

The High and Low-Context Communication Styles in Refusal Strategies by Jordanian Arabic and American English Speakers

Yasser Al-Shboul^{1*} and Marlyna Maros²

¹*Department of English Language and Literature, Salt Faculty of Human Sciences, Al-Balqa Applied University, 19117 Al-Salt, Jordan*

²*School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43600, Selangor, Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to identify the refusal strategies produced by Jordanian Arabic (JA) and American English (AE) speakers. It also aims to examine the influence of high and low-context communication styles on the production of refusal strategies by the two participating groups. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was adapted to collect data from AE group and an equivalent Arabic version to collect data from JA group. The data were analysed and classified based on the classification of refusal strategies. Results showed that although both groups portrayed similar preferences in using two of the strategies, namely, the indirect strategy and adjunct strategy; they seemed to differ in lights of the content and number of semantic formulas used. Results also showed that participants' cultural backgrounds influenced the number and content of semantic formulas of their refusals. For instance, JA group provided more vague and ambiguous explanations than those made by the AE group. The findings of the present study would be useful in future intercultural comparison studies.

Keywords: DCT, high and low-context, refusals, semantic formulas, speech acts

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 22 February 2020

Accepted: 16 May 2020

Published: 25 September 2020

E-mail addresses:

nowshboul@bau.edu.jo (Yasser Al-Shboul)

marlyna@ukm.my (Marlyna Maros)

*Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

It is a recognized fact that communication has an important role in peoples' life. It is a social process by which humans express their feelings, thoughts, ideas, and relay messages (Mahajan, 2015). Undoubtedly, the process of communication is an essential phenomenon between people

as it enables them to share information and build relationships. Hence, the significance of communication cannot be ignored. In our daily life, we communicate with different people including our families, friends, and colleagues, or even strangers. Communication takes different modes such as verbal communication, non-verbal communication and mass communication. In verbal communication, people communicate with each other face to face. It is believed to be the best way of communication because the person can express his feelings directly to others. However, people avoid speaking and tend to communicate using eye contact, body language, gestures with hands, and facial expressions in the non-verbal communication style (Dilnoza & Nurmaxamatovna, 2019). Over the years technology has been growing fast, changing the medium of communication among interlocutors. These include e-mail, video calls, short messaging system, and WhatsApp.

The different ways of communication people use between them represents their own different cultural background. So, the cultural differences between individuals form every phase of global communication. In his book *The Silent Language*, the pioneer of intercultural communication, Hall (1959) proposed the area of intercultural communication. First, the book was mainly the interest of general public, but later it became the interest of researchers in the area of cross cultural and intercultural communication. Hall (1959) defined the concept of intercultural communication

as a way of communication by sharing knowledge between individuals representing different social groups and cultures. Within the framework of intercultural communication, he discussed the concepts of high-context and low-context cultures, which placed contexts as the crux of people's behavioural and communicative patterns. Communication in a high-context culture essentially relies heavily on the context of the communication. Essentially, while context is at least as important as what is actually said, what is not being said can carry more meaning than what is said. Hence, interactions tend to be more implicit, indirect, and less verbal. Low-context cultures on the other hand, rely strongly on the verbal messages, as most of the information is contained explicitly in words. Here, what is said is more important than what is not said. Hence, low context cultures exhibit less implicit communicative style. High context cultures are also associated with collectivism, while the low context cultures are attributed to individualism. The differences affect the overall ways of communicative patterns between these cultures. If someone is not conscious of the different communication styles between high and low context cultures, he can simply get into trouble that can lead to serious communication breakdowns when communicating with individuals from another culture. Countries that represent high context cultures include Japan, Arabic countries, and some Latin American countries, while Germany, the United States of America, and Scandinavia

represent countries of low context cultures. These and other countries of the world are in a continuum of the High Context and Low Context attributes. The cultural differences initiated the interest to investigate the impact of different communication styles (high and low-context) on the performance of refusal among speakers of Jordanian Arabic and speakers of American English; two countries on both ends of the cultural continuum.

Refusals

The act of refusal has attracted the attention of many scholars (Al-Kahtani, 2005; Al-Shalawi, 1997; Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2016; Beebe et al., 1990; Çiftçi, 2016; Jasim, 2017; Johnson, 2014; Nelson et al., 2002; Rezvani et al., 2017). It is the act that occurs when a speaker responds 'no' in a direct or indirect way to invitation, request, offer, or suggestion. Cohen (1996) stated that the act of refusal was usually performed using indirect strategies, and it needed a high competence and a great knowledge of pragmatic. It had also been classified as a high-risk face-threatening act because of the damage that resulted on the face of both the speaker and the hearer and of a possible incapability to refuse appropriately that could threaten the speakers' interpersonal relations. Refusals involve different strategies as a way to avoid offending the interlocutors. These strategies depend greatly on the interlocutors' linguistic and cultural background (Al-Eryani, 2007). Hence, they should be familiar with the appropriate forms and their functions. Similarly, Al-Kahtani (2005) indicates that

the social functions of speech acts rely greatly on each speech community and their cultural-linguistic values.

The participants of the current study include Jordanian speakers and American tourists visiting Jordan. Hence, the problem emerges when Jordanian speakers engage in conversations with native speakers of American English. In such real situations, communication difficulties may arise due to their lack of the necessary social and conversational norms involved in the production of speech acts in general and particularly the speech act of refusal. So, these difficulties in understanding the social and conversational norms would cause serious intercultural and interethnic communication breakdowns. Moreover, the researchers of the present study have concentrated on the speech act of refusal due to the fact that it is mainly rich in the social meanings involved in its uses. With this respect, Al-Shalawi (1997) stated that the act of refusal was regarded as a rich source of information of the sociocultural values of a speech community and provided an important insight into the social and cultural norms that were embedded in cultures. Compared with other speech acts such as greetings and leave-taking, the act of refusal seems to be complex and more difficult to perform because it consists of more sociocultural variables (Chen, 1996).

Consequently, this study is important because it offers new data in the fields of intercultural and sociopragmatics. Moreover, it improves our understanding on the Jordanians and American sociocultural

values. Hence, it would be important to examine the way two different cultural-linguistic nations realize refusal in order to increase both Jordanian and American speakers' cultural and pragmatic awareness. More specifically, how the performance of refusal speech act by Jordanian and American speakers is influenced by high and low-context communication styles.

Literature Review

The speech act of refusal has been examined from different viewpoints including comparative studies on refusals across different languages and cultures and also the production of refusal in the target language by non-native speakers (NNSs). The following paragraphs summarized these different viewpoints with a focus on the impact of different communication styles (high and low-context) on the production of refusal strategies across different cultures and languages.

In a comparative study, Beebe et al.'s (1990) study is believed to be the most influential research in the framework of refusal. The researchers compared the speech act of refusal between American English native speakers and Japanese native speakers. The research examines the concept of pragmatic transfer among Japanese participants responding in English. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used as a data collection instrument. The DCT consists of 12 situations. Findings revealed that the status of the interlocutor influenced the strategies used by the participants. Japanese tended to use more

indirect strategies when refusing a higher status person and more direct strategies when refusing a person of lower status than their Americans counterparts. In addition, findings showed the occurrence of pragmatic transfer among Japanese learners of English. By contrast, Americans used less direct strategies when they had to refuse a request made by a person of higher, equal, and lower status.

In Turkish context, Çiftçi (2016) examined refusal performed by Turkish and Americans. The study examined the concept of pragmatic transfer among Turkish EFL learners responding in English. The study consisted of three participating groups categorized according to the following: 15 Turkish EFL learners of English represent the target group of the study. Moreover, 15 Turkish native speakers and 15 American English native speakers who were recognised as the reference groups of the study. The participants responded to an adapted version of DCT proposed by Beebe et al. (1990). Data were analysed in terms of pragmalinguistic and pragmatic competence of the learners (Thomas, 1983). The findings of the study revealed that both groups of Turkish used 688 refusal strategies where *reasons or explanation* were the most frequent semantic formulas used by them. However, there were differences among the three participating groups in terms of the directness and the semantic formulas' content. Although *Statement of alternative* was used by the three participating groups when refusing a higher status person, it was used more frequent by both reference

groups than the target group. Additionally, the American English group used *negative willingness* more frequently than both groups of Turkish who tended to refuse with this strategy in almost the same amount. Finally, the American group used less *explanations or reasons* with their higher status interlocutor than both groups of Turkish.

In another comparative study, Rezvani et al. (2017) investigated the performance of refusal speech act by English Language teaching students at Eastern Mediterranean University in Famagusta, Cyprus. The participants were fifty postgraduate students from four different ethnic groups, namely, Arab, Persian, Turkish and Kurdish. Data were collected by means of DCT established by Beebe et al. (1990). Next, the researchers followed Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification system in their classification of data. The findings revealed that the participant preferred indirect refusal than direct and adjunct strategies. Moreover, male students tended to refuse a lower status person more directly than the female students did. By contrast, female students used more direct strategies when they had to refuse an equal status person. In addition, male students used less adjuncts strategies than their female counterparts in all three situations. Finally, Turkish students tended to use more direct strategies, while Persian students preferred more adjuncts strategies than the other groups of participants.

In another cross-cultural pragmatics study, Johnson (2014) investigated German and American English refusal strategies.

Data were collected using DCT proposed by Beebe et al. (1990), and analysed following refusal the classification taxonomy, also by Beebe et al. (1990). Fifteen (15) native speakers of American English (AE) from the USA (11 females and 4 males) and 15 native German Speakers of German (GSG) from Germany (7 females and 8 males) responded to the questionnaire. Results revealed that the two participating groups used more indirect strategies than direct strategies. More specifically, AE participants used 87.3% indirect strategies compared to 12.7% direct strategies. Similarly, GSG participants used 88.4% indirect strategies compared to 11.6% direct strategies. However, the AE group utilized a slightly less amount of the semantic formula (24.8 %) compared to GSG group (27.9%). In addition, Americans tended to use more statements of alternative (15.1%) compared to their German counterparts (10.4%).

In Arabic context, Al-Shalawi (1997) examined Saudis and American refusal strategies from a cross-cultural perspective. Data were collected from 50 Saudis and 50 American males using a written open-ended DCT, and were analysed with the classification of refusal strategies proposed by Beebe and Cummings (1995). In addition, the researcher counted the frequency of all semantic formulas made by the participants followed by a t-test. Findings revealed that Saudis produced more semantic formulas compared to their American counterparts. However, both groups refused a higher status person using more semantic formulas. The participants also refused suggestions

with a fewer number of semantic formulas when compared to their refusal of requests, invitations, or offers. This particular finding reflects deeply rooted cultural values.

In another study in Saudi context, Al Qunayeer (2019) identified refusal strategies performed by Saudi EFL learners. The study aimed to investigate pragmatic transfer in the responses of Saudi EFL learners in English. The same group of participants were asked to refuse situations with four different scenarios including invitations, requests, offers and suggestions in their first language (Arabic) and second language (English). Hence, 44 third-year English major female students responded to a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) that involved situations to people with low, high and equal social status. Moreover, data were analysed based on the classification of refusal strategies proposed by Beebe et al. (1990). The results of the study showed that the participants tended to refuse using less direct strategies in Arabic compared to their responses in English. In other words, they tended to refuse with more statement of regret, care for the interlocutor's feeling, and giving reasons. However, the participants used more direct strategies when they had to refuse a person with lower social status. In addition, the participants' responses in English tended to be too direct and mainly inappropriate and inaccurate. This is could be attributed to the participants' lack of knowledge about the role of social status when refusing a person of higher social status. The results also showed that the participants tended to be indirect using

reasons or explanations when refusing in their first language (Arabic). Finally, the study recommended that frequently used speech acts should be taught to the students, mainly those used in their daily conversation with professors and classmates.

In Egyptian context, Nelson et al. (2002) compared the production of refusal speech act between American English and Egyptian Arabic. The researchers collected the data from 25 Egyptian Arabic and 30 American English using a modified version of open-ended DCT designed by Beebe et al. (1990). Unlike Al-Shalawi's (1997) study, the data were collected orally by which each situation was read to the participants by an interviewer who asked them to respond to these situations orally. In order to show if there were any statistically significant differences in the responses of the groups of the participants, the researchers ran inferential statistical tests. In addition, data were analysed in terms of the influence of the interlocutor status, frequency use of strategies in general and frequency/type of indirect strategies in particular. Findings revealed that both groups of participants were found to refuse using similar semantic formulas and similar number of indirect and direct strategies. Yet, Egyptian participants tended to refuse with more direct strategies than Americans in the equal status situations. By contrast, Americans tended to use more expressions of *gratitude* than their Egyptians counterparts. The scope of this study is believed to be relevant to the current study in lights of the variable examined (high and low-context communication styles), the

data collection as well as the data analysis methods. Therefore, the findings by Nelson et al. (2002) would be used as a comparison to the present study.

In Iraqi context, Jasim (2017) examined how Iraqi Arabic and British English refused requests and offers. The participants were similarly divided into three groups of 20 native speakers of Iraqi Arabic, 20 Iraqi EFL of English, and 20 native speakers of British English. An open-ended role plays and DCT were adopted to collect data from the participants. The participants were asked to refuse situations to people with different gender, social distance, social status, and rank of imposition. The data were coded into strategies and then classified based on the Beebe et al. (1990) scheme of refusals. Data were also categorized in lights of (im) politeness super strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Culpeper (1996). The findings revealed that the participants' cultural background influences their choice of refusal strategies. For example, both groups of Iraqis were more influenced to status and distance than their British counterparts who were influenced to status and gender. In addition, both groups of Iraqi tended to refuse using more direct strategies compared to the British participants.

Finally, Al-Shboul and Huwari (2016) investigated the influence of the individualism and collectivism cultural dimensions on the production of refusal by speakers of Jordanian Arabic (JA) and American English (AE). 15 native speakers of JA and 15 native speakers

of AE participated in the study. For the purpose of data collection, Al-Issa's (1998) Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was adapted. Regarding the analysis of the data, sequences of semantic formulaic and the refusals' taxonomy proposed by Al-Issa (1998) were used. Findings show that the two participating groups preferred indirect strategies, adjunct strategies, and direct strategies respectively. Nevertheless, Americans made more direct refusal strategies than Jordanians who used more indirect refusal style. Table 1 briefly summarises the studies presented above and their main results.

To sum up this section, the researchers reviewed these studies because they are relevant to the current study regarding the design, data collection, and data analysis technique. Moreover, they reviewed these studies to compare their findings with the findings of the present study. Hence, it can be seen that the research reviewed above included three inter-language refusal studies that investigated the realization of refusal speech act performed in English by EFL learners comparing the production of refusal by Japanese native speakers and native speakers of American English (Beebe et al., 1990), and how this speech act is performed in English by Turkish EFL learners and compared their production to that of Turkish native speakers and American English native speakers (Çiftçi, 2016), and how refusal is realized in English by Saudi EFL learners as compared to the production of that made by Saudi native speakers and native speakers of American English (Al

Table 1
Research investigating the speech act of refusal

Research	Focus	Data collection method	participants	Results
Beebe et al. (1990)	Refusing in Japanese L2 ESL	Written DCT	20 Japanese ESL, 20 Japanese NSs, and 20 Americans NSs.	- Occurrence of pragmatic transfer among Japanese learners of English.
Çiftçi (2016)	Refusing in Turkish L2 EFL	Written DCT	15 Turkish EFL, 15 Turkish NSs, and 20 Americans NSs.	- Occurrence of pragmatic transfer among Turkish learners of English.
Rezvani et al. (2017)	Arab, Persian, Turkish and Kurdish	Written DCT	15 Arabic, 9 Persian, 14 Turkish and 12 Kurdish	- Participant preferred indirect refusal than direct and adjunct refusal.
Johnson (2014)	Refusing in German and American	Written DCT	15 German NSs, and 15 Americans NSs.	- The two groups of participants used less direct strategies than indirect strategies
Al-Shalawi (1997)	Refusing in Saudi and American	Written DCT	50 Saudi males and 50 American males	- Saudis used more semantic formulas and provide fewer explanations.
Al Qunayeer (2019)	Refusing in Saudi	Written DCT	44 third-year English major female students	- Occurrence of pragmatic transfer among Saudi learners of English.
Nelson et al. (2002)	Refusing in Egyptian and American	Oral DCT	25 Native Speakers of Egyptian Arabic, and 30 Native Speakers of American English	-Americans used less direct strategies in status-equal situations than Egyptians. -Egyptians used more indirect strategies in equal/lower status situations.
Al-Shboul and Huwari (2016)	Refusing in Jordanian and American	Written DCT	15 Jordanian NSs, and 15 Americans NSs.	- Americans made more direct refusal strategies than Jordanians who used more indirect refusal style.

Qunayeer, 2019). These studies have shown the occurrence of pragmatic transfer among EFL learners of English.

Moreover, the studies reviewed above included five inter-cultural speech act studies that compared the realization of the speech act of refusal in Arabic and American English (Al-Shalawi, 1997; Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2016; Nelson et al., 2002), in German and American English (Johnson, 2014), and between Arab, Persian, Turkish and Kurdish (Rezvani et al., 2017). Generally speaking, the participating groups in these five studies used more indirect strategies than direct strategies. Regarding the data collection method, all of the studies reviewed above used the DCT to collect the data which is the instrument that elicited single-turn responses.

In addition, the above studies are reviewed in a way that shows the contribution of the present study and bridged some of the gaps in the literature. Consequently, previous research on Jordanian refusals were either interlanguage studies (Al-Issa, 1998; Huwari & Al-Shboul, 2015) or intercultural studies (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2016) to examine the intercultural communication of refusal speech act and based on Hofstede's (1991) individualism and collectivism cultural dimensions. Hence, this study will enrich the speech act studies on production in general and of refusal in particular; in the field of inter-cultural awareness generally and among Jordanian and American speakers specifically. It will focus to enrich inter-cultural understanding and communication awareness. More

specifically, the current study is expected to add empirical findings with regards to the production of refusal by Jordanian Arabic and American English in relation to high and low-context communication styles.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the refusal strategies produced by Jordanian Arabic and American English?
2. How do high and low-context communication styles influence the production of refusal strategies by Jordanian Arabic and American English?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of the present study were 30 Jordanian native speakers of Arabic (JA) and 30 American native speakers of English (AE). The first selection of American participants involved a purposive random sampling within four months period of non-Arab speakers visiting Jordan. This group of participants initially consisted of 53 speakers with different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Eventually however, 23 of them who were not AE speakers (7 were speakers of Dutch, 5 French, 6 British, 4 South African and 1 New Zealand) were excluded. Hence, the remaining, who were 30 male AE speakers ranging from 25-50 years old. The Jordanian speakers were all citizens of Amman. The researchers met the speakers from both groups in the same locations (i.e., Amman, Jerash and Petra).

The number of the Jordanian speakers was also reduced from initially 41 to 30 male speakers aged from 25-45 to meet the equivalent number of the American participants. All 60 Jordanian and American participants have at least completed their Bachelors in different academic programmes. Hence, the participants of both groups are recognized to be somehow homogeneous concerning their cultural, academic level, and ethnic backgrounds.

Instrument and Procedure

Similar to Nelson et al. (2002) who used a modified version of Beebe et al.'s (1990) DCT to be completed by the American English and then they translated it into Arabic (with very slight modifications to fit Arabic context) to be completed by Egyptian Arabic. The researchers of the present study used two types of Discourse Completion Tasks as its instrument of data collection. The first was a modified version of DCT proposed by Beebe et al. (1990) to be completed by the American native speakers of English. Jordanian Arabic native speakers on the other hand responded to the equivalent Arabic version adopted from Nelson et al.'s (2002) study. The researchers selected the DCT instrument because it was considered as a useful device in cross-cultural comparison research and can be run to participants with a great number in a non-elaborative time edge. In addition, Blum-Kulka and House (1989) indicated that such instrument helped the researchers to completely control a number of social and contextual variables. Moreover, Beebe

et al. (1990) had made a pilot study to the instrument in order to achieve the validity and reliability of the 12 situations involved (three offers, three requests, three suggestions, and three invitations) and intended to a lower, equal, or higher status person in each situation.

Regarding the procedures of data collection, the researchers visited different locations in Jordan such as Amman, Jerash and Petra seeking American tourists visiting Jordan to complete the questionnaire. Hence, the researchers met them and administrated the questionnaire over a period of four months. For the Jordanian Arabic group, the researchers located and saw the participants only in Amman the capital of Jordan. More specifically, they met them in two famous cafes located in downtown Amman. The average time taken by participants to complete the questionnaire was around 10 minutes. The researchers explained the purpose of the study to both participating groups and clarifying the tasks in some details. The researchers asked the participants to read each situation carefully and try to react to it naturally by imagining themselves in these situations, before writing the responses.

Upon completion of data collection, the researchers analysed these data in lights of the sequences of semantic formulaic and then classified them following the classification taxonomy of refusal strategies established by Beebe et al. (1990). The concept of semantic formula is defined as "a word, phrase, or sentence that meets a particular semantic criterion or strategy,

any one or more of these can be used to perform the act in question” (Cohen, 1996). For instance, refusing a dinner invitation by a friend by saying “Thanks a lot for your invitation; I have something to do, let’s make it another day.”, was analysed as involving three semantic formulas (as shown in the parentheses):

- Thanks a lot for your invitation (gratitude).
- I have something to do (Excuse, reason, explanation).
- ‘Let’s make it another day (Promise of future acceptance).

Nevertheless, the classification system of the present study was slightly modified to fit the data by omitting semantic formulas listed in Beebe et al.’s (1990) that did not appear in the present data and adding categories that were not in its original framework.

After the first round of data analyses, two well-trained professors of English linguistics were invited as independent raters as a measure of ensuring a high level of reliability to the classification made on the data. During this process, there were differences of opinion in classification types, decisions were made based on agreement between the researchers and the two raters.

It was during this process too that some new categories were found, noted, and added as new findings. Only after the classifications were agreed upon and completed, the researchers ran descriptive statistics analysis to acquire the patterns of the classifications that would assist further analysis.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the semantic formulas produced by both participating groups. The researchers calculated the rank (R.), number (No.), and frequencies of these semantic formulas. It can be seen that both groups of participants performed total number of 1827 written refusal strategies. More specifically, the JA participants made 961 written Arabic refusal strategies. By contrast, the AE participants’ responses to the questionnaire resulted in 866 written English refusal strategies. Generally speaking, both groups of participants demonstrated preferences for indirect strategies, adjunct strategies, and direct strategies. In the following section, the researchers show and discuss in some detail the semantic formulas produced by both participating groups.

Table 2
Rank, number, and frequencies of the semantic formulas

Semantic formula	JA			AE			Total	
	R.	No.	%	R.	No.	%	No.	%
Direct								
Performative	-	-	-	14	2	0.2	2	0.1

Table 2 (Continued)

Semantic formula	JA			AE			Total	
	R.	No.	%	R.	No.	%	No.	%
No	7	22	2.3	6	26	3.0	48	2.6
Negative willingness/ ability	4	82	8.5	3	152	17.6	234	12.8
Indirect								
Statement of regret	3	116	12.0	4	81	9.4	197	10.8
Wish	17	5	0.5	8	16	1.8	21	1.1
Excuse, reason, explanation	1	363	37.7	1	290	33.5	653	35.7
Statement of Alternative	5	46	4.7	7	19	2.2	65	3.5
Set condition for future or past acceptance	11	13	1.3	10	8	0.9	21	1.1
Promise of future acceptance	15	7	0.7	-	-	-	7	0.4
Statement of principle	8	21	2.2	8	15	1.7	36	2.0
Philosophy	20	1	0.1	11	5	0.6	6	0.3
Criticize	13	11	1.1	13	3	0.3	14	0.8
Let interlocutor off the hook	12	12	1.2	13	3	0.3	15	0.8
Unspecific or indefinite reply	10	14	1.4	-	-	-	14	0.8
*Swearing to God	14	8	0.8	-	-	-	8	0.4
*Self-defence	18	4	0.4	-	-	-	4	0.2
*Praying for God's blessing	16	6	0.6	-	-	-	6	0.3
*Define relation	6	40	4.2	-	-	-	40	2.2
Silence	15	7	0.7	15	1	0.1	8	0.4
Physical departure	17	5	0.5		-	-	5	0.3
Postponement	19	2	0.2	10	8	0.9	10	0.5
Repetition of part of request		-	-	13	3	0.3	3	0.2
Adjuncts to Refusals								
Statement of positive	9	15	1.6	5	32	3.7	47	2.6

Table 2 (Continued)

Semantic formula	JA			AE			Total	
	R.	No.	%	R.	No.	%	No.	%
opinion/feeling or agreement	9	15	1.6	5	32	3.7	47	2.6
Pause filler	17	5	0.5	9	12	1.4	17	0.9
Statement of gratitude or appreciation	2	156	16.2	2	186	21.5	342	18.7
Statement of empathy	-	-	-	12	4	0.5	4	0.2
Total	-	961	100.0	-	866	99.9	1827	99.7

*Additional types of semantic formulas found in the corpus of the current study.

DISCUSSION

Research Question One: What are the refusal strategies produced by Jordanian Arabic and American English?

The first research question was set to identify the refusal strategies made by Jordanian Arabic and American English native speakers. Regarding JA participants, a total number of 961 written Arabic refusal strategies were made by them. Unsurprisingly, the participants give *excuse*, *reason*, *explanation* (e.g. "I will be busy at that time", سوف اكون مشغولا في ذلك الوقت) as the most frequent strategy in around 37.7% of the strategies (n = 359). The participants' use of *gratitude or appreciation* (e.g. "thank you"; شكرا لك) was the second most frequent strategy in approximately 16.2% of the strategies (n=156). *Expressing regret* using semantic formulas such as (e.g. "I'm really sorry"; انا حقا اسف) was the third most frequently strategy made by JA participants in almost 12.0% of the strategies

(n=116). The participants' use of *negative ability/willingness* (e.g. "I cannot do this"; لا استطيع فعل ذلك) was fourthly adopted in approximately 8.5% of the strategies (n=82). As the fifth most frequently used strategy, the JA participants used *statement of alternative* (e.g. "I prefer to stay in the current position instead of moving to the new one"; بدلا من الانتقال الى المكان الجديد; انا افضل البقاء في المكان الحالي) in approximately 4.7% of the strategies (n=46). The JA participants' use of the strategy *define relation* (e.g. "my dear boss"; مديري الفاضل) was the sixth most frequent strategy in approximately 4.2% of the strategies (n=40). The participants' frequency use of the remaining strategies appeared respectively as the following: "no" 2.3%, *statement of principle* 2.2%, *Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement* 1.6%, *Unspecific or indefinite reply* 1.4%, *Set condition for future or past*

acceptance 1.3%, *Let interlocutor off the hook* 1.2%, *Criticize* 1.1%, *Swearing to God* 0.8%, *Promise of future acceptance* 0.7%, *Praying for God's blessing* 0.6%, *Wish* and *Pause filler* 0.5%, *Self-defence* 0.4%, *Postponement* 0.2%, and *Philosophy* 0.1%.

By contrast, the AE participants' responses to the questionnaire resulted in 866 written English refusal strategies were made by the AE participants. Similar to the JA group, *excuse, reason, explanation* (e.g. "My kids and I have a party that day.") was ranked as the most frequently strategy performed by the participants in almost 33.5% of the strategies (n=290). This is in accordance with Jordanian Arabic refusal studies such as Al-Shboul and Huwari (2016) who found that both Jordanians and Americans used *excuse, reason, explanation* more than any other strategy. *Expressing gratitude or appreciation* (e.g. "I highly appreciate your offer.") was also the second most frequent strategy made by AE participants in around 21.5% of the strategies (n=186). As the third most frequently used strategy, the AE participants expressed *negative ability/willingness* (e.g. "I cannot make this at the moment") in approximately 17.6% of the strategies (n=152). The AE participants' use of *regret* (e.g. "I'm sorry...") was the fourth most frequently used strategy by them in almost 9.4% of the strategies (n=81). The participants show *statement*

of positive opinion/feeling/agreement (e.g. "I'd love to...") in their responses to questionnaire as the fifth most frequent strategy used by them in around 3.7% of the strategies (n=32). The participants' use of *direct refusal "no"* (e.g. "No") was the sixth most frequent strategy used by them in approximately 3.0% of the strategies (n=26). The participants' frequency use of the remaining strategies appeared respectively as the following: *statement of alternative* 2.2%, *wish* and *statement of principle* 1.7%, *Pause filler* 1.4%, *Set condition for future or past acceptance* and *Postponement* 0.9%, *Philosophy* 0.6%, *Statement of empathy* 0.5%, *Let interlocutor off the hook, criticize, and Repetition of part of request* 0.3%, *Performative* 0.2%, and *Silence* 0.1%.

Research Question Two: How do high and low-context communication styles influence the production of refusal strategies by Jordanian Arabic and American English?

The second research question was formulated to investigate the influence of high and low-context communication styles on the Jordanian Arabic and American English production of refusal strategies. Although both groups of participants agreed in their preference of refusal strategies, they differ in the content and number of semantic formulas. Hence, the participants of both groups tended to

use indirect strategies (excuse, reason, explanation) followed by adjunct strategies (Statement of gratitude or appreciation). Other examples of the most frequent strategies used by the participants included *statement of regret* and *statements showing negative ability/willingness*. These particular findings seem to be similar to those reported by Al-Shalawi (1997), Nelson et al. (2002), and Al-Shboul and Huwari (2016). The following paragraphs discuss how the participants' cultural backgrounds influence the number and content of semantic formulas.

Hall (1976) indicated that the nature of message and communication in high-context (HC) cultures was little coded, implicit, and only part of the message was conveyed in which most of the information was kept by the person. By contrast, the communication in a low-context (LC) is directly coded, explicit and much of the information is unambiguously expressed. Similarly, Samovar et al. (1998) indicated that while members of high-context cultures appeared to communicate with others in an ambiguous way, members of low-context cultures tended to express their messages in detail, clear cut, and definite way, feeling not relaxed with vagueness and ambiguity.

This appeared clearly in the participants' responses to the questionnaire. For example, the JA group provided more vague and ambiguous explanations than those made by the AE group. More

specifically, Jordanians' responses did not include specific times or places when refusing someone using explanations. For instance, when refusing an invitation by a boss (higher social status) inviting to attend a little party (situation 4), while Jordanians provided responses such as "I have very important appointment at the same time", AE participants were more likely to say "I have a birthday party that day." In addition, JA group responds using similar unspecific time and place explanations by saying "I have to do something else after work", "I need to go somewhere after the meeting", or "I have many things to finish right after meeting", when they tended to refuse a boss's (higher social status) request to spend an extra hour or two to finish meeting agenda (situation 12). By contrast, AE group tended to give more specific responses when they had to refuse the same situation. Examples of their responses include "I have to pick up my son from school" or "I have a family reunion at home this evening." These findings are in agreement with those recorded in other research on Arabic refusal research. For instance, Al-Shalawi (1997) found that the Saudi participants' explanations/excuses were less specific in detail as to time, place and parties involved (i.e., "I have another appointment at that time.") compared to their American counterparts.

These differences represent deeply rooted cultural values and how the

differences between high and low-context cultures could influence the participants' production of refusal speech act. That is, Americans, as a low-context culture, provide detailed, clear-cut, and definite messages such as "I have to pick up my son from school." they also provided specific time and place by responding "I have a family reunion at home this evening." On the other hand, JA participants, as a high context culture, provided vague and less specific in detail as to time (i.e., I have to do something else after work) and place (i.e., I need to go somewhere after the meeting). Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) stated that people of high-context cultures were most likely to get engaged in an affective communication style compared to people in low context cultures who tended to get involved in an instrumental communication style. Thus, members from cultures of affective communication styles are most likely to refer to their "intuitive sense to interpret the multifarious nuances that are being transmitted in the ongoing dialogue" (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). The use of this type of affective communication style by JA group could reflect deeply rooted linguistic behaviour in giving highly contextual messages in interactions, in this case, refusing an invitation. Thus, Jordanians being used of this type of affective communication style feeling more comfortable with being indirect, vagueness and ambiguity and do not seem to feel they

have to provide as many of the details about their lives in general and in their giving the explanations in particular.

CONCLUSION

The current study adds to our knowledge about the production of refusal in two different cultures with two different languages as well, namely Jordanians and Americans. It also contributes to our understanding of how speech acts in general and the speech act of refusal in particular represent deeply rooted cultural orientation and the social norms of people with different cultural backgrounds. The differences raised because of the influence of high and low-context communication styles on the production of refusal strategies could be serious and lead to misunderstanding or communication breakdowns between Jordanians and Americans. Hence, results of the current study would be useful for designers of Arabic and English language curricula and for those who are teaching and learning Arabic and English as second/foreign languages. In addition, a good understanding of the inter-cultural awareness would be useful for people working in tourism and hospitality, especially for those who have direct contact with tourists such as staffs in customer service, administrative and management positions.

The findings of this study would enrich the production studies of refusal in the

field of inter-cultural awareness. It is also useful in understanding the inter-cultural and communication awareness and would add empirical findings with regards to the production of refusal by Jordanian Arabic and American English in relation to high and low-context communication styles.

Finally, although the present study provides evidence on the impact of high and low-context communication styles on the way Jordanian Arabic and American English produce the act of refusal, it has some limitations that need to be recognized. One of these limitations appears in the instrument of data collection (DCT) compared to the data collected from natural contexts. Yuan (2001) noticed that the responses of DCT were shorter, simpler, less emotional, and less face-attentive. In addition, the use of only one instrument to collect data would not be enough to highlight every phase of participants' refusal response. Rose and Ono (1995) insisted that it was unexpected to obtain all the needed insights of speech acts by means of only one data collection instrument. However, the DCT situations would allow researchers to control many variables, hence possibly decreasing the validity of the findings. In future research, researchers are highly recommended to replicate the present study using different data collection techniques including ethnographic technique, analysing discourse, videotaping, and role plays.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article, but we are grateful to *Zeyad Al-Daher* and *Adnan Abumahfouz* for helping to code and analyze the data, and to *Ala'a Bani Khalef* for his thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Al Qunayeer, H. S. (2019). Refusal strategies in L1 and L2 among undergraduate Saudi EFL learners. *International Journal of English and Education*, 8(4), 145-172.
- Al-Eryani, A. A. (2007). Refusal strategies by Yemeni EFL learners. *The Asian EFL Journal*, 9(2), 19-34.
- Al-Issa, A. (1998). *Sociopragmatic transfer in the performance of refusals by Jordanian EFL learners: Evidence and motivating factors* (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation), Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA.
- Al-Kahtani, S. A. W. (2005). Refusals realizations in three different cultures: A speech act theoretically-based cross-cultural study. *Journal of King Saud University*, 18, 35-57.
- Al-Shalawi, H. (1997). *Refusal strategies in Saudi and American culture* (Unpublished Master's thesis), Michigan University, USA.
- Al-Shboul, Y., & Huwari, I. (2016). A comparative study of Jordanian Arabic and American English Refusal Strategies. *British Journal of English Linguistics*, 4(3), 50-62.
- Beebe, L. M., & Cummings, M. C. (1995). Natural speech act data versus written questionnaire data: How data collection method affects speech act performance. In S. M. Gass & J. Neu (Eds.),

- Speech acts across cultures: Challenges to communication in a second language* (pp. 65-86). New York, USA: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Beebe, L. M., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals. In R. C. Scarcella, E. S. Anderson, & S. D. Krashen (Eds.), *Developing communicative competence in a second language* (pp. 55-94). New York, USA: Newbury House.
- Blum-Kulka, S., & House, J. (1989). Cross-cultural and situational variation in requesting behavior. In S. BlumKulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies* (pp. 123-154). Norwood, USA: Ablex.
- Brown, P., & Levinson S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge, England; New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, H. (1996). *Cross-cultural comparison of English and Chinese metapragmatics in refusal* (Doctoral dissertation), Indiana University, USA.
- Cohen, A. D. (1996). Developing the ability to perform speech acts. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18, 253-267.
- Culpeper, J. (1996). Towards an anatomy of impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 25(3), 349-367.
- Çiftçi, H. (2016). Refusal strategies in Turkish and English: A cross-cultural study. *ELT Research Journal*, 5(1), 2-29.
- Dilnoza, A., & Nurmaxamatovna. (2019). The effects of verbal and non-verbal cues in multimedia. *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering*, 8(9), 753-756.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). *Culture and interpersonal communication*. Newbury Park, USA: Sage.
- Hall, E. T. (1959). *The silent language*. Garden City, USA: Doubleday
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. New York, USA: Doubleday.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. London: McGraw-Hill.
- Huwari, I. F., & Al-Shboul, Y. (2015). A study on the perception of Jordanian EFL learners' pragmatic transfer of refusals. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6(1), 46-54.
- Jasim, M. T. (2017). *Refusals of requests and offers in Iraqi Arabic and British English* (Unpublished Doctoral thesis), The University of Manchester, England.
- Johnson, A. (2014). The pragmatics of expressing refusals in German and American English. *Kwansei Gakuin University Humanities Review*, 18, 105-125.
- Mahajan, R. (2015). The key role of communication skills in the life of professionals. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20(12), 36-39.
- Nelson, G., Al Batal, M., & El Bakary, W. (2002). Directness vs. indirectness: Egyptian Arabic and US English communication style. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 26(1), 39-57.
- Rezvani, M., Ismael, D. A., & Tok, S. (2017). Speech act of refusal among English Language Teaching students. *International Journal of Research in Teacher Education*, 8(2), 1-11.
- Rose, K. R., & Ono, R. (1995). Eliciting speech act data in Japanese: The effect of questionnaire type. *Language Learning*, 45(2), 191-223.
- Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., & Stefani, L. A. (1998). *Communication Between Cultures*. Belmont, USA: Wadsworth.
- Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4, 91-112.
- Yuan, Y. (2001). An inquiry into empirical pragmatics data-gathering methods: Written DCTs, oral DCTs, field notes, and natural conversations. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33(2), 271-292.