Refusal Strategies Used by Iraqi EFL University Students

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1 Introduction

According to Richards and Schmidt (2002), speech acts that have been introduced first by Austin in 1962, are utterances that are treated as functional units in communication. Speakers use different speech acts to reach their communicative aims. Speech acts are broadly classified into:

1-Commissive (speech acts that are related to doing something in the future, like promises or threats (Abdul Sattar et al. 2011))
2- Declarations like the sentence "*I now announce you man and wife.*"
3- Directives (such as suggestions, requests, or commands)
4- Expressives (such as apologies, complaints, thanks, and congratulations)
5- Representatives (such as assertions, claims and reports) (ibid.)

A refusal is a response of rejection to a suggestion, a request, an invitation, an offer, or a command. Actually, refusal occurs in all languages and plays a significant role in everyday life communication, but it is difficult to reject appropriately specially in a foreign language because rejection does not only involve linguistic competence but also pragmatic one and realization of the culture peculiar to that language. When the intended meaning is not clear in the utterance, it causes misperception and miscommunication for the EFL learners of English (Kitzinger and Frith, 1999; Umale n.d.).

Refusal is a problematic issue because it is a face threating act that may offend the relationship between the addresser and the addressee, since it contradicts the interlocutor's prediction about the hearer. The refuser may resort to interlingual transfer strategy i.e. s/he transfers the rules and culture of his/her source language to the target one resulting in pragmatic failure or impolite response that may cause break down even in interethnic communication (ibid.).

Brown and Levinson (1987) state that refusals are related to the category of commissives because the person who wants to reject will not act promptly to the action (Searle 1977, cited in Abdul Sattar et al. 2011). From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, refusals are fundamental because the person who wants to refuse must put into his consideration the social variables like sex, age, social distance, educational rank and power (Brown and Levinson, 1987). As such, Kasper (1984: 3) stresses that:

"Learners first have to recognize the extra-linguistic, cultural constraints that operate in a native speaker's choice of a particular speech act appropriate to the context. They also have to know how to realize this speech act at the linguistic level and in accordance with second language sociocultural norms."

Actually, Cohen (1996: 254) terms this "Sociocultural knowledge" as "speakers ability to determine whether it is acceptable to perform the speech act at all in the given situation and, so far, to select one or more semantic formulae that would be appropriate in the realization of the given speech act."

This study tries to answer the following questions:

1) What are the refusal strategies that Iraqi EFL university students employ suggestions, requests, offers, and invitations?
2) What are the most frequent combinations of refusal strategies that are used by them?
3) With which status do they use more strategies in rejection?
4) Do they employ inappropriate refusal strategies?

2 Previous Studies:

After Austin (1962) has introduced the term speech acts, many scholars write about this subject. Beebe et al. (1985) make a study on refusals between Japanese and American. They find that Japanese learners of English transfer the socio-culture of their mother tongue language into the foreign one. They also make another study in 1990 on three groups of people: Japanese learners of English, native speakers of Japanese and American native speakers of English. They find that the Americans use indirect strategies in refusals, while the Japanese employ indirect strategies when they respond to lower status addresser and they use direct strategies when they refuse the demands of people of lower status. The Americans use brief refusal expressions when they talk to higher or lower-status people, whereas they use long and elaborate expressions when they talk to people of equal status.

King and Silver (1993) make a study on the refusal strategies and tried to develop the sociolinguistic competence of the sample in using refusals through lectures but the lectures do not have much influence.

Stevens (1993) studies refusals in English and Arabic. He finds that both cultures use the same strategies, but he does not refer to status.

Hussein (1995) investigates the speech act of refusal of Arabs and finds that they use indirect refusal.

Al Shawali (1997) finds that the Saudi and American speakers of English at their undergraduate levels use analogues refusal formulas.

Another study is conducted by Nelson et al. (2002) and they find that similar semantic formulas in refusals. They find that Egyptians are more direct in equal status situations. In addition, they give similar excuses in their refusals.

Al-Issa (2003) finds that Jordanians use indirect strategies more than Americans and both them use excuses heavily.

Some of other studies like Umar (2004), Al-Kahtani (2005), Felix-Brasdefer(2006) Nguyen (2006), and Al-Eryani (2007) highlight the importance of the notion of refusal and show that it is controlled by a set of cultural specific rules.

Umale (n.d.) identifies that the Omanis employ more direct strategies than the British in refusing requests and offers. Both of them employ indirect strategies to refuse requests when they are concerned with higher status people.

As a matter of fact, many different studies have been conducted on refusal, but to my simple knowledge, no study has been done on the Iraqi EFL learners in terms of refusals' patterns of strategies.

3 Strategies of Refusals

Generally there are two types of strategies used by the refuser. The first is the direct strategy. Most of the studies that investigate this area show that this strategy of refusal is used rarely by interlocutors because it is sometimes face-threatening and it may break the relationship between the two people engaged in a conversation. On the other hand, the indirect one is used intensively by the interlocutors because it is considered more polite than the direct one and it is used heavily so as to preserve the relationship between the addresser and the addressee.

3.1 Direct

Direct strategies are those achieved when responding , using expressions like *no*, *I can't*, *can't be done/ allowed*, *don't*, *forget it*, *I refuse*, *I object*, viz. they are done through using denying vocabularies or statements that show reluctance or inability (Beebe et al. 1990).

3.2 Indirect

1- Excuse, reason, or explanation: e.g. *I'm busy. I still have some things to do.*
2- Regret: e.g. *I'm sorry. I feel embarrassed.* (Umale, n.d.)
3- Wish: *I wish I could, I wish I had money. I wish I can do it.* (Ibid.)
4- Statement of philosophy: *Accidents happen. Excuse is worse than the sin.* (Abdul Sattar et al. 2011).
5- Statement of principle: *I don't like lazy students who like easy-notes taking. I never lend money. I believe that what I do is correct.* (Umale n.d.).
6- Future or past acceptance: *I can help you tomorrow after final exam. If the work is complete. You may go tomorrow.*(Abdul Sattar et al. 2011)
7- Alternative: *I'll find somebody to help you carrying your things. Let me do it. You can do come tomorrow.* (Ibid.).
8- Avoidance (hedging):
A. Non-verbal: silence, hesitation, physical departure.
B. Verbal: topic switch, joke, hedge, e.g. *Let me try it but I cannot guarantee anything. I'm not sure…* (Sadeghi and Savojbolaghchilar 2011).
9- Repetition of part of the request: e.g. *Borrow my notes?, Malaysia?* (Umale, n.d.).
10- Acceptance that functions as a refusal: e.g. *We will think over your requests.*
11- Mitigated refusal: I don't think it is possible: e.g. *I wouldn't be able to attend.* (Abdul Sattar et al. 2011).
12- Dissuade: Sadeghi and Savojbolaghchilar (2011) suggest the following strategies:
a. Threat, or statement of negative consequences to the requester: e.g. *Do you know how many people are waiting for job opportunities*
b. Criticize the requester: e.g. *Who do you think you are?*

c. Request for help, empathy or assistance by dropping or holding the request: e.g. *I'll try to think about it.*
d. Let the interlocutor off the hook: e.g. *Don't worry. It is okay. You don't have to.*

3.3 Adjuncts

As indicated by Sadeghi and Savojbolaghchilar (2011), adjuncts are the third category of refusals used by interlocutors. Adjuncts are expressions that are associated with refusals but do not convey refusals alone. They have the following subcategories:
1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement: e.g. *It is good but … I would like to go but…*
2. State of empathy or understanding: e.g. *I realize that you are in a difficult situation.*
3. Pause fillers: e.g. *Uhh. Well,*
4. Gratitude or appreciation: e.g. *Thanks. I appreciate the offer…*
5. Statement of caution: e.g. *You'd better be careful.*

4 Related Topics

4.1 Negation

It is a "process or construction in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the construction of some of all of a sentence's meaning." (Crystal 2003: 310). It can be achieved either by the use of *not*, or the use of prefixes such as *un-*, *non-,* or words like *deny*, *reject*, *refuse*, etc. Additionally, expressions like *never*, are used to express negation, e.g. *Although he lived quite close, he never visits us*. (Richards and Schmidt 2002: 354). Also, *nor* and *impossible*, etc. are used in negations (Levinson 1997: 163).

There are some pronouns that are called negative pronouns which are used for the purpose of negation. These are like *no*, *nobody*, *no one*, *none*, *neither*, *nothing*. In addition, some implied negatives like *just*, *before, fail, prevent*, *reluctant*, *hard*, *difficult* are used for negation. Also, adverbs and determiners (negators like *hardly*, *little*, *few*, *only*, *seldom*, *rarely*, *scarcely*, etc.) are used to express negation (Quirk et al. 1985:390).

4.2 Request

As defined by Mey (2009), request is seen as the speaker's wish that the hearer acts in a particular way. He adds that requests are not licensed by the right obtained by the individual as part of an institution but by the hearer previous interaction experience.

Yang (2008) indicates that strategies like excuses, reasons, or explanations, alternatives in addition to trying to dissuade are used by the addressee in an attempt to refuse the request of the addresser. Apologies in addition to excuses are used most of the time by some communities so as not to embarrass the requester. Sorrow is sometimes used in refusing request in the Iranian community, while the excuses are used heavily by the Americans in refusing requests. Sometimes, showing or expressing regret, by saying "*I'm sorry*" in addition to giving excuses or explanations is a common strategy used by people in the Malay culture (Abdul Sattar et al. 2011). Although direct refusals to request are not preferable by speakers, they are used more frequently by Omanis Umale (n.d.).

4.3 Suggestion

Suggestion is one type of speech act in which the speaker "indicates his desire for the hearer to consider the merits of the state of affairs expressed by the proposition" (Fraser, cited in Flöck (n.d.)). Suggestion is the proposition made by the speaker who requires the listener to act in a particular way (ibid.). According to Sadeghi and Savojbolaghchilar (2011), there are two types of suggestions: solicited and unsolicited suggestions. In the solicited suggestion, the speaker yields his suggestion according to the need of the listener. For example, a graduate asks for advisor's suggestions about his/her paper. The unsolicited suggestion does not include request from the listener. Usually, unsolicited suggestions occur between acquaintances, thus, careful use of the form of the address is essential in preserving face in refusing such suggestion (ibid.).

Actually another classification of suggestion is suggested by Fraser (1974). These are suggesting proper, imploring, recommending, and advising. Flöck (n.d.) indicates conditions that should be available for a suggestion to be considered so. They are as follows:

1- The addresser wants the addressee to take into consideration the proposed action.
2- Both of them realize that the hearer is not forced to do the action proposed.
3- The suggestion is for the benefit of the hearer (as realized by the speaker).
4- The addresser may or may not be included in the action proposed.

Here are some examples of suggestions by (Leech and Svartvik 1994:168):

*I **suggest** they take the night train.*
*You **can** read these two chapters before tomorrow (if you like).*
*You **could** be cleaning the office while I'm away.*
***Shall** we listen to some music?*
Why don't you call on me tomorrow? (Ibid.)
Could and ***might*** refer to temporary suggestion. Examples of a suggestion involving the speaker are (ibid.):

I suggest we go to bed early and make an early start tomorrow.
You might have a look at this book.
Let's not waste time.
How about a game of cards?
What about having a drink? (Ibid.)

4.4 Offer

Offers are the questions that are arised by the speaker to satisfy the wishes of the hearer. The hearer has the right to accept or refuse the offers directed to him. Some types of offers are: gift offer, favour offer, food/drink offer, opportunity/job offer (Sadeghi and Savojbolaghchilar 2011).

Swan (2003:545) contends that when you want to offer to do something for people, one can use the formula.

Would you like me to mail these letters?

Can I carry your bags upstairs? (Leech and Svartvik 1994:175)
May I …? (Swan 2003)
Would you like another helping of turkey? (Leech and Svartvik 1994:175)

Typical answers for such questions are as follows (Leech and Svartvik 1994: 175):

Yes, please. (acceptance)
No, thank you. (refusal)
Yes, please. That is very kind of you.
Yes, thank you. I'd love some more. (ibid.)

It is noticed that *'thank you'* is used in either accepting or refusing an offer (Swan 2003).

4.5 Invitation

Invitation is an illocutionary speech act, which is supposed to be essentially a face-enhancing act for the addressee (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1997: 14), as the addresser intends to give a chance to the hearer to enjoy or gain something or even do something for his own sake (Suzuki 2008).

Some instances of invitations are:

Come in and sit down.
Would you like to come with me?
How would you like to come and spend a week with us next year?
May I invite you to dinner next Saturday? (formal, polite invitation) (Leech and Svartvik 1994: 176)

There are several replies to invitations, some common ones are:

Thank you very much. That would be very nice. (acceptance)
Sorry. I'm afraid I'm not free. (regret+ excuse) (Swan 2003: 545)

5 Participants

A discourse completion test (henceforth DCT) is given to forty Iraqi EFL university students at their third year, Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon. The average of their ages is between 20 to 21. The excuse behind their choice is that they are at advanced stage and they have dealt with this topic previously.

6 Test

The test of the present study encompasses twelve items (see Appendix II). The first three items measure how Iraqi EFL university students refuse the requests of other people. The second three items measure how students reject the invitations of others. The third three items exhibit how the participants refuse the suggestions of others, whereas the last three items indicate how the participants reject the offers of others.

Situations (1, 4, 7, and 10) illustrate how subjects refuse the offer, the request, the invitation, or the suggestion of the people of equal status, while situations (2, 5, 8, and 11) exhibits how the participants reject the request, the invitation, the suggestion or the offer of people of higher rank. Lastly, situations (3, 6, 9, and 12) show how the participants reject the request, the invitation, the suggestion or the offer of individuals of lower level.

The items of the tests are taken from Umale's study (n.d.). Some modifications are undergone some items of the tests to suit the culture and the level of the participants.

7 Data Analysis

In this section, the results of the test are analyzed in order to find out the strategies that Iraqi EFL learners manipulate when they reject requests, invitations, suggestions, and offers of people of different ranks. Here are the strategies of rejection that the participants have used in general with some examples from the subjects' reponses:

1- Acceptance that functions as a refusal: e.g. *"I'll think about it later on."*
2- Addressing terms: e.g. *"Sir"*, *"Professor"*, and *"father"*
3- Advice: e.g. *"You would better complete first…."*
4- Agreement: e.g. *"I agree with you but…."*
5- Apology: e.g. *"I'm sorry"*
6- Asking for empathy: e.g. *"Please, understand me."*
7- Begging: e.g. *"Please"*, *"Pardon me"*, and *"Excuse me"*
8- Command: e.g. *"You must stay…."*
9- Complaining: e.g. *"I have been waiting for a long time."*
10- Criticism: e.g. *"You spent your money buying silly things."*
11- Dismiss the speaker: e.g. *"Leave me alone."*
12- Disrespect: e.g. *"This is not my problem."*
13- Excuse: e.g. *"I don't have the amount of money you need right now."*
14- Intensified apology: e.g. *"I'm so sorry."* and *"I'm terribly sorry"*
15- Intensified refusal: e.g. *"No, I will not come."*, *"No, I will not."*, and *"Of course I can't."*
16- Let the interlocutor off the hook: e.g. *"Don't bother yourself."*
17- Mitigated refusal: e.g. *"I'm afraid I can't."* and *"I'm not sure."*
18- Negative ability: e.g. *"I cannot"* and *"I could not"*
19- Negative willingness: e.g. *"I don't like to go to Malaysia."* *"I don't want to be a scientist."*
20- No/Direct refusal: e.g. *"No, I don't think so."*
21- Pause filler/ Interjection: e.g. *"Oh!"*, *"Well!"*, and *"See!"*
22- Positive opinion: e.g. *"It is a good idea…."*
23- Positive willingness: e.g. *"I would like to but…."*
24- Postponing: e.g. *"I can help you next weekend."*
25- Praising the speaker: e.g. *"That is nice of you."*
26- Principle: e.g. *"I like studying more than playing football."*
27- Prolonged excuse: e.g. *"I have a big problem with my friend and I will meet him tomorrow to discuss the matter so, please, forgive me."*
28- Question: e.g. *"Can you change the date?"* and *"Can you go later?"*
29- Rhetorical question: e.g. *"What can I do?"* and *"Don't you see me thinking?"*

30- Thank: e.g. *"Thank you very much"*.
31- Threatening: e.g. *"You have to stay or you will be punished."*
32- Unspecified excuse: e.g. *"I'm busy this weekend."*
33- Wish: e.g. *"I wish I could."*

Table (1)
Participants' Performance in Refusing Requests

Strategies	Situation 1 Equal		Situation 2 Higher		Situation 3 Lower	
Apology	25	62.5%	17	42.5%	7	17.5%
Excuse	33	82.5%	14	35%	18	45%
Negative ability	17	42.5%	14	35%	6	15%
Intensified apology	2	5%	12	30%	1	2.5%
Unspecified excuse	1	2.5%	22	55%	1	2.5%
Addressing words	2	5%	12	30%	1	2.5%
Prolonged excuse	2	5%	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Intensified refusal	-	-	1	2.5%	22	55%
No	6	15%	1	2.5%	28	70%
Criticism	2	5%	-	-	1	2.5%
Wish	2	5%	8	20%	-	-
Postponing	-	-	2	5%	-	-
Pause filler/ interjection	3	7.5%	2	5%	1	2.5%
Advice	1	2.5%	-	-	2	5%
Begging	-	-	3	7.5%	-	-
Command	-	-	-	-	-	2.5%
Question	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Mitigated refusal	1	2.5	-	-	1	2.5%
Threatening	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Disrespect	1	2.5	-	-	-	-
Total	98	32.7%	109	36.3%	93	31%

It is clear from table (1) that Iraqi EFL learners employ 20 strategies and rely heavily on *apology*, *excuse*, *negative ability*, *unspecified excuse*, *no*, and *intensified refusal* when they refuse the requests of other people. Iraqi EFL learners care more about people of higher status (36.3%).

Table (2)
Strategies Used by Participants in Refusing Invitations

Strategies	Situation 4 Equal		Situation 5 Higher		Situation 6 Lower	
Apology	21	52.5%	16	40%	18	45%
Excuse	22	55%	24	60%	21	52.5%
Negative ability	25	62.5%	23	57.5%	22	55%
Intensified apology	2	5%	7	17.5%	-	-
Unspecified excuse	12	30%	7	17.5%	11	27.5%
Addressing terms	1	2.5%	9	22.5%	3	7.5%
Prolonged excuse	3	7.5%	5	12.5%	6	15%
Intensified refusal	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No	3	7.5%	4	10%	4	10%
Criticism	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wish	6	15%	9	22.5%	5	12.5%
Pause filler/ interjection	5	12.5%	4	10%	4	10%
Rhetorical Question	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Question	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Mitigated refusal	4	10%	2	5%	-	-
Let the interlocutor off the hook	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Praising the speaker	3	7.5%	4	10%	2	5%
Thank	2	5%	2	5%	5	12.5%
Positive opinion	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Positive willingness	2	5%	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Total	112	33%	119	36%	104	31%

From table (2), Iraqi EFL university students use 20 strategies and employ greatly *apology*, *excuse*, and *negative ability*, when they reject the invitations of others. Also, they care more about people of higher rank.

Table (3)
Strategies Used by Participants in Refusing Suggestions

Strategies	Situation 7 Equal		Situation 8 Higher		Situation 9 Lower	
Apology	5	12.5%	4	10%	5	12.5%
Excuse	20	50%	22	55%	19	47.5%
Negative ability	25	62.5%	17	42.5	24	60%
Intensified apology	1	2.5%	2	5%	2	5%
Unspecified excuse	5	12.5%	1	2.5%	3	7.5%
Intensified refusal	2	5%	6	15%	1	2.5%
Prolonged excuse	2	5%	5	12.5%	-	-
Command	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
No/ direct refusal	13	32.5%	10	25%	14	35%
Criticism	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Wish	3	7.5%	5	12.5%	-	-
Pause filler/ interjection	-	-	4	10%	6	15%
Begging	1	2.5%	2	5%	1	2.5%
Negative willingness	2	5%	2	5%	1	2.5%
Addressing word	-	-	3	7.5%	-	-
Rhetorical Question	2	5%	-	-	-	-
Asking for empathy	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Mitigated refusal	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Acceptance that functions as a refusal	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Thank	-	-	1	2.5%	6	15%
Positive opinion	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Dismiss the speaker	2	5%	-	-	-	-
Agreement	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Principle	-	-	9	22.5%	-	-
Complaining	-	-	-	-	2	5%
Alternative	1	2.5%	-	-	5	12.5%
Total	89	32.4%	96	34.9%	90	32.7

Table (3) exhibits that Iraqi EFL learners employ 26 categories. The following strategies are widely used with suggestions: *excuse*, *negative ability*, and *no/direct refusal*. As shown in the total, they pay more attention to individuals of higher level.

Table (4)
Strategies Used by Participants in Refusing Offers

Strategies	Situation 10 Equal		Situation 11 Higher		Situation 12 Lower	
Apology	1	2.5%	5	12.5%	2	5%
Excuse	15	37.5%	16	40%	2	5%
Negative ability	5	12.5%	13	32.5%	3	7.5%
Intensified apology	2	5%	-	-	1	2.5%
Unspecified excuse	-	-	-	-	2	5%
Intensified refusal	5	12.5%	3	7.5%	2	5%
No	20	50%	18	45%	22	55%
Criticism	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Wish	2	5%	2	5%	-	-
Pause filler/ interjection	-	-	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Begging	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
Negative willingness	-	-	4	10%	2	5%
Addressing word	2	5%	2	5%	-	-
Mitigated refusal	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
Let the interlocutor off the hook	4	10%	-	-	24	60%
Praising the speaker	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
Thank	9	22.5%	13	32.5%	4	10%
Positive ability	2	5%	3	7.5%	-	-
Positive willingness	2	5%	-	-	-	-
Principle	5	12.5%	-	-	-	-
Consideration of the interlocutor's feeling	1	2.5%	-	-	1	2.5%
Alternative	10	25%	3	7.5%	15	37.5%
Total	88	34.4%	86	33.6%	82	32%

Table (4) illustrates that Iraqi EFL university students use 22 sorts of refusal with offers. The most of which are: *excuse*, *negative ability*, *no*, *let the interlocutor off the hook*, *thank* and *alternative*.

With the exception of invitations, they use *no* heavily with all ranks ignoring its effect on others.

Some of the strategies are used with requests, invitations, suggestions, and offers, while others are used with one of them only or more than one of them. For instance, *postponing*, *advice*, *threatening*, and *disrespect* are used with requests, whereas *asking for empathy*, *acceptance that functions as a refusal*, *dismiss the speaker*, *agreement* and *complaining* are used with suggestions, while *consideration of the interlocutor's feeling* is used with offers. As for invitations, there are no new strategies used with them.

Table (5)
Iraqi EFL University Students' Performance according to Status

	Equal		Higher		Lower	
Requests	98	32.7%	109	36.3%	93	31%
Invitations	112	33%	119	36%	104	31%
Suggestions	89	32.4%	96	34.9%	90	32.7
Offers	88	34.4%	86	33.6%	82	32%
Total	387	31.6%	410	35.2%	369	33.2%

It is explicit from table (5) that there are slight differences among the three statuses, but Iraqi EFL university students show more consideration to people of higher position (35.2%).

Table (6) (see Appendix I) displays the most frequent formulae in requests which are: *apology+ excuse*, *apology+ unspecified excuse, no+ excuse*, *no+ intensified refusal*, and *apology + negative ability*. It is explicit from table (7) that the four formulae which are used greatly by the subjects in refusing invitations are: *apology+ negative ability+ excuse*, *wish+ excuse*, *negative ability+ excuse*, and *apology+ negative ability*. As for table (8), the most frequent formulae in rejecting suggestions are: *no + negative ability + excuse*, *negative ability+ excuse*, *apology+ negative ability+ excuse*. Lastly, table (9) presents the most usable formulae in refusing offers. They are: *no + let the interlocutor off the hook*, and *no + thank*. Hence, the most recurred patterns of rejection are used with requests.

Table (10)
The Most Frequent Responses Used by Iraqi EFL University Students

Categories	Frequency	%
Apology + negative ability + excuse	27	67.5%
Negative ability + excuse	24	60%
Apology + excuse	17	42.5%
Apology + negative ability	13	32.5%
No + negative ability + excuse	11	27.5%
Wish + excuse	11	27.5%
No + let the interlocutor off the hook	9	22.5%
No + intensified refusal	9	22.5%
Apology + unspecified excuse	7	17.5%
No + alternative	7	17.5%
No + excuse	6	15%
Let the interlocutor off the hook	5	12.5%
Intensified refusal + excuse	5	12.5%
No + negative ability	5	12.5%
No + thank	5	12.5%
Wish + unspecified excuse	4	10%
Pause filler + negative ability + excuse	4	10%
Intensified apology + unspecified excuse	3	7.5%
Negative ability + principle	3	7.5%
Negative ability + unspecified excuse	3	7.5%
No + negative ability + unspecified excuse	3	7.5%
No/direct refusal	3	7.5%
Apology + negative ability + unspecified excuse	2	5%
Apology + wish + excuse	2	5%
Direct refusal (no) + thank + alternative	2	5%
Excuse	2	5%
Intensified apology + negative ability	2	5%
Intensifying apology + addressing word + unspecified excuse	2	5%
Mitigated refusal	2	5%
Negative ability	2	5%
No + excuse	2	5%
No + negative ability + alternative	2	5%
No + positive ability	2	5%
No + principle	2	5%
No + thank + negative willingness	2	5%
No + thank + reason	2	5%
Pause filler + apology + addressing word + negative ability	2	5%
Pause filler + wish + excuse	2	5%
Thank + excuse	2	5%
Wish + excuse + postpone	2	5%
Wish + negative ability	2	5%

Total	222	60%

Apology+ negative ability+ excuse, *negative ability+ excuse*, *apology+ excuse*, *apology+ negative ability*, *no+ negative ability+ excuse*, *wish+ excuse*, *no+ let the interlocutor off the hook*, *no+ intensified refusal*, *apology+ unspecified excuse*, and *no+ alternative* are the most frequently employed combinations of strategies in refusal. The total number of the combinations of strategies is 370. There are 222 (60%) repeatedly used combinations.

It is worth mentioning that there are two factors that affect subject's performance in rejection:

7.1 Interlingual Transfer

This type of error happens owing to the effect of the learners' first language into the foreign one. There are two sorts of this transfer: (i) *positive transfer* occurs when the source language facilitates the learning of the target one, (ii) *negative transfer* happens when the native language affects the learning of the foreign one (Brown, 2001: 65-6; AbiSamra, 2003: 8).

In the light of a similar study which Al Tai (2012) has made on the Iraqi native speakers of Arabic, it is unearthed that Iraqi EFL learners transfer some of the refusal strategies from Arabic into English as both subjects use *apology*, *excuse*, and *negative ability* heavily with requests and invitations and they use the combination: *apology+ negative ability+ excuse*, while with suggestions they use *excuse*, and *negative ability* greatly. Additionally, they use *excuse*, *negative ability*, *no*, *let the interlocutor off the hook*, and *thank* with offers. Their responses show that they pay more attention to people of higher level and this reflects the effect of their society on their answers.

7.2 Context of Learning:

Errors may arise from the effect of the situation of learning, the delusive explanation by the instructor, or the textbook designer who concentrates on some aspects of the target language and neglects others, according to his own beliefs and experiences. All of these factors may encourage EFL learners to make faulty hypotheses about the language (Richards, 1974:178).

As for Iraqi EFL learners, they have studied such a topic previously, but they are not instructed how to refuse the request of people of higher, equal, or lower status. Besides, their textbooks focus on structure rather than pragmatics. Furthermore, they employ *no* widely with all statuses without feeling its effect on others. The repeated combinations of strategies (222, 60%) are more than the single ones (148, 40%). This reflects the fact that they encounter difficulties when they express refusal owing to the context of learning.

8 Conclusion

1- The researcher finds that Iraqi EFL learners use 33 strategies in refusing requests, invitations, suggestions, and offers. Most of which are employed with suggestions. Besides, some of the strategies are used with requests, invitations, suggestions, and offers, while others are found only with one or two of them.

2- The most frequent formulae are: *apology+ excuse*, *apology+ unspecified excuse, no+ intensified refusal*, and *apology+ negative ability*, *apology+ negative ability+ excuse*, *wish+ excuse*, and *negative ability+ excuse*. Hence, the most recurred patterns of rejection are used with requests. In addition, the recurrent combinations of categories (222, 60%) are more than those that occur only once (148, 40%).

3- There are slight differences in the informants' responses to people according to their statuses but, in general, they employ more strategies with people of higher status because Iraqi society traditions require showing more respect to people of higher rank.

4- Sometimes, Iraqi EFL learners resort to pragmatic transfer in some of the strategies they use. They transfer some of the Iraqi refusal patterns into English, i.e. *apology*, *excuse*, and *negative ability* are heavily used with requests and invitations and they use the combination: *apology+ negative ability+ excuse* with requests and invitations, while with suggestions they employ *excuse*, and *negative ability* greatly. Additionally, they use *excuse*, *negative ability*, *no*, *let the interlocutor off the hook*, and *thank* with offers.

5- The topic of refusal is important in discourse and should be studied and focused on comprehensively in the Iraqi EFL learners' textbooks. In lieu of concentrating on structure, Iraqi EFL university students must learn rejection from a pragmatic standpoint. An illustration of their incompetent use of refusal strategies is the use of *no* greatly with all statuses. This reflects the fact that they are unaware of the danger of this formula because saying *no* may break down the relation between the speaker and the listener.

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Appendix I
Table (6)
Participants' Combination of Strategies in Rejecting Requests

Semantic Formulae of Requests	Situation 1 Equal		Situation 2 Higher		Situation 3 Lower	
Apology + excuse	12	30%	-	-	-	-
Apology + unspecified excuse	-	-	5	12.5%	-	-
Intensified apology + negative ability	-	-	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Apology + excuse + addressing word	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Apology + prolonged excuse	-	-	1	2.5%		
Intensified refusal + excuse	-	-			1	2.5%
Apology + negative ability + excuse	2	5%	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Apology + negative ability	3	7.5%	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
No + excuse	3	7.5%	-	-	3	7.5%
Negative ability + excuse + criticism	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Wish + excuse + postpone	-	-	2	5%	-	-
Apology + wish + excuse	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
Addressing word + negative ability + excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Wish + unspecified excuse	-	-	4	10%	-	-
No/direct refusal	-	-	-	-	3	7.5%
Wish +excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Apology + direct refusal + excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5
Negative ability + excuse	3	7.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
No+ negative ability	2	5%			-	-
Apology +addressing word + excuse + negative ability + intensified apology	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No/direct refusal+ criticism+ excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Pause filler + apology + addressing word + negative ability	-	-	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Negative ability + criticism	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Intensified refusal + excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%

Pause filler + intensified apology + unspecified excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Advice	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Apology + addressing word + negative ability+ unspecified excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Apology + negative ability + excuse	3	7.5%	-	-	1	2.5%
No + intensified refusal + excuse	-	-	-	-	3	7.5%
Intensified apology+ unspecified excuse	-	-	3	7.5%	-	-
No+ intensified refusal + intensified refusal	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No + intensified refusal	-	-	-	-	7	17.5%
Excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	1	2.5%
Intensified refusal +excuse			-	-	2	5%
Apology + negative ability + unspecified excuse	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
Apology + prolonged explanation + advice	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
No +intensified refusal + prolonged explanation	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No +negative ability + advice	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Intensified apology + addressing word + excuse + negative ability	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
No + negative ability + prolonged explanation	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Begging + negative ability+ excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Apology + addressing word+ unspecified excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Apology + addressing word+ negative ability	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Begging +addressing word + negative ability +apology	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + negative ability + excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Intensified refusal + unspecified excuse + apology	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Intensifying apology+	-	-	2	5%	-	-

addressing word + unspecified excuse					
Pause filler+ apology + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Apology + addressing word + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + command	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Question + excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Apology + unspecified excuse	-	-	2	5%	-	-
Negative ability + unspecified excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Pause filler +mitigated refusal	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Pause filler +mitigated refusal + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Intensified apology + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Begging + addressing word+ negative ability +excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Intensified refusal	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No + intensified refusal+ threatening	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Disrespect	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-

Table (7)
Participants' Combination of Strategies in Rejecting Invitations

Semantic Formulae of Invitations	Situation 4 Equal		Situation 5 Higher		Situation 6 Lower	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No+ Unspecified excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Intensified apology+ Addressing word	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Let the interlocutor off the hook+ excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Willingness (praise) + pause fillers + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Praise + apology + unspecified excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Pause filler + wish +unspecified excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Thank + apology + unspecified excuse+	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-

Semantic Formulae	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
negative ability						
No + apology + unspecified excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Apology + negative ability+ excuse	4	10%	2	5%	6	15%
Apology + pause filler	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Pause filler + negative ability + excuse	2	5%	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Wish + negative ability	-	-	2	5%	-	-
Apology + negative ability	2	5%	2	5%	1	2.5%
Pause filler + wish + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	1	2.5%
Pause filler + addressing word + wish + excuse + negative ability	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Wish + excuse	1	2.5%	2	5%	3	7.5%
Pause filler+ addressing word + rhetorical question +prolonged apology +wish + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Apology+ excuse + negative ability + intensified apology	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Positive willingness + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Negative ability + excuse	2	5%	3	7.5%	3	7.5%
No + apology + negative ability + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + addressing word + negative ability + apology	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Apology + excuse	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Apology + wish + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Apology + direct refusal + negative ability	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-

Table (8)
Participants' Combination of Strategies in Rejecting Suggestions

Semantic Formulae of Suggestions	Situation 7 Equal		Situation 8 Higher		Situation 9 Lower	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%

No+ negative ability + unspecified excuse	3	7.5%	-	-	-	-
Intensified apology+ excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Apology + negative ability + unspecified excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Wish + rhetorical question	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Agreement + excuse + principle	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Pause filler + complaining + alternative	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No + principle	-	-	2	5%	-	-
No + thank + negative ability	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No + negative ability + excuse	5	12.5%	1	2.5%	5	12.5%
Pause filler + wish + prolonged explanation	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + complaining+ excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Negative ability + excuse	5	12.5%	2	5%	3	7.5%
Wish + excuse	1	2.5%	2	5%	-	-
Pause filler + apology + negative ability	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Please + criticism + dismiss the speaker + command	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Wish + negative ability	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Negative ability + negative willingness + apology + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Wish + negative ability + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Apology + negative ability + excuse	2	5%	3	7.5%	-	-
Negative willingness	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Intensified apology + excuse + negative ability	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Pause filler + negative ability + excuse + apology	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Negative ability + prolonged explanation	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Negative ability + principle	-	-	3	7.5%	-	-
Negative ability + excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%

+ alternative					
Dismiss + rhetorical question	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Excuse + addressing word + principle	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Principle	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + intensified refusal	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
No + intensified refusal	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Intensified apology + negative ability	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Direct refusal + prolonged excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Pause filler + no + negative willingness	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + positive opinion + negative ability + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Please + negative ability + prolonged excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + negative ability	1	2.5%	-	-	2	5%
Apology + excuse	2	5%	-	-	-	-
Apology + addressing word + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Apology + unspecified excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Negative ability + unspecified excuse	3	7.5%	-	-	-	-
Please + addressing word + negative ability + asking for empathy	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Thank + unspecified excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Thank + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
No + thank + intensified refusal	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Negative ability	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No + negative willingness	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + negative ability + alternative	1	2.5%	-	-	1	2.5%
Pause filler + intensified refusal + negative ability	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Pause filler + negative ability + excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No + thank + negative ability + excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%

Negative ability + acceptance that functions as refusal	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Negative ability + negative willingness	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Intensified refusal + prolonged excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Mitigated refusal	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
Thank + mitigated refusal + alternative	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No + negative ability + alternative + excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%

Table (9)
Participants' Combination of Strategies in Rejecting Offers

Semantic Formulae of Offers	Situation 10 Equal		Situation 11 Higher		Situation 12 Lower	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No + excuse	2	5%	-	-	-	-
Apology + negative ability + addressing word	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Direct refusal (no) + thank + alternative	1	2.5%	-	-	1	2.5%
No + intensified refusal	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Let the interlocutor off the hook	-	-	-	-	2	5%
No + thank + excuse	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
No + thank + negative willingness	-	-	2	5%	-	-
No + excuse + alternative	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + Let the interlocutor off the hook	1	2.5%	-	-	8	20%
Wish+ excuse	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
No + negative willingness	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Intensified refusal + excuse	1	2.5%	2	5%	-	-
Apology + negative ability	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Pause filler + alternative	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Criticism	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No + positive willingness	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
No + thank + positive ability	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + thank	1	2.5%	4	10%	-	-
No + intensified refusal +	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-

excuse					
Apology + negative ability + excuse	-	-	2	5%	-	-
No + intensified refusal + prolonged explanation + alternative	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Intensified apology + addressing word + negative ability + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Let the interlocutor off the hook + alternative	1	2.5%	-	-	4	10%
No + principle	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Praise + principle	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
No + thank + let the interlocutor off the hook	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Let the interlocutor off the hook + positive ability	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Negative ability	-	-	2	5%	-	-
Let the interlocutor off the hook	-	-	-	-	3	7.5%
No + alternative	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	2	5%
No + intensified refusal	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Thank + alternative + principle	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Direct refusal + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + thank + intensified refusal	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Mitigated refusal + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + let the interlocutor off the hook+ alternative	1	2.5%	-	-	2	5%
No + positive willingness + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Please + negative ability	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Apology + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + alternative	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Negative ability + excuse	-	-	2	5%	-	-
No + addressing word + negative ability + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Pause filler + thank + praise + negative willingness	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Thank + alternative	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Thank + postponing	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + thank + let the interlocutor off the hook + alternative	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%

Intensified apology + negative ability	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
No + positive ability	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	-	-
No + thank + intensified refusal + excuse	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
No + thank + negative ability + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
No + intensified refusal + prolonged excuse	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
No + thank + consideration of the interlocutor feeling	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
No + thank + negative willingness + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-
Let the interlocutor off the hook + excuse + negative willingness	-	-	-	-	1	2.5%
Thank + principle	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
Thank + alternative + principle	1	2.5%	-	-	-	-
No + negative ability + excuse	-	-	1	2.5%	-	-

Appendix II
Discourse Completion Test
Refusal Conditions

Given below are twelve different situations in which a person asks a question (request, invitation, suggestion or offer) to another person (who may be of equal, lower or higher status). Please, consider yourself in the *respondent's position* and write down exactly the way you would *refuse* the following requests in the space provided. Please, note that the request is *not to be accepted* but refused in all situations.

1.   You are working in a college. You are unmarried and one of your married colleagues who has a big family comes to your house to borrow money.
    Colleague: I have a big family and I just don't know where the money goes. The children always need something   or   the   other.   Could   you   lend   me $100   for   a   month?
You: _____

Colleague: It's O.K. I'll borrow from someone else.

2.   You are working in a college. Your boss who is the head of your department requests you to come at the weekend to help him.
Boss: If you do not mind, I would like you to come during the weekend to help me with the library work?
You: _____

Boss: Well, then maybe next weekend.

3. A clerk is working in the Insurance office. He has some important personal work. He requests his boss to let him go in the afternoon when the boss is having a lot of pending work for him.
Clerk: I have some important work. Could I leave my office early today?
You (Boss):_____

Clerk: Then, could I leave tomorrow?

4.   Your friend invites you on telephone, for dinner and a magic show at a hotel.
Friend: We have arranged a get-together at Babylon hotel. There would be dinner and magic show for children. You are invited to join us.
You: _____

Friend: Well, I can understand your position.

5.   You have joined a company recently and your boss invites you for lunch at his place.
Boss: How   about   your   coming   over   to   lunch   tomorrow   at   my   residence?
You:_____

Boss: Oh, I understand. That is more important.

6.   You are the boss of a company. Your employee wants to invite you for his daughter's birthday.
Employee: I've arranged a small party for my daughter's birthday at home on Monday and I would be delighted if you could come along.
You :_____

Employee: It's O.K. I can understand.

7.   You work as a lecturer in a college. The workload is very high and you are getting stressed over your job. Your friend suggests that you take a break and go to Malaysia.
Friend: You are overstressed due to work. Why don't you take a break and go to Malaysia?
You:_____

Friend: You could still think about it, later on.

8.   You are a student and an excellent football player. You want to become a scientist but your counsellor suggests you to take up football as your career.
Counsellor: John, you are so good at football, why don't you make it your career?

You:_____

Counsellor: Well, it is your choice mine was just a suggestion.

9.   You are in a new place waiting for your friend, James to pick you up. You have to meet an important person to discuss business prospects. You are hard pressed for time and your friend is going to help you with the transport. It's been an hour and he hasn't shown up. You telephone him and his housekeeper replies that he is not at home.
Housekeeper: Normally James is very punctual. It seems he has got stuck somewhere. You could wait for him.
You: _____

House Keeper: Well, it is a mere suggestion.

10.   You are a businessman and have no time as you have just started your business. Your son has been a nuisance in the school. The principal wants to meet you in this connection. You generally do all your work yourself and do not take the help of others. Your friend offers to meet the principal on your behalf and sort out matters.
Friend: If you do not have time, I can go and sort out matters with the principal.
You: _____

Friend: Well, it is up to you.

11. You are a schoolteacher. You are talking to a manager of a car company. You show interest in one of his expensive models. He is eager to sell it to you but you are asking for a huge discount. He offers to help you sell your old car at a good price.
Manager: If you are really interested in purchasing) this model, I can help you in selling your old car at a good price
You:_____

Manager: Well, I was just offering alternatives.

12. You have a domestic helper at home. While ironing your clothes he spoils one of your expensive shirts.
Helper: Sir, I am so sorry, I didn't mean to but while ironing your clothes, I have
 burnt your shirt. Please, tell me from where you have purchased it? I will replace it with a new one.
You:_____

Helper: But, the mistake was mine.