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The Use of Refusal Strategies among Kurdish EFL Students Learning English Language: A Case Study of Soran University EFL Students

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Abstract

Refusal strategies occur in every language. The speech act of refusals has been tackled by many researchers. The aim of this study was to explore pragma-linguistic strategies employed by a group of Kurdish English language learners when making refusals to invitations, requests, offers and suggestions. The study has made use of a modified written discourse completion test (DCT) comprising of some different situations. The participants are required to provide written data to express their refusals to these situations. . There were 36 participants (18 males, 18 females), and their age ranged between (19-25). They were asked to respond to eight different situations of refusing. The results show that participants differed pragmatically in the way they made use of refusal strategies. Some of the participants prefer direct refusal, while some others use indirect speech act refusals. The findings indicate that Kurdish learners of English language tend to use more expressions of regret followed by excuses/ reasons/ explanations. Most often, they have avoided refusal with “no” except in few cases where it is, also, followed by excuses or explanations, with the exceptions of some differences and variances.

Keywords: speech act, request, refusal strategies, direct speech act, indirect speech act.

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Introduction

Refusals are negative responses to a request, invitation, offer or suggestions. According to Searle and Vandervken (1985, p.195) speech act of refusal is “the negative counterparts to acceptances and consenting are rejections and refusals. Just as one can accept offers, applications, and invitations, so each of these can be refused or rejected”. In many cases, how one says “no” is probably more important than the answer itself. Therefore, saying “no” needs special skills, depending on the situation, mode and the persons. It means, how to refuse someone’s invitation, request or offer without hurting his/her feelings. However, it is difficult to refuse because it does not only need semantic knowledge but also pragmatic knowledge as well (Ramos, 1991, as cited in Al-Kahtani, 2005:4).

Refusing is a very difficult task because people, sometimes, get emotional and they do not want to refuse but they have to do it, so they use many indirect ways to refuse such as postponing, asking for apology, asking for alternative solutions, excuses, wishes, future acceptance or regretting. On the other hand, some of them use the direct way to refuse. For instance, they only say “no” or they use an insulting language. Soran University students communicate whether in English or Kurdish, and there are factors may influence their way of communication. Taking refusal strategies as an example. It sought to investigate how Soran University EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners refuse requests, offers, suggestions or invitations in a set of conversations of eight situations. The situations were organized in a way that involve different social status: high (a teacher, for example), same

(a friend) and low (an employee). The study tested whether the responses were convenient pragmatically and linguistically.

Literature Review

According to Austin (1962), a single speech act contains three separate but related speech acts: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. Whenever a speaker produces a word, he performs a locutionary act. This is simply the act of producing a meaningful expression. Moreover, we usually do not say words without having any purposes. For example, ("Could you please pass the book to me?"). We do not utter that sentence but also intend the listener to pass us a book. This kind of act which we produce words with communicative purpose in mind is called an illocutionary act. This act is the function of the utterance that the speaker has in mind. Another example is the statement "It's hot in here". This sentence can have the illocutionary force of a statement, an offer, an explanation, or a request. It might be uttered by someone who is experiencing heat in a crowded room just to comment on the weather.

Alternatively, it can also be uttered by a person who intends to open the window so that everyone in the room can enjoy fresh air from outside. Perlocutionary acts occur when we want a speech act to have an effect when we utter a statement. For instance, "Could you please pass me the dictionary?" the speaker wishes the act of passing the dictionary to be performed: This is perlocutionary force. The perlocutionary act refers to the hearer's recognition of and response to the illocutionary act. Among the three acts, the illocutionary act is regarded as the most important because it is about what the speaker wants to achieve through the uttering sentences. Furthermore, this theory was later developed by Searle (1985) who claims that everything we say is governed by rules. He

defines speech acts according to their definition and usage in communication.

Several comparative studies have been made on refusals in different places but there are few refusal studies on Soran University students. (Beebe, 1990) and King and Silver (1993) analyzed the refusal strategies of six intermediate level learners. A lecture was organized to control a group on “how to make small talk with the Americans” and the treatment group was tutored on variables important in refusing in American English. Results indicate that instructions on refusals did not have much effect. There was large disparity between written and spoken refusal strategies.

Chen (1996) also investigated the beliefs of the native English speakers and the Chinese ESL learners about how refusal should be expressed. The native speakers consider truthfulness, clarity, directness and effectiveness as the most important whereas ESL learners were more concerned about being direct, preserving face and avoiding embarrassment. Al Shawali (1997) studied the semantic formulas used by Saudi and American male undergraduate students in the speech act of refusal. The results indicated that Americans and Saudis used similar refusal formulas except in the case of direct refusal where they gave unspecified answers.

Eryani (2007) studied the responses of 20 Yemeni learners of English who responded to six situations of refusal in English. Their performances were compared to Yemeni Arabic native speakers and American English native speakers. Results indicated that Yemani Arabic native speakers tended to be less direct in their refusals by offering reasons or explanations. American English native speakers, on the other hand used different semantic order by

preceding regret and giving more direct refusals. Yemani learners of English depicted pragmatic competence but at times also showed their native speech community norms.

Oliveria (1994) studied 40 college students and investigated rejecting of requests between English and Portuguese. The results were analyzed separately for Portuguese and English and took into consideration directness of request. The results indicated that the Portuguese - speakers and English – speakers displayed differences on the proportion of strategies used in different situations. EFL learners took an intermediate position between native Portuguese speakers and native English speakers when using direct strategies and were closer to English speakers when using conventional ones. On the other hand, Researchers on the relation of gender and language claim that women are more sensitive than men in being polite (Brown, 1998). Liao and Brenahan (1996:709) also find that "women are more status sensitive than men". Therefore, it is predictable that women will use more politeness strategies than men do.

Methodology

Method

Throughout the paper, the researchers used qualitative method for the purpose of the data collection. The researchers used unstructured interview in terms of open - ended questions.

Participants

The population of the study were from Faculty of Arts/ Soran University. They were from three different departments, namely English, Arabic, and Psychology. Their age ranged from 19 to 25. Eighteen participants were males, and the rest were females.

Instrument

The instrument used consists of a modified version of a Discourse Completion Test by Beebe et al, 1990, and asked to give responses to some different situations of requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions.

Procedure

Participants were provided with a copy of the Discourse Completion Test and were required to write down how they would refuse each of the situations in a real conversation in order to discover which strategies they would most commonly use to refuse: direct, indirect.

Results and Discussion

The Discourse Completion Test was examined based on the classification of direct, indirect speech act. After collecting all the answers from participants, their responses analyzed according to those refusal strategies that (Beebe et al, 1990) formulated. Additionally, a gender difference is also explored.

Gender Difference Refusal Strategies

Refusal strategies	Males	Females
Direct		
“no”	4	2
Non-performative statement	4	12
Insulting language	28	30
Indirect		
Negative willingness ability	19	18
Statement of regret	26	4
Statement of wish	0	1
Excuse/reason/explanation	12	15
Statement of alternative	3	9
Future or past acceptance	1	8
Promise of future acceptance/postponement	12	18
Statement of principle	3	5
Rhetorical question	3	0
Threatening	4	9
Restatement	5	6
Unwillingness/insistence	15	6
Lies	5	9

According to the analysis of direct strategy use, both males and females used direct answers. However, females were more direct

and tough in refusing than males. As they used non-performative statements “I do not ...” more than males. However, both used the insulting language while made use of refusal, teacher, son/daughter and strangers. On the other hand, if we consider the indirect strategies. Generally, males were more indirect than females. They used statement of regret and unwillingness most. In addition, females used future acceptance strategy the most.

Age difference Refusal Strategies

Refusal strategies	Age (19-21)	Age (22-25)
Direct		
“no”	3	3
Non-performative statement	9	8
Insulting language	14	30
Indirect		
Negative willingness ability	18	19
Statement of regret	14	16
Statement of wish	0	0
Excuse/reason/explanation	19	17
Statement of alternative	8	4
future or past acceptance	4	4
Promise of future acceptance/postponement	13	13
Statement of principle	3	5
Rhetorical question	1	2

Threatening	7	6
Restatement	4	7
Unwillingness/insistence	12	5
Lies	7	13

According to the above table, the samples between the ages of (22-25) were more direct than the samples between the ages of (19-21) that they used the insulting language in refusing, moreover, sometimes they were not true even to themselves.

Conclusions

For second language learners with linguistic limitations, performing refusals successfully may require a higher level of pragmatic competence than other target language speech acts. Female participants used more direct refusals to refuse their friends, teachers, or strangers. However, the male used indirect refusals presumably. Furthermore, almost all of them used direct and tough strategies of refusals to a lower status person. On the other hand, they used indirect strategies to refuse requests, especially, when dealing with higher status people. The indirect strategy most commonly used was expressing regret and giving reasons so that they do not hurt the emotions of the people.

Culture influences the type of strategies used for communication. People are more polite when dealing with people from higher status and more direct when dealing with lower status. The present research concludes that participants employ different strategies in refusing people with different status, yet in several situations the strategies used are similar.

Recommendations

The preliminary insights in terms of perceptions of L2 learners in on social factors with an emphasis on refusals strategies. More factors should be considered .Various variables such as social distance and social power should be included in the design of the study. Cross- cultural studies in relation to the use of refusal strategies should be taken into considerations.

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پوخته:

کرده قسه یه ره تکراره کان له هه موو زمانیکدا به کارده هنرین و به شیکى زور له تويزهران تويزينه وهيان له سهر ئه نجام داوه . ئامانجى ئهم _____ تويزينه وهش به _____ ريتيه له خسته پروو شتووازيه کارهيتانیکرده قسه یه ره تکراره کانله لایه نکومه ليکفیرخوا زانيزمانیئي نگليزیکاتيک هه ولير تکرده وهيمیوانداری، داواکاری، پیشنیار، داخواز یده دهن. هه ربوئه مهش، چه ندسیناریویه کيجیاوازله شیوه یفوپرمی (DCT) به سهر به شداربووان دابه شکرابه مه به سستی کوکرده وهی زانیاری. به شداربووان ۳۶ کهس بوون که ۱۸ کوپو ۱۸ تریان کچ بوون، ته مه نی هه موویان له نیوان (۱۹-۲۵) سالییدا بوو. به شداربووان وهلامی هه شت سیناریوی جیاوازیان دایه وه . دهرئه نجامه کان نیشانیان دا که فیرخوازان شیوهی جیاوازی پراگماتیکیان به کارهیتاوه کاتیک کرده قسه یه کانی ره تکرده وهیان به کارهیتاوه. هه نديکیان کردهی ره تکرده وهی راسته وخویان به کارهیتاوه، له کاتیکدا هه نديکیتریان به ناراسته وخوی کرده قسه یه کانی به کارهیتاوه کاتیک شتیکیان ره تکرده وه. هه ربویهش، فیرخوازانی کورد زیاتر ده سته واژهی ئه فسوسسی وپوزش هیتانه وهیاندهر برپویه بوره تکرده وه کانیان. زور به شیانهه ولیانداوه وخویانه دوور بگرنله به کارهیتانیده سته واژه یه خیرپراس ته وخو، هه ولیانداوه زیاتر کرده ییناراسته وخوپره تکرده وه وپوزشدار به کار بهینن

ملخص:

توجد استراتيجيات الرفض في كل اللغات وقد قام العديد من الباحثين بدراسة أفعال كلام الرفض. إن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو بيان الاستراتيجيات اللغوية البراغمية التي يستخدمها مجموعة من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الأكراد عند رفضهم للدعوات والطلبات والعروض والاقتراحات.

استندت هذه الدراسة على نسخة معدلة من إختبار تكملة الخطاب (DCT) والذي يتضمن بعض المواقف المختلفة يتعين على المشاركين تقديم بيانات مكتوبة للتعبير عن رفضهم لهذه المواقف. شارك في الإختبار ٣٦ شخصاً (١٨ ذكور و ١٨ إناث) وتراوح أعمارهم ما بين (١٩ إلى ٢٥) سنوات. طُلب من المشاركين في هذا الإختبار الرد على ثماني حالات مختلفة للرفض. أظهرت النتائج أن المشاركين اختلفوا بشكل عملي في الطريقة التي استخدموا بها استراتيجيات الرفض. فقد استخدم بعض المشاركين الرفض المباشر، في حين أن البعض الآخر استخدم الرفض الغير المباشر لأفعال الكلام. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فقد بينت بعض النتائج إلى أن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الأكراد يميلون إلى استخدام تعبيرات الندم أو الأسف بشكل كبير ويتبعها بعض الأعذار أو الأسباب أو التفسيرات. ولكن في الأغلب، تجنب المشاركون الرفض بكلمة "لا" إلا في حالات نادرة ويتبعها أيضاً أعذار وتفسيرات، مع وجود بعض الإستثناءات والاختلافات.