| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unpacking Cultural and Linguistic Refusal Strategies in Jordanian EFL Discourse: A Conceptual Paper

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| ABSTRACT

Refusal strategies are ubiquitous linguistic tools employed in everyday communication. Understanding the application of these strategies is crucial for interpreting the reactions of those receiving the refusals. This study investigates the diverse refusal strategies Jordanian students utilize to explore the cultural and linguistic factors influencing their choices. Data will be collected through interviews and observations and analyzed using Beebe et al.'s (1990) framework. The anticipated results include the identification of the significant influence of linguistic and cultural factors on the forms of refusal strategies employed by the students. The study also expects to identify direct and indirect refusal strategies. Ultimately, this research will provide a foundation for future investigations into the syntactic and morphological processes underlying Jordanian students' construction of refusal strategies in their interactions. A deeper understanding of these processes will contribute to a more nuanced comprehension of pragmatic communication within this cultural context.

1. Introduction

The relationship between language and culture is fundamental; they function interdependently and separating them obscures a comprehensive understanding of communication (Romaine, 2000). A deficiency in either linguistic or cultural knowledge can lead to breakdowns in communication. Utterances are inherently embedded with cultural context, which guides the interpretation of the intended meaning. As Wannaruk (2008) notes, cross-cultural interactions can falter when participants interpret utterances differently. Pragmatic errors can lead to misunderstandings that embarrass communicators, potentially resulting in pragma-linguistic failure (Thomas 1983). Therefore, raising students' awareness of the importance of recognizing linguistic and cultural backgrounds is crucial. Instructing students on the pragmatic implications of utterances will enable them to comprehend communication more effectively.

This study aims to investigate the refusal strategies employed by Jordanian English as a Foreign Language students, with a focus on how these strategies reflect the influence of Jordanian culture. Specifically, it seeks to identify the intended meanings conveyed through these refusal strategies and the impact of Jordanian culture on students' speech when expressing disagreement.

Refusal speech acts are inherently face-threatening, carrying the potential to either diminish or maintain face (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Competent communication requires careful navigation of these sensitive, pragmatic tasks, employing suitable refusal

strategies to avoid offending the hearer. Interlocutors must understand the appropriate forms, functions, and strategies in the target language to navigate specific contexts effectively.

Examining the refusal strategies used by EFL students within a Jordanian academic setting is vital for fostering successful communication between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. The intrinsic connection between language and culture is evident in the daily interactions of Jordanian students, highlighting the need to understand the functions of utterances within their refusal strategies. Every language has its own rules governing the construction of refusal strategies. Therefore, understanding the specific refusal strategies employed by Jordanian EFL students can help both the students and others to discern the precise meanings conveyed in various contexts and situations. Such insights can promote more effective cross-cultural communication and minimize potential misunderstandings.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Past Studies

Effective communication hinges on the ability of interactants to exchange clear messages, a goal significantly influenced by social variables. A nuanced understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds further enriches communicative competence, particularly when navigating sensitive interactions like refusals. As demonstrated by Al-Natour et al. (2025), social dynamics, such as power relationships, can significantly impact how individuals express dissent. To contextualize the present study, this review examines existing research on refusal strategies across various societies and settings, highlighting gaps that warrant further investigation.

Al-Natour et al. (2025) explored refusal strategies within a management context in academia, revealing the impact of social power dynamics on expressions of dissent. Their findings indicated that hierarchical relationships shape communication, with those in positions of authority often attempting to control dissenting opinions. Interestingly, the study also found that women employees were more inclined to voice upward dissent, employing strategies that reflected both their influence and limitations within the organizational structure. This highlights the intersection of gender and power in shaping refusal behavior. This emphasis on indirectness and politeness underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity in refusal strategies. Another study by Al-Natour et al. (2024) focused on food refusal strategies among Jordanians, revealing a preference for indirect strategies to maintain politeness. Similarly, Liu, Y. et al. (2025) investigated request and refusal emails written by international students in a Thai EFL context, noting the prevalence of positive politeness strategies in requests and negative politeness strategies in refusals. This reinforces the idea that refusals are inherently face-threatening acts that often require mitigation. Jalis, F. et al. (2025) further underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity, demonstrating similarities and differences in Malay and German refusal speech acts. Their research emphasizes the need for speakers to adopt socially appropriate strategies to ensure successful cross-cultural communication.

Another study by Al-Natour et al. (2024) focused on food refusal strategies among Jordanians, revealing a preference for indirect strategies to maintain politeness. This finding aligns with broader research suggesting that indirectness is often employed in cultures where maintaining social harmony is highly valued. Similarly, Liu, Y. et al. (2025) investigated request and refusal emails written by international students in a Thai EFL context, noting the prevalence of positive politeness strategies in requests and negative politeness strategies in refusals. This reinforces the idea that refusals are inherently face-threatening acts that often require mitigation. These studies highlight the importance of considering cultural and linguistic backgrounds when analyzing refusal strategies. Jalis, F. et al. (2025) further underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity, demonstrating similarities and differences in Malay and German refusal speech acts. Their research emphasizes the need for speakers to adopt socially appropriate strategies to ensure successful cross-cultural communication.

Yu, Q., & Li, Q. (2025) delved into the complexities of cross-linguistic influence on refusal strategies among Uyghur–Mandarin–English trilingual. Their findings, which support the Scalpel Model, suggest that the influence of prior languages on L3 refusal strategies is not holistic but rather strategy-specific. The study highlights the crucial role of language input and processing in shaping pragmatic competence, suggesting that the linguistic medium through which learners acquire a new language can significantly impact their ability to navigate the pragmatic dimensions of the target language. This suggests that language learners may face unique challenges in mastering the pragmatic nuances of refusal strategies. Mohammad's examination of refusal strategies among EFL nursing students revealed a tendency towards direct refusal strategies, particularly when refusing requests. The study also identified problematic refusal semantic formulas used when addressing individuals of higher status, indicating potential areas for pedagogical intervention. Fang's research on refusals in English as a lingua franca revealed that Chinese English speakers often employ indirect refusal strategies when rejecting requests from Indonesian participants, using explanations, alternatives, and apologies, and linguistic downgrades.

Studies on refusal strategies across various contexts and populations reveal a multifaceted landscape influenced by culture, language proficiency, and instructional methods. Mohammad's (2022) examination of EFL nursing students' refusal strategies indicates a preference for direct approaches, particularly in request refusals, while also identifying problematic semantic formulas

when addressing superiors. This tendency towards directness might stem from the specific professional context of nursing, where clarity and efficiency are highly valued. Fang's (2021) research, however, presents a contrasting perspective, highlighting the use of indirect refusal strategies, such as explanations and apologies, among Chinese English speakers rejecting requests from Indonesian participants in ELF interactions. The use of linguistic down graders further underscores the importance of mitigating the face-threatening nature of refusals in intercultural communication. The divergence between these findings suggests that cultural background and the specific dynamics of intercultural interactions significantly shape refusal behavior**.**

Farashaiyanl and Muthusamy's (2017) study on Iranian EFL learners reveals a limited range of semantic formulas used across diverse situations, indicating a potential lack of pragmatic awareness and contextual sensitivity. This highlights the challenges faced by L2 learners in developing a nuanced understanding of pragmatic norms. Tobbi's (2024) investigation into sociocultural transfer in Algerian EFL learners' refusals sheds light on the influence of cultural values on refusal strategies, with a preference for directness, detailed explanations, and expressions of gratitude. These findings underscore the complex interplay between L1 cultural norms and L2 pragmatic development.

Research on the effectiveness of pragmatic instruction offers valuable insights into pedagogical approaches. McIntire's (2021) study highlights the complexity of teaching L2 pragmatics and suggests exploring tandem learning for refusal instruction. Derakhshan and Shakki's (2020) investigation demonstrate the positive impact of both implicit and explicit instruction on the pragmatic comprehension of apologies and refusals, emphasizing the importance of attending to language forms, sociocultural facets, and contextual factors. These studies suggest that while pragmatic awareness can be developed through instruction, a multifaceted approach that integrates cultural insights and contextual understanding is crucial for effective learning**.**

Building upon the understanding of refusal strategies, further research highlights the interplay between cultural norms, pragmatic transfer, and contextual factors. Demirkol's (2016) study suggests that preferences for politeness strategies in refusals remain consistent, with regret and explanation being cross-culturally important. This stability indicates a core set of politeness principles that speakers adhere to across languages**.** Wannaruk's (2008) investigation into American English and Thai refusals reveals both similarities and differences, along with instances of pragmatic transfer by Thai EFL learners. This suggests that while universal strategies exist, L1 influence plays a significant role in shaping refusal behavior.

Jalil's (2025) comparative study between Kurdish Sorani Dialect and American English highlights cultural nuances in refusal strategies, with Sorani Kurds exhibiting greater sensitivity towards status and a tendency to invoke religious elements. This underscores the importance of considering specific cultural values when analyzing refusal strategies**.** Duresa's (2025) research on remedial students' reluctance to major in English reveals factors such as a lack of understanding of the benefits of studying English and perceived limited career opportunities. This highlights the broader implications of language attitudes and perceptions on educational choices. Li and Wongwaropakorn (2025) highlighted the use of indirect and culturally nuanced refusal strategies in Chinese television dramas, showcasing the implicit ways that refusals can be communicated.

Al-Natour et al.'s (2024)] study on politeness in silence among Jordanian EFL students sheds light on the strategic use of silence by both professors and students in classroom interactions. Al-Natour's (2025) investigation into congratulation strategies in graduation notebooks reveals a variety of congratulatory strategies employed by students. These findings expand the scope of pragmatic research beyond explicit speech acts to encompass non-verbal communication and other forms of social interaction.

Arwa Mohammad Rabee et al.'s (2025) examination of the interplay between linguistic theories and their application in literary and translation studies reveals a more pronounced influence of linguistic frameworks within translation studies. This suggests that translation, by its very nature, relies more heavily on explicit linguistic principles. AlYousef, H. M. et al.'s (2025) investigation into persuasive strategies employed by Jordanian interlocutors within an academic setting, utilizing Aristotle's rhetorical triangle, reveals distinct preferences between students and professors, with professors favoring logos-driven strategies and students leaning towards pathos-driven approaches. This highlights how different roles and goals within an academic context can shape persuasive communication styles.

In conclusion, the existing body of research illuminates the multifaceted nature of refusal strategies, shaped by a complex interplay of cultural norms, pragmatic transfer, and contextual factors. Studies have revealed variations in directness, politeness strategies, and the influence of L1 cultural norms on L2 pragmatic development. However, a discernible gap remains in understanding the nuanced interplay between individual agency and socio-cultural constraints in shaping refusal behavior. While research has explored the impact of explicit instruction on pragmatic comprehension, further investigation is needed to unravel how individuals negotiate and adapt refusal strategies in real-time interactions, particularly in intercultural settings. Future research should also explore the role of non-verbal cues, such as body language and tone of voice, in conveying refusals, as well as the influence of power dynamics and social distance on strategy selection. Moreover, longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the development of refusal competence over time, shedding light on the factors that contribute to successful communication in diverse social contexts. Finally, considering the increasing importance of digital communication, there is a need to investigate refusal

strategies in online interactions, taking into account the unique challenges and opportunities presented by this medium. Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of refusal strategies and their implications for effective communication across cultures and contexts.

2.2 Analytical Framework

There were various frameworks used to analyze refusal in the previous studies. This study adopted Beebe et al. (1990:55-73) model which classified refusals into two categories which are direct refusal strategies and indirect refusal strategies. Under the direct refusal strategies there are two strategies. The indirect refusal strategies are eleven strategies. These strategies are explained with examples in table 2.1 below.

No	Direct Refusal Strategies	No	Indirect Refusal Strategies
1	Using performative verbs (I refuse)	1	Statement of regret (I'm sorry.../I feel terrible...)
2	Non performative statement o "No" o Negative willingness/ability (I can't./I won't./I don't think so)	2	Wish (I wish I could help you...)
		3	Excuse, reason, explanation (My children will be home that night./I have a headache)
		4	Statement of alternative: o I can do X instead of Y (I'd rather.../I'd prefer...) o Why don't you do X instead of Y (Why don't you ask someone else?)
		5	Set condition for future or past acceptance (If you had asked me earlier, I would have...)
		6	Promise of future acceptance (I'll do it next time./I promise I'll.../Next time I'll...)
		7	Statement of principle (I never do business with friends.)
		8	Statement of philosophy (One can't be too careful.)
		9	Attempt to dissuade interlocutor: o Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (I won't be any fun tonight to refuse an invitation) o Guilt trip (waitress to customers who want to sit a while: I can't make a living off people who just order coffee.) o Criticize the request/requester (statement of negative feeling or opinion; insult/attack (Who do you think you are?/That's a terrible idea!)

	Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request o Let interlocutor off the hook (Don't worry about it./That's okay./You don't have to.) o Self-defense (I'm trying my best./I'm doing all I can do.)
10	Acceptance that functions as a refusal: o Unspecific or indefinite reply o Lack of enthusiasm
11	Avoidance: o Nonverbal ∙∙ Silence ∙∙Hesitation ∙∙Doing nothing ∙∙Physical departure o Verbal ∙∙Topic switch ∙∙Joke ∙∙Repetition of part of request (Monday?) ∙∙Postponement (I'll think about it.) ∙∙Hedge (Gee, I don't know./I'm not sure

Table 2.1 Beebe et al. (1990:55-73) refusal strategies

Some adjuncts may be preceded these refusals strategies. The following are the adjuncts that were proposed by Beebe et al. (1990:55-73) in his refusal model:

1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement (That's a good idea.../I'd love to...)

2. Statement of empathy (I realize you are in a difficult situation.)

3. Pause fillers (uhh/ well/oh/ uhm)

4. Gratitude/appreciation

Refusals can be seen as a series of the following sequences:

1. Pre-refusal strategies: these strategies prepare the addressee for an upcoming refusal .

2. Main refusal (Head Act): this strategy expresses the main refusal.

3. Post-refusal strategies: these strategies follow the head act and tend to emphasize, justify, mitigate, or conclude the refusal response.

3. Methodology

This research is a qualitative research that concentrates on understanding the exact meaning of refusals by EFL speakers. It seeks to figure out the meaning that is deliberate behind the utterances of the interactants. This section elucidate the research methodology, encompassing four key areas: data collection, sample of the study, the instruments and procedures for data collection.

A. Data Collection

The data for this study are collected from Jordanian EFL students in the English and translation departments during the first semester, 2025 at the Faculty of Arts in Jerash University. 30 enrolled students participated in this study. Following the acquisition of permission from the head of departments, the researcher observes the refusal strategies employed by the Jordanian students during negotiations, as reflected in their responses to the interview questions and by noting their usages for the refusal strategies.

The data in the linguistic qualitative research assemble the direct and indirect meaning of the utterances to reveal the intended meaning of the speech. It helps the linguistic researchers to have a good chance to dive in the factors that induce the speakers to construct such forms that are considered appropriate in their cultures. Therefore, using qualitative method is undoubtedly suitable to conduct substantial results that help linguists in the future research to conduct fruitful research for the phenomenon that they are going to investigate.

B- Sample of The Study

The participants in this study comprise the EFL learners at the English and translation departments in the faculty of Arts at Jerash university, totaling 30 individuals. As Sekaran (2003, p. 295) advises, a minimum sample size of 30 is generally acceptable for data analysis. The sample includes both male and female EFL students to account for expected variations in the refusal strategies used during communication and in response to differing opinions. The researcher utilized special codes for each respondent to determine the examples that related to the him/her.Two distinctly symbolized codes used for the examples in the analyses, LS1 is related to the students who study at the English and literature department while TS1 is for the students who study at the translation department.

C- Research Instrument

Two instruments are used in this research to collect the data . This research utilize a qualitative approaches to analyze data systematically, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the refusal strategies employed by the participants. Creswell (2014) describes qualitative data as information obtained from purposefully selected informants. Data collection through observation employed during the first semester, 2025 academic year.

The researcher aimed to study the phenomena and their underlying causes, differentiate between regular and irregular activities, seek diverse perspectives to view events comprehensively, identify negative cases or exceptions, and systematically observe events and behaviors that exemplify the theoretical purposes of observation as Musante and DeWalt's (2010) recommended.

Data collection ceased once saturation was observed and there was no new information can be collected (Imran, M., & Almusharraf, N., 2023). Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained permission from the heads of the English and translation departments, assuring them that the data would be used solely for the purposes of this study. Because of using a mix method approach in this research, the second instrument used is interview. Creswell & Creswell (2017) description of qualitative data as that was obtained through information provided by purposefully selected informants. This instrument assists the researcher to ask purposeful questions to understand the reasons that motivated them to use such refusal strategies rather than others. It helps to reach the central reasons that make some strategies suitable rather than others in their interactions. As this study seeks to find out the major factors that effect on the EFL learners while using some refusal strategies in their speeches, it is important to account the essential forms they constructed in specific situations. Covering all of these aspects help to identify the reason of using the refusal strategies in their speeches.

C- Procedure for Data Collection

The following procedure for data collection was followed. It consisted 8 processes which are summarized in the following points:

1- Writing a letter to the head of departments to get the permission to collect the data from the students.
2- Get the respondents signature on the consent forms to get their approval to participate in this research.
3- Identify a suitable place to meet them and tell them about the time for the interviews.
4- Interview the interviewees one by one and write their responses.

5- Collecting the data till the researcher reach the saturation and there is no new information can be collected from other participants.

6- While collecting the interview responses, the researcher observed their reactions to the questions and write what he observed directly beside their responses.

7- Classify the responses based on each question to be able to compare between them.

8- Extract the refusal strategies from their responses.

To analyse the data adequately, the research employed the following points:

1. Following the analytical framework that is adopted in this research to analyse the refusal strategies.
2. Analyzing the extracted refusal strategies based on the objectives of this research.
3. Identifying the linguistics and cultural factors that effect on their usage for the refusal strategies.
4. Elaborate the reasons of using the refusal strategies by the Jordanian EFL students based on their responses and based on the researcher observations.
5. Conclude the research with the revealed results.

4. Conclusion

This study is a conceptual study that states a hypothesis which could be proved in the future research for a specific problem which mentioned in the introduction section. The problem is related to discover the linguistic and cultural factors that encourage the EFL students to use a specific refusal strategies in their interactions at English and Translation departments. To solve this problem, this research appoints two objectives to reveal the results to cover this gap. The first objective is to find out the reasons for using such a refusal strategy rather than another by the EFL students in their interactions. The second objective is to figure out the linguistic and cultural factors that directed their performance to these strategies by formulating them in a specific morphological and syntactical forms.

By achieving these objectives, the study results can help future researchers to add another contributions which are related to comparing the morphological processes of word formation in the refusal strategies that are used by the Jordanian EFL learners. Moreover, it gives a clear image for the syntactic structures of the refusal strategies that the Jordanian EFL learners utilized in their interaction. These two expected contribution can be proved once the two results of the mentioned objectives revealed.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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