Pragma-linguistic and Socio-pragmatic Transfer among Iraqi Female EFL Learners in Refusing Marriage Proposals

Tabarek Ali Qassim
Department of English, College of Education for Women
University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq
Corresponding Author: tabarek269@gmail.com

Nawal Fadhel Abbas
Department of English, College of Education for Women
University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq

Fatima Falih Ahmed
English Department, Midlands Technical College
School of English and the Humanities, West Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Sura Hameed
MATC- Milwaukee Area Technical College
Lead and Stem Pathway advisor, USA

Abstract
In the framework of this study, the phenomenon of transfer is probed pragma-linguistically and socio-linguistically concerning marriage situations among Iraqi EFL learners. The study also strives to look at the refusal strategies most commonly employed by Iraqi female English as a foreign Language (EFL) learners compared to their counterparts, American native speakers of English. The study involved 70 female participants who answered a Discourse Completion Task (DCT), which contained ten marriage proposals to be refused. Each situation entailed refusal of a person from a higher, an equal, and lower status. The researchers adapted Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss Weltz's (1990) taxonomy of refusal for analyzing the data comprehensively. The study's findings indicated that Iraqi female EFL learners followed similar patterns of refusing marriage situations to American speakers. The most prevalent strategies used by the two groups were "reasons/ excuses and explanations," followed by "statements of regrets," and then "non-performative statements" with slight variation in frequency. However, the Iraqi learners' native language and culture affected how they formulated their refusal; hence they manifested pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic transfer in particular areas. The areas of pragma-linguistic transfer included the literal translation of words, expressions, and structures into their refusal in English. As for the socio-pragmatic areas, the transfer occurred in certain Arabic culture features like elaboration, exaggeration, repetition, endearing terms, and many others in expressing the target language, English.
Keywords: Beebe et al.'s taxonomy, Iraqi EFL learners, marriage proposals, pragma-linguistic transfer, refusal, socio-pragmatic transfer

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Introduction

Like any speech act, refusal holds to be universal and culturally distinctive. It occurs in all languages around the world; however, individuals realize it differently across cultures. Refusal is a negative response to initiating an act like requests, invitations, suggestions, and offers. Refusal is face-threatening in nature that interlocutors need to utilize several strategies to mitigate its adverse impact, and thereby avoid offending their addressee. In pragmatics, some factors that determine the choice of certain utterances in a given context (Majeed, 2021). Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) state that refusal is subject to several social constraints, for instance, social status, distance, age, educational background, gender, and many others. In marriage situations where one person in a relationship asks for another's hand, the answer to the proposal could be either agreement, which is a preferred act, or refusal, which is not. Brown and Levinson (1987) mention that refusal contradicts the wants of the addressees' face as well as the speaker (Abbas, 2013), and hence the speaker cannot engage in an event initiated by the addressee (Chen, 1996). Refusal is "a sensitive, pragmatic task," as claimed by Yamagashira (2001, p.260), and that is why interlocutors need to manage refusal situations carefully.

Notwithstanding, refusal represents a significant challenge for non-native speakers to perform appropriately because mastery of the target language and culture are required. It is not easy to make a rejection using a foreign language without the risk of offending interlocutors; hence, the non-native learners' linguistic knowledge is not enough, but pragmatic expertise is necessary for this context. An EFL learner, for example, Iraqi in this case, can have great expertise in vocabulary and a good understanding of grammar. Still, if pragmatic competence is insufficient or flawed, then the speech act is not applied felicitously, and thereby misunderstandings and communication breakdowns can still arise (Phuong, 2006). As mentioned earlier, refusal is global in that it occurs in every language equally, but it is performed across cultures differently. Culture plays a prominent role in the way refusal is performed and the selection of a specific strategy. What might be considered proper in one culture might not be so in another. Non-native speakers of English, i.e., Iraqi female EFL learners in this regard, may transfer the cultural conventions and rules of their first language into the performance of the target language.

Pragmatics, according to Leech (1983), is composed of two components where a transfer can take place, these are pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic (Mohammed & Abbas, 2016). Lado (1957) elucidated such a phenomenon and labeled it as pragmatic transfer where individuals transfer, both productively and receptively, not only the forms and meanings of their native language and culture, but also their distribution into the target language and culture (Eldin, 2018).

Kasper (1992) states that pragmatic transfer takes two forms: either positive or negative transfer. The former represents a proof of socio-cultural and pragmatic universality across languages. In contrast, the negative pragmatic transfer, refers to the sociolinguistic norms and conventions of the native language negatively transferred into the target language. This process often leads to pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983), which is the inability to comprehend the meaning of an utterance in the target language. The socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic knowledge of the mother tongue when communicating using the target language causes deviant

perceptions and behaviors to the speakers of the second language (Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper & Ross, 2006). Kasper (1992) clarified the reason behind this phenomenon, irrespective of linguistic mastery, is the absence of culturally relevant schemata (Eldin, 2018).

Kiok (1995) stresses that pragmatic errors are more weighty than lexical or syntactic ones because lacking knowledge of the differences between cultures creates communication failure. It is necessary for non-native speakers to know the norms of the target language so that they will be able to handle refusal successfully. It is where the significance of the study lies; pragmatic errors are requisite for non-native speakers to avert, mainly when performing refusal in sensitive situations such as marriage proposals. The following are the questions the study attempts to answer:

1.   What are the most frequent strategies used by Iraqi female EFL learners and American English native speakers when refusing marriage situations?
2.   What areas of the pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic transfer may emerge in the refusals of Iraqi female EFL learners?

Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the face-threatening act of refusal as performed by Iraqi female EFL learners in marriage situations, a context that no study tackled before. It also scrutinizes the areas in which pragma-linguistic transfer and socio-pragmatic take place.

Literature Review
Refusal
A refusal is a speech act that emerges as a negative response to initiating acts, such as requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions (Gass & Houck, 1999). A refusal is non-compliant, dispreferred (Levinson, 1983), and face-threatening; thus, interlocutors must perform it carefully in the contexts where it occurs, especially in marriage situations. Refusing causes contradictions to the expectations of the interlocutors, and thereby, their interpersonal relationships will be at risk (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Although it is almost difficult for learners to achieve, it demands a high level of pragmatic competence so as to felicitously perform such an act (Al-Eryani, 2007; Chen, 1996). Interlocutors must understand the social and cultural factors, like social distance and social status, that influence refusing to achieve successful communication (Moaveni, 2014).

It is refusing someone in a particular situation, like marriage proposals, that demands interlocutors of several linguistic strategies to protect the hearers' face. Beebe et al. (1990) proposed a taxonomy for refusal strategies that involved three kinds of strategies, namely, direct, indirect, and adjunct. The direct includes two types of refusing explicitly, and the indirect involves 11 types of refusing implicitly to minimize the face threat. The last one encompasses adjuncts which contain four types of strategies that do not stand by themselves but accompany other strategies (Saud, 2019). These strategies are illustrated in the following Table one (Appendix A)

Pragmatic Transfer
Takahashi and Beebe (1987, p.133) remark that the speech act of refusal is a "major cross-cultural stinking point for ESL students." First, learners may unintentionally offend their

interlocutors, and this causes communication breakdown (Al-Shboul & Maros, 2012). Second, speakers of any language must know not only grammatical and lexical knowledge of the language but also its underlying pragmatic rules (Izadi & Ziliae, 2015). Third, the linguistic obstruction that already exists in the learners' culture, their first language, and their assessment of the situations (Nuruddeen, 2008) is another factor influencing refusal; and face-threatening nature of the speech act further complicates the matter (Al-Eryani, 2007; Chen, 1996). Al-Shalawi (1997) elucidated that refusal may offer a source of information on the socio-cultural values, and an insight into the social standards embedded in a specific culture (Al-Shboul & Maros, 2012). Pragmatic transfer emerges when learners of a foreign or second language retreat to the norms of their first language to perform in the target language. Kasper (1992) states that pragmatic transfer is "the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than the first language on their comprehension, production, and learning of second language pragmatic information." (p. 207). Thomas (1983) subdivided this type of transfer into a pragma-linguistic transfer, refers to the properness of the linguistic content, and the other is a socio-pragmatic transfer, denoting the coveted function and the acceptability of a particular speech act to the social context. Thomas (1983) stated that pragma-linguistic transfer expresses the improper use of a speech act strategy from the first language to the target language since these utterances are not "semantically/syntactically equivalent" (p. 101), resulting in conveying different pragmatic forces when using the target language (Eldin, 2018). Kasper (1992) observed that in pragma-linguistic transfer, the illocutionary force and the courtesy value associated with a specific linguistic utterance of the mother tongue affects the way learners produce and perceive its function in the target language. Kasper (1992) maintained that socio-pragmatic transfer occurs when "the social perceptions underlying language users' interpretations and performance of linguistic action in L2 as influenced by their assessment of subjectively equivalent L1 contexts." (p. 209). Such a process often leads to pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983), which is the inability to comprehend the meaning of an utterance in the target language (Salman & Ebadi, 2015). It can relate to, according to Cenoz (2003), the learners' unawareness of the social and cultural conventions that govern the realization of several speech acts of the target language. Differences include the perception of some social factors, such as social distance and power relations, and the assessments of the appropriateness of various behaviors (Eldin, 2018).

Previous Studies on Refusal and Pragmatic Transfer

Due to the significance of pragmatic transfer, several studies conducted on refusal across various languages and cultures. These researchers discussed refusal in terms of the most frequent strategies used by non-native speakers compared to native speakers of English, others examined the pragmatic transfer occurring when performing refusal, and some studies examined refusal in movies (Nailah, 2016), and series (Putri, 2014). Nonetheless, to the researchers' best knowledge, no study has tackled refusal in marriage situations; thus the current research examines refusal and pragmatic errors as occurring in marriage proposals among Iraqi Female EFL learners.

As adequately put by Beebe et al. (1990), refusal is a significant challenge for several non-native speakers to perform across cultures. All the studies in the literature review collected data through a DCT, and analyzed using Beebe et al. 's (1990) scheme of refusal strategies. Beebe et al's (1990) study is one of the significant studies that examine the strategies of refusal

used by Japanese speaking their language, Japanese speaking English, and American speaking English. It revealed that Americans and Japanese differed significantly in using refusal strategies, particularly in the order, frequency, and content of semantic formulas. Al-Shalawi (1997) investigated the speech act of refusal among Saudis and Americans. His study attempted to identify the culture's influence on the speech of their community and their style of communication. Findings revealed that, in performing refusals, there was a similarity between the two groups in the use of semantic formulas. Still, there was a difference in the use of the direct strategy "No."

Nelson, Al Batal and El-Bakary (2002) examined how Americans and Egyptians make refusals in specific situations. Their study investigated refusal strategies, the extent of directness, and the effect of gender and social status. In general, the findings revealed that the Egyptian and the American participants used similar refusal strategies and that both groups mentioned negative willingness as a reason for their refusals. Also, the Egyptians differed from Americans in the level of directness used in face-to-face interaction. Stevens (1993) explored refusal among Arabic and English. It concluded that there were multiple strategies employed when refusing, interlocutors scarcely refuse in a direct manner, and those second language learners misused refusal strategies (as cited in Phuong, 2006). Al- Issa (1998) conducted a study on refusal among Jordanian Arabic learners and American English native speakers. The findings revealed that Jordanian were more likely to use statements of regret than Americans and that both groups used explanations/ reasons/ excuses more than any other strategies. Also, the socio-cultural transfer occurred in EFL learners' speech through their selection of semantic formulas, the length of their refusals, and the content of semantic formulas, reflecting values of the Arabic culture/ language transferred into English.

Al-Eryani (2007) examined the use of refusal among Americans and Yemenis. It found that there was evidence of cross-cultural variation in the frequency and content of semantic formulas used by Yemeni EFL learners in terms of contextual variables. The Yemenis were refusing indirectly using reasons and explanations other than their desire. On the other hand, the Americans employed different orders through placing "regret" followed by more direct refusals strategies. Salman and Ebadi (2015) conducted a study to examine the pragmatic transfer among Iraqi Arabic learners of English in response to compliments. The collected data analyzed according to Herbert's (1986) taxonomy. The study concluded that the Iraqi female EFL learners indeed transferred some of the expressions of their Iraqi Islamic culture when expressing compliments in English. Al-Shboul and Huwari (2016) scrutinized how Jordanian EFL learners perceive pragmatic transfer in using refusal strategies, considering the factors of context and culture. The study concluded that there was a negative transfer in the refusal perception among Jordanian EFL learners due to reflecting the norms of their native language when communicating in English.

Dendenne (2017) investigated the pragmatic transfer among Algerian EFL learners in response to apologies. Data collected using a DCT was composed of seven situations and distributed to 32 Arabic native speakers, 20 English native speakers and 68 Algerian EFL learners. The results indicated evidence of pragmatic transfer in the content of the strategies and the literal translation. The socio-pragmatic transfer was also apparent in identically utilizing apologies to their mother tongue and culture when assessing the variables of particular

situations. Nonetheless, linguistic proficiency does not seem to be advantageous to high proficiency students. Furthermore, some factors influence the interlanguage production of learners, including insufficient pragmatic competence, particular interlanguage traits, and some native language restrictions.

Eldin (2018) investigated the pragmatic transfer in producing requests among Sudanese students. His study aimed at identifying the occurrence of socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic transfer in their utterances. It found out that there were signs of socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic norms of the native language and culture when conceiving this speech act in English. The areas of pragma-linguistic transfer include Islamic greetings, prayers to their requestees, and some words, expressions, and structures translated in their English utterances. Also, it concluded that socio-pragmatic transfer emerged in areas such as consecutive detailed greetings, discursive techniques of their first language that disproportionately represent the reality of having rapport from others, kinship terms with strangers, and social distance and relation.

Al Refaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019) examined the link between negative pragmatic transfer and language proficiency concerning refusal as recognized by Yemeni EFL learners. Data gathered from 40 Yemeni EFL learners, 20 low proficiency learners and 20 high proficiency learners, and two baseline groups, 20 American native speakers of English and 20 Arabic native speakers, using DCT, which consisted of twelve scenarios. The study's results manifested that there existed evidence of negative pragmatic transfer from the first language, particularly in terms of the frequency, content, and order of semantic formulas. They employed the strategy of "wish," which is not widely shared in English, following the pragmatic pattern of their first language; however they use "gratitude/ appreciation" and "positive opinions and feelings" less than their counterparts, again due to their native culture. Yemeni learners also displayed pragmatic transfer when employing intensifiers and horrific expressions. Nevertheless, it indicated that both Yemeni learner groups demonstrated evidence of pragmatic transfer; low proficient learners showed a much tendency towards the pragmatic norms of their first language compared to high proficient learners.

Methodology
Research Design
The current study is qualitative in nature, supported by statistical analysis to address the objectives of the study.

Participants
Non-probability sampling is widespread and realistic for researchers to apply when conducting intercultural studies. One of the types of this sampling is a convenient sample method whereby a group of individuals is selected, simply because they are easy to reach, and they are ready and able to be involved (Saunders et al., 2012). The study involved 35 female Iraqi female EFL learners and 35 female American native speakers of English. The Iraqi participants study the English language at the College of Education for Women, the University of Baghdad, while the American participants are students at Springfield College, Massachusetts, United States. The participants' ages ranged from 24-37 years old. The researchers collected data in a timeframe of three months, February through May 2021.

Research Instrument

Spencer-Oatey (2008) stated that Discourse Completion Task (DCT) is one of the major instruments of collecting data in pragmatic research. Despite their limitations, data collected using DCT offer authentic conversations (Beebe & Cummings, 1996). The current study uses a DCT, designed in a Google form, consisting of ten marriage situations. The Google form where the test was designed contains two sections, one for the instructions and information about the participants, the other one displaying the marriage situations. These situations were divided into those where the speaker is from a higher, equal, and lower status (Appendix C). The form of the DCT was shared via email to the participants of the study who typed their refusal responses in short answer slots.

Research Procedure

After obtaining the data, the researchers compared the responses of the two groups to see the extent to which Iraqi female EFL learners can refuse appropriately in English. Beebe et al. 's (1990) taxonomy of refusal strategies is used to analyze the data since it is the one widely used in categorizing refusal strategies across, and within cultures. After that, the data were analyzed to find the areas where pragmatic transfer emerged pragma-linguistically and socio-pragmatically.

Findings

The researcher analyzed the data according to directness, the most frequent semantic formulas, and adjuncts. Then, the researcher inspected the pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic transfer in the responses of the Iraqi female EFL learners to figure out in what areas it might occur. A total of 1852 strategies were utilized by the two groups in refusing marriage proposals, and the findings were presented as answers to the research questions as shown below.

1. What are the most frequent strategies used by Iraqi female EFL learners and American English native speakers when refusing marriage situations?

Regarding directness and indirectness, Iraqi female EFL learners produced 943 refusal strategies, and American English native speakers made 909. To find the frequency of refusal strategies used by each group, the researcher calculated each type of strategy. A detailed description of the strategies is illustrated in Figure one.
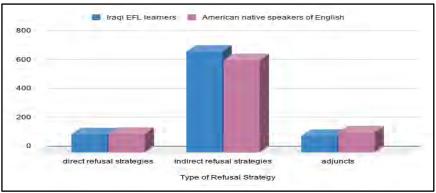

Figure one: Types of refusal strategies used by Iraqi female EFL learners and American native speakers of English

It seems that Iraqi learners and American speakers had a similar frequency in the use of each type. The Iraqi female EFL learners utilized 126 direct strategies, 700 indirect strategies, and 117 adjuncts. The Americans, on the other hand, employed 129 direct strategies, 641 indirect strategies, and 139 adjuncts when they refused marriage situations. Both groups of participants preferred indirect strategies to refuse marriage proposals. As for the use of semantic formulas and adjuncts, a descriptive statistical analysis for the data is presented below based on the subdivisions of the three main categories of Beebe et al. 's (1990) taxonomy. The research indicated that Iraqi female EFL learners and American English native speakers utilized different varieties of indirectly refusing the marriage situations. Such variation is summarized in Table two (Appendix B).

Table two displays that the most frequent semantic formulas used by Iraqi female EFL learners when refusing marriage situations is "excuse, reason, and explanation," 24% followed by "statement of regret," 15% then by "non-performative statements," 12% subsequent "statements of criticizing the request, or requester" and "hedging" 8%, then "statements of positive opinion/feeling," 7% followed by "statements of philosophy," 6%, and finally "statement of principle" 5%. Table two also shows the least used strategies by Iraqi female EFL learners when refusing marriage proposals. These are "statements of empathy," "promise of future acceptance," "set conditions for past or future acceptance," and "performative statements," 1%, followed by "pause fillers," 2%, following "statements of alternatives," and "threat or negative consequences," 3%, and then "appreciation and gratitude" 4%.

The semantic formulas employed most frequently by American native speakers of English are "excuse, reason, and explanation," 18%, followed by "non-performative statements," 11%, then "statement of regret" and "statements of criticizing the request, or requester," 10%, next "statement of principle," 8%, "statements of positive opinion/feeling," 7%, followed by "appreciation and gratitude," and "promise of future acceptance," 6%. The semantic formulas less frequently utilized by the American English native speakers are "statements of alternatives," 1% followed by "pause fillers," "acceptance that function as a refusal," and "let interlocutor off the hook," 2% next "set conditions for future acceptance," and "performative statements," 3%, and then "statements of philosophy" and "hedging" 4%.

2. What areas of pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic transfer may emerge in the refusals of Iraqi EFL learners?

The data collected from the Iraqi participants demonstrated that their refusals were affected by both their native language and culture. Many instances of pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic conventions were in recognition of refusal in English. A thorough analysis of the pragmatic transfer phenomenon that emerged in the responses of the Iraqi learners is introduced below. The pragma-linguistic transfer instances are presented first, followed by those of socio-pragmatic transfer. Primarily, the data gathered displayed the pragma-linguistic transfer in the following areas:

Iraqi female EFL learners did a literal translation to original local expressions used in their first language to perform refusal in English. Lacking the pragma-linguistic awareness in the target language, Iraqi learners resorted to their first language to convey the meaning. These are pretty common expressions employed to refuse proposals in the local Iraqi Arabic language. For

instance, they translated some Arabic expressions, such as "a thousand of girls" to say "several girls," "the last man in the world" to alternate its English equivalent "the only man alive," and also "I envy the woman that will marry you" to express "the lucky girl to have you," and many others. They resorted to their mother tongue rather than adhering to the target language expressions in this regard.

Iraqi refusal strategies contained many intensifiers like "really, so, very, quite, etc." occurring across and within their responses. Such intensifies function as softening devices forming a "hedging strategy" that emerged 8% among Iraqi learners and 4% among American English native speakers. Obviously, unlike the American participants who used these expressions in a relatively efficient way, Iraqi learners used them excessively and repeatedly to add emphasis and show the sincerity of what they say. This is related to the Arabic discourse rule in which repetition gives an empathic meaning to sentences. Thus, Iraqi learners returned to their mother tongue to emphasize rather than using those devices available in the target language. For example, in English, emphatic meanings take different structures such as passive voice, inversion, the use of the continuous form with "always, forever, etc.," cleft sentences with it and what, and the use of did and do before the verb. However, Iraqi learners preferred to stick to that convention in their first language for this purpose. For instance, when expressing a genuine apology, they repeat the words "I am so so sorry," to give the assertion.

Iraqi female EFL learners also used certain words in English to give the alternative meaning in Arabic. These terms are used differently in the two languages, yet Iraqi learners utilized them to express their intentions in this regard. They produced such words that they have learned in their textbooks, neglecting their inappropriateness for this interaction. For example, they applied the word "complicated" to describe a "difficult spouse," or the word "roaming" to convey the meaning that the person proposing has several women "around," also they used the word "concerning" to refer to the word "about." The native speakers rarely use these expressions and phrases in realistic contexts.

Iraqi female EFL learners were prone to utilize compound and complex sentences when refusing marriage situations, a point of difference to the American responses, which were simple structured and contained fragments. Iraqi participants excessively employed compound sentences with coordinators like "and, but and so," and complex sentences with subordinators like "that, which and because." It can be related to the norms of the Arabic in which sentences are not necessarily separated by commas when writing. It does not matter if a sentence expresses one idea or contains a single verb and a simple structure. Examples are the following: "I can't accept you because I already lost my father because of smoking, so I can't lose you too," another stating that "I can't trust you again, and I don't give a second chance, so my answer is no," and another saying "I can't accept your proposal because it means that you will betray me with one of those women."

On the other side, the effect of the Iraqi learners' mother language and culture exhibited in the emergence of a socio-pragmatic transfer. They misconceived the target language's social relations with each other, the social distance, and other points. The data displayed this kind of transfer in the following areas:

Iraqi learners inappropriately utilized some endearing terms copied from their native language to address those with close or distant relations equally. They made use of expressions like "sweetheart, honey, babe, dearie, and others," which the natives use when talking to romantic partners, yet not in this sense. In the Iraqi Arabic culture, it is widely prevalent that the equivalents of these terms are used with anyone, whether family members, relatives, strangers, neighbors, or any others, as an attention-getter before stating the intended message. Thus, it is the erroneous translation of these terms from the native language; the Iraqi learners thought such expressions would carry the exact hue of the meaning of their equivalents in Arabic and thus employ them accordingly. In this regard, the Iraqi learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds influence the perception and production of the mentioned expressions.

Iraqi female EFL learners were prone to elaborate in refusing that their contents were too lengthy. Like in their first cultures, Iraqi learners substantially used more words for refusing, and usually, more than one strategy employed. Elaborateness seems to be a characteristic of Arabic in that the more one says, the more they make themselves apparent, and avoid misunderstandings. For example, in answering one situation, they tended to mention within the single response multiple reasons, several statements of philosophy and principles, extended positive statements, repeated statements of regret, gratitude, wishes, and hedging. Therefore, they resorted to their native cultural norms when expressing themselves using the target language.

Iraqi learners overloaded their refusal with statements of regrets, gratitude and wishes. They tended to apply these expressions at the beginning and the end of their refusal. For example, "Sorry, Sir. You are…… for this reason, I am sorry, …..." and " I apologize. You are….. Sorry," "thanks for choosing me. I really appreciate your proposal…," and plenty others. Here, Iraqi learners once again adhered to their native cultural conventions in using apologies, thanking and wishing statements multiple times to show their true feelings, and assure their interlocutor of the honesty of what they say. Repetition is a feature of Arabic culture that indicates the assertion and effectiveness of the speech. Thus, the use of such expressions is necessary for these kinds of situations, i.e., marriage, and that the more they are applied, the speech would sound polite, sincere, and faithful.

Iraqi female EFL learners tended to exaggerate the reality of circumstances believing that their interlocutor empathized with them. That would give a solid and convincing ground for turning down a proposal without hurting their interlocutors' feelings or risking their face. For example, they used reasons like "my mum is very sick, there will be no one in my house to help her if I accept your proposal," and "I have pregnancy issues and I am afraid that will deprive you of being a father." Exaggeration is a common feature of Arabic cultures that makes speech sound more convincing to the hearer (Patai, 1983; Shouby, 1951). When refusing marriage situations, they sometimes do not give the real reason for rejection. They either use a series of typical answers or mention exaggerated reasons; hence sound fake. As a collectivist culture, Iraqi Arabic society puts weight on how one appears to be polite, considerate, and persuasive rather than honest and upright. These features have values in individualistic cultures like the Americans.

Iraqi learners strived to make pessimistic assumptions when refusing a marriage situation, apparent in utilizing the refusal strategy "negative consequences" to dissuade an

interlocutor. They consider setting many negative implications for accepting a proposal can work as a good, solid, and persuasive method for refusal. It is attributed again to the Arabic culture that they usually have their pessimistic view about the future. Their aspect of marriage is different from that of the Americans', meaning that the Iraqi culture finds situations of marriage considerably based on what makes a compensation between cons and pros and the agreement on the terms that set earlier, usually determined by the families. In contrast, the target culture relates the acceptance and refusal of marriage based on love and loyalty, among other things.

Iraqi female EFL learners showed no significance for the social status of their interlocutor. Whether the interlocutor is from a high, equal, or lower status, they treated all the situations with indirect strategies oriented toward saving the face of an interlocutor. They were inclined to address the person of higher level with great respect and that equally happened to the situations when the interlocutor was from a lower status. It relates to the collectivist Iraqi Arabic culture that encourages people to respect the elders and be kind and delicate to their peers and the younger. The teachings of Islam stimulate people to treat all man-kinds with no difference based on any type of segregation. "Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you" is a direct and clear warning mentioned in the Holy Quran against treating people as superior or inferior because the best of them is the one who is humble and respectful.

Iraqi female EFL learners also resorted to their first culture in advising their interlocutors when refusing. It occurred in the marriage situations of the guy who smokes, and the person who has multiple relations; Iraqi participants offered advice to them to quit a bad habit, and to stop acting immorally. As a collectivist culture, Arab people typically warn one another from being involved in the path of evil, as the Islamic teachings instruct them to do so. It is a reminder to the addressee just in case they are ignorant or simply oblivious, as mentioned in the Holy Quran, that "And remind, for indeed, the reminder benefits the believers."

In their responses, Iraqi learners resorted to their first culture in formulating the nature of their reasons for refusals. Examples include "my family does not accept and I want to complete my study" or "my father refuses to let me marry someone from outside the family plus I am already engaged to my cousin." In collectivistic cultures, they consider families as the central institutions that determine the marriage relations, a matter that is entirely dissimilar to individualistic cultures, like the American. In the latter, an individual is the one who makes such decisions on their own, not their families. Iraqi learners contributed their turning down for proposals as something that they cannot decree. It is a plain return to the mother culture in this matter, indicating a socio-pragmatic transfer.

Iraqi female EFL learners formulated "statements of positive opinions and feelings" about the person proposing in a way that is different from the American participants. Some examples of the Iraqis' responses include "That is incredibly wonderful of you, you are a great person, and you are sweet," "Any girl in my shoes would be more than happy to have a man like you as her husband," and "You are really a nice guy. You are incredible. I am sure there are thousands of girls out there who wish to be with you." It originates in Arabic cultures in general, where people tell each other kind words. They tend to praise one another directly and indirectly, and once more to display admiration and courtesy. It can also relate to the Islamic teachings that

"a good word is like giving elms," mentioned in the Holy Quran, as well as "and speak kindly to all people."

Discussion

The study's findings revealed that Iraqi female EFL learners and American native speakers of English prefer to refuse marriage proposals indirectly. They employed several semantic formulas and adjuncts; the most frequently utilized by Iraqi learners were reasons/excuse/explanation, statements of regret, non-performative statements, while those favored by American native speakers of English were reasons/excuse/explanation, non-performative statements, and statements of regret and criticism. Such results conform to most of the studies in the literature review (Al-Shalawi, 1997; Al- Issa, 1998; Nelson et al., 2002; Al-Eryani, 2007). They both indirectly refused the marriage situation, considering no the social status and social distance. It seems that Iraqi learners and American English native speakers of English share the tendency to act indirectly by employing almost similar strategies that make their refusal sound persuasive and face-saving at the same time. However, the Iraqi refusal responses differed significantly from those of the Americans in several points. It can relate to the influence of their native language and culture. These areas of divergence included both types of transfer, whether pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic. The former occurred on the lexical and syntactic level when performing the speech act of refusal in marriage situations. It is demonstrated in the literal translation of expressions and words that are, in conformity with Eldin's (2018) findings, commonly applied in the local Iraqi society; hence Iraqi learners transferred them from the first language rather than adhering to the ones most prevalent in the target language, English. They also transferred the syntactic structures of Arabic in performing refusal in the second language. They constructed their sentences with compound, and complex sentences instead of simple ones. They cling to the Arabic rules of adding the assertion to what is said rather than holding those available in the target language. Such findings indicate a lack of awareness considering the linguistic knowledge of Iraqi learners, particularly failure to employ precise and appropriate utterances and breakdown to exercise the structures of the target language in real situations.

Following that, socio-pragmatic transfer emerged in plenty more areas when refusing marriage situations that all reflected, in accordance with the findings of Huwari and Al-Shaboul (2015), the inclination of Iraqi learners to their Arabic culture's conventions and norms. They employed endearing terms improperly, which suggests the removal of any distance that has to exist between interlocutors, in agreement with Eldin's (2018) results. It explains that the local Iraqi society uses expressions of this kind to address members with whom the speaker has a distant relation or not. This function is entirely different from that of the target language. Iraqi refusals also displayed no significance for the social status of their interlocutor, believing, according to Islamic teachings, that people treat each other equally. Some features of Iraqi Arabic culture were further present in the learners' refusal strategies, including elaboration, exaggeration, family orientation, repetition, pessimistic views, advice and praise. The findings reveal that the Iraqi learners elaborated when employing any refusal strategy, whether reasons, regrets, criticizing, or positive opinions and feelings, etc., in a way similar to the findings of Stevens (1993) and Al-Isaa (1998). They also exaggerated the real situations to make their speech, reasons for rejecting proposals in this case, more persuasive and face-saving. They further assumed that their interlocutor was aware of the role of the family in deciding blood and

flesh relations; therefore most of the refusal reasons were attributed to circumstances that they did not control, conforming to Al-Eryani's (2007) results. Another point that is clear in the Iraqi refusal strategies is repetition in that they repeat several words, phrases, or sentences to serve different purposes like assertion and displaying sincerity. For example, they repeated statements of gratitude, regret, wishes, and others. Such findings go in line with Stevens (1993), who affirmed that there are multiple strategies employed when refusing; interlocutors scarcely refuse explicitly. Concerning opinions of marriage, Iraqi learners manifested the pessimistic Arabic views of the future by using a "negative consequences" strategy. It interprets the Arabic collectivist culture as it values mutual understanding and consensus for a successful marriage instead of the individualistic cultures, like the American, which approves love and loyalty for such situations. Lastly, there are two other characteristics of Arabic cultures transferred in the Iraqi refusal strategies into English; these are advice and praise. In Arabic societies, when people communicate, they tend to praise each other as indications of respect and politeness. They give advice to one another as signs of caring and consideration. Such results align with that of Salman and Ebadi (2015). All of the mentioned points are characteristics of collectivist cultures manifested in the Iraqi refusal of marriage proposals.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A refusal is a face-threatening act that demands interlocutors to manage their performance carefully. Interlocutors tend to protect their interlocutors' face by refusing indirectly through utilizing various semantic formulas and adjuncts. Refusal is especially challenging for non-native speakers to accomplish as there is a high risk of unintentionally offending their interlocutors. Refusal of non-native speakers of English, like the Iraqi, may sound confusing to native speakers, due to the influence of their native language and culture, resulting in communication breakdown. The present study aims at inspecting the refusal strategies used by Iraqi female EFL learners, and the areas of pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic transfer in marriage proposals. The findings suggest that there are similarities between Iraqi female EFL learners and American English native speakers in the preferred strategies used in refusing marriage proposals. Both of them favored indirect strategies, namely "reasons/ excuse /explanation," and for the direct strategies, both utilized "non-performative statements." However, Iraqi refusals hold indications of pragma-linguistic, and socio-pragmatic transfer of their native language that make their refusals dissimilar to that of the target language. Characteristics transferred from the Arabic language and culture include lexicons, syntactic structures, idiomatic expressions, on the one hand, and endearment terms, elaboration, exaggeration, family orientation, repetition, pessimistic views, advice, and praise, on the other.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend that Iraqi learners' linguistic competence be developed by encouraging students to apply the grammatical rules they learn at school in their speech. They also need to be aware of the social and cultural norms of English when performing the speech act of refusal. The researchers also call for conducting more research to explore the pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic transfer among Iraqi EFL learners. Future studies should focus on the speech act of refusal in marriage situations.

About the Authors:

Tabarek Ali Qassim is an M.A. student in the department of English, College of Education for Women

in the University of Baghdad. Her major is Linguistics and she has interests in several fields within Linguistics including Applied Linguistics. You can reach her at: tabarek269@gmail.com. My ORCID is https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2924-639X.

Nawal Fadhil Abbas got her PhD in English Language and Linguistics in 2014 from the school of Humanities, University of Sains Malaysia. Now she is an assistant professor teaching at the College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad. Her field of study is Semantics and Pragmatics. Other fields of interest include Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Stylistics and Corpus Linguistics. You can reach her publications at: Nawal F. Abbas - Google Scholar Citations.

Fatima Falih Ahmed has her master degree in English literature from University of Baghdad. She is an instructor at English Department, Midlands Technical College, School of English and the Humanities, West Columbia, South Carolina, USA.

Sura Hameed has a master degree in Applied Linguistics at the University of Baghdad. She is an instructor at MATC Milwaukee Area Technical College, Lead and Stem Pathway advisor, USA.

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Appendices
Appendix A

Table one: *Refusal strategies according to Beebe et al. (1999)*

Refusal strategy	Types of refusal strategies	examples
Direct strategies	Performative verb	"I refuse."
	Non-performative statements	"No.," I cannot," and "I don't think so."
Indirect strategies	Statement of regret	"I am sorry," and "I feel terrible..."
	Wish	"I wish I could help you"
	Excuse, reason, or explanation	"My children will be home that night," and "I have a headache"
	Statement of alternative	"I can do X instead of Y.," "I'd rather," "I'd prefer," "Why don't you do X instead of Y?," "Why don't you ask someone else?"
	Set conditions for future or past acceptance	"If you had asked me earlier, I would have"
	Promise of future acceptance	"I'll do it next time.," "I promise I'll or "Next time I'll"

	Statement of principle	"I never do business with friends."
	Statement of philosophy	"One cannot be too careful."
	Attempt to dissuade interlocutor by:	
	Threat	"I won't be any fun tonight."
	Criticize the request or requestor	"Who do you think you are?" - "That is a terrible idea!"
	Request help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request	
	Let the interlocutor off the hook	"Do not worry about it...," "That is okay...," "You don't have to."
	Self-defense	"I am trying my best," "I am doing all I can do"
	Acceptance that functions as a refusal by using unspecific or indefinite reply and lack of enthusiasm	
	Avoidance by the topic switch, joke, repetition of part of the request, or postponement	"Monday?" and "I'll think about it"
Adjuncts	Statement of positive opinion or feeling or agreement	"That is a good idea," and "I'd love to"
	Statement of empathy	"I realize you are in a difficult situation"
	Pause fillers	"uhh," "well," "oh," "uhm"
	Gratitude or appreciation	

Appendix B

Table two. *Frequency and percentage of semantic formulas and adjuncts strategies used by Iraqi female EFL learners and American native speakers of English*

Refusal strategy	Iraqi EFL learners		American native speakers of English	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Direct strategies				
Performative statements	11	1%	25	3%

Non-performative statements	115	12%	104	11%
Semantic formulas				
Statement of regret	141	15%	93	10%
Wish	14	1%	3	0%
Excuse, reason, and explanation	225	24%	168	18%
Statement of alternative	31	3%	6	1%
Set conditions for future, or past acceptance	6	1%	30	3%
A promise of future acceptance	6	1%	52	6%
Statement of principle	48	5%	75	8%
Statement of philosophy	54	6%	32	4%
Threat, or statement of negative consequences	30	3%	51	6%
Criticize the request/requester	74	8%	90	10%
Let interlocutor off the hook	0	0	17	2%
Request for help, assistance, or empathy	0	0	4	0%
Acceptance that functions as refusal	0	0	16	2%
Hedging	71	8%	36	4%
Adjuncts				
Statement of positive opinion/feeling, or agreement	62	7%	63	7%

Statement of empathy	6	1%	0	0%
Pause fillers	15	2%	21	2%
Gratitude/Appreciation	34	4%	55	6%
Total	**943**	**100%**	**909**	**100%**

Appendix C

Instructions: You are kindly requested to consider the following marriage proposals. Respond to them by refusing as naturally as possible as if you were in the actual situations:

[+distance/ +status]
1- A great guy, except that he is way too older than you.

2- A famous person who has a lot of female fans.

[-distance/ +status]
3- A guy, who is incredibly handsome but has no job.

[+distance/ =status]
4- A guy with good social-economic status except that he's a heavy smoker.

[-distance/ =status]
5- The husband of your best friend.

6- Your Ex who cheated on you.

[+distance/ -status]
7- A perfect guy, but has a physical defect.

8- A good guy but lives far in an insecure place.

[-distance/ -status]
9- A guy is known for his many casual relationships.

10- A guy with trust issues.