multilingua*, *23*(4), 339-364.

Lin, M. F. (2014). An interlanguage pragmatic study on Chinese EFL learners' refusal: perception and performance. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *5*(3), 642-653.

Litvinova, A. V., & Larina, T. V. (2023). Mitigation tools and politeness strategies in invitation refusals: American and Russian communicative cultures. *Training, Language and Culture*, *7*(1), 116-130.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: a methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rusdi, R. P., Purwanti, I. T., & Dahnilsyah, D. (2022). Refusal strategies used by EFL learners of English study program in Riau, Indonesia. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, *10*(1), 175-186.