

## A Comparative Study of Refusals: Gender Distinction and Social Status in Focus

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the differences between Iranian EFL learners' use of English and Persian refusals. It also examined the influence of social status and gender on the provided responses. The participants of this study were 60 graduate Iranian students mastering in English. They were divided equally into males and females. The study was done in two phases with an interval time of two months. The same participants participated in both phases. Once they sat for the English version of the test and once for the Persian one. The DCT's provided data were analyzed to show the average frequencies of direct and indirect strategy use, the types of employed strategies, and the effects of participants' social status and gender on the responses. The results showed that participants used more indirect strategies in the Persian in comparison to the English. No significant difference was observed between males and females refusal strategies. As for social status, the finding showed that the Persian group used more indirect strategy when talking to someone of a higher class.*

**Keywords:** *EFL, Refusals, Gender distinction.*

### **Introduction**

Our lives are shaped by the way we use language. We learn the norms and rules of social interaction in specific contexts through socialization or "culturalization" processes (Ochs, 1996). These context specific norms regulate our interaction behaviors and perceptions of the behavioral interactions of others. Since people use language differently, their perceptions of appropriate use and politeness phenomena are different. Regarding politeness, a sensitive field is making refusals. Refusals are types of speech acts that are proposed as a reaction to another individual's request, invitation, offer or suggestion; in other words, they are not speaker-initiative. Since refusals are speech acts involving a certain level of offensiveness and are inherently discourteous, applying improper refusal strategies may damage the relationship between the people concerned. Consequently, appropriate perception and production of refusals necessitates a certain degree of culture-specific awareness. To avoid appearing rude or discourteous, non-native speakers often overuse indirect strategies which might be misunderstood by the target community.

Successful presentation of the speech acts in a language demands not only the speaker's linguistic proficiency, but also his/her socio-pragmatic perception of speech acts. To perform the speech acts appropriately in a first and second language is very challenging, and the challenges not only stem from the linguistics variations between the languages, but also the variations between cultures. This study aims at investigating probable similarities and differences between Iranian EFL use of refusals in English and Persian. It also examines the probable effects of gender and social status on the refusals. For achieving this goal, the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) developed by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) was used as data eliciting device.

## Research questions

This study intends to answer whether there is a difference between English and Persian refusal or not. The study also aims at identifying whether social status and gender are distinguishing factors in refusal or not. Therefore the following research questions are presented:

Q1: Does the frequency of direct and indirect refusals differ across languages-English & Persian?

Q2: Does interlocutors' social status have any effect on refusal strategy use?

Q3: Does interlocutors' gender have any effect on of refusal strategy use?

## Literature review

Some speech acts threaten the hearer's face; some others threaten the speaker's face. However, there are still some other speech acts like refusals which threaten both interlocutors' faces. In other words, they are dual face-threatening acts. Some FTA's threaten negative face and some others threaten positive face. The former includes directives such as commands, requests, advice, invitations, etc. The latter, on the other hand, includes criticisms, insults, disagreements, and corrections. Interlanguage studies in this regard can shed some light on these aspects of language. It is very important to remember that while native speakers often ignore phonological, syntactic, and lexical errors, they are less likely to overlook pragmatic errors. Such errors are typically interpreted by native speakers as arrogance, intolerance, rudeness, and so forth.

This study is worthwhile in that it investigates Iranian refusal strategies. Among the studies which have investigated non-English languages, very few, if any, have focused on Persian. Moreover, this study examines the influence of interlocutors' social status and gender on the provided refusal strategies. While there are a lot of studies in the literature of refusals that have investigated the effect of interlocutors' social rank on their responses, very few have paid proper attention to the role of the speakers' sex in selecting refusal strategies. The findings of this study may help Iranian to get acquaintance with the similarities and differences between Iranian English and Persian refusals and discover the cases of positive and negative pragmatic transfer. On the other hand, the cases which are culture-specific should be given more attention and practice.

### Refusals as dual face-threatening acts

Refusals are face-threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987) and belong to the category of commissives because they commit the refuser to (not) performing an action (Searle, 1975). Refusals function as a response to an initiating act and are considered a speech act by which a speaker "[fails] to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor" (Chen et al., 1995:121). From a sociolinguistic perspective, refusals are important because they are sensitive to social variables such as gender, age, level of education, power, and social distance (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Fraser, 1990; Smith, 1985). Overall, refusals are complex speech acts that require not only long sequences of negotiation and cooperative achievements, but also "face-saving maneuvers to accommodate the noncompliant nature of the act" (Gass and Houck, 1996:2).

By making request, the speaker intends to hinder the hearers' freedom of action. In the case of refusing the request, the hearer should do it in a way showing that he is conscious of the speaker's wants, needs, or feelings, since there is a potential for being threatened for both sides in conversation. Thus, refusals can be used in response to requests (polite demands for something), invitations (a type of request in which the inviter is trying to be thoughtful and kind rather than asking a favor), offers (asking individuals if they want something) or suggestions (ideas put forward for people to consider). Refusals often involve explanations or reasons as why they are necessary. For reassuring the addressee of the refusal that s/he is still approved of but at the same time there are reasons to reject the request and that the refuser is sorry for this, refusal strategies are used.

### Sequence of Refusals

The usual sequence in refusal strategy application is in three phases:

1. Pre-refusal strategies: preparing the addressee for an upcoming refusal;

2. Main refusal (Head Act): bearing the main refusal;
  3. Post-refusal strategies: functioning as emphaser, mitigator or concluder of the main refusal.
- For example, a refusal sequence of someone to his friend's request for going to movies together would be:

Uhm, I'd really like to (pre-refusal);

But I can't (main refusal);

I'm sorry. I have a difficult exam tomorrow (post-refusal).

The number of moves in a refusal depends on the type of refusal (whether it is direct or indirect). Compare these two examples:

1. A: May I go out now? B: No, you may not.
2. A: Have another cookie. B: Thanks. Everything was so tasty, I Couldn't eat another bite.

In the first example, the refusal involves only one move, which is a contradictory move, but in the second example the hearer refuses the proposition using more than one move. Naturally, indirect refusals take more moves to accomplish the refusals.

### Refusals Categorization

Refusals are divided into two main groups which is based on Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification and is as follows: direct refusals and indirect refusals. The direct refusals have very limited subdivisions in comparison to indirect ones. The direct refusals include non-performatives like "no" and performative verbs such as "I can't". The indirect refusals involve various types:

1. Statement of regret like "I'm sorry."
2. Wish like "I wish I could help you."
3. Excuse, reason, explanation like "I have an exam."
4. Statement of alternative.
5. Set condition for future or past acceptance like "If I had enough money"
6. Promise of future acceptance like "I'll do it next time."
7. Statement of principle "I never drink right after dinner."
8. Statement of philosophy like "One can't be too careful."
9. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor:
  - 9-1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester like "If I knew you would judge me like this I never did that"
  - 9-2. Criticize the requester "It's a silly suggestion."
  - 9-3. Guilt trip (waiter to customers who want to sit for a while: "I can't make a living off people who just order tea"
10. Acceptance functioning as a refusal:
  - 10-1. Unspecific or indefinite reply "I don't know when I can give them to you"
  - 10-2. Lack of enthusiasm "I'm not interested in diets"
11. Avoidance:
  - 11-1. Non-verbal (silence, hesitation, doing nothing and physical departure)
  - 11-2. Verbal (topic switch, joke, repetition of past request, postponement and hedge);

An example for postponement can be "I'll think about it."

There are also some *adjuncts* to the refusals as follows:
12. Statement of positive opinion like "That s a good idea"

13. Statement of empathy "I know you are in a bad situation"

14. Pause fillers like "well" and "uhm"

15. gratitude/appreciation like "Thank you."

### **Social Status and Gender in Refusals**

There are many studies in the literature which have investigated the effect of interlocutors' social status on the degree of indirectness of responses (Beebe et al. (1990), Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford (1990), and Nelson et al. (2002). Refusals are usually studied in three levels of social status: *higher*, *equal* and *lower*. The results of these studies have shown that the degree of indirectness in strategy use is conditioned by the interlocutors' social rank and is different from one language society to another. All these studies have proved that maintaining unequal social status with speaker and the hearer influences the use of refusal strategies. In addition to interlocutors' social status, their gender may also influence their speech features. Hence, a brief review of language and its relationship with participants' gender is presented below.

Another factor which seems to influence the type of refusal is Gender. Generally speaking, the differences between male and female use of language can be into five categories (Smith, 1985). The voice of female has a wider range of pitch which often makes it possible to recognize who is speaking, a female or a male. Women have more tendencies to make use of intonation patterns and speech rhythm. Females seem to be more aware to use appropriate morphemes than males. As an example, men of lower social class tend to omit the inflectional morpheme third person singular (s), as well as possessive (s) quite more frequent than women of the same social class (Wolfarm, 1969: cited in Smith, 1985). Syntactic differences are another source of difference among males and females. The most revealing differences are lexical ones. This lets the listener make a rather firm statement as to who the speaker is a male or a female. In Farsi for instance, there are some sex-specific words which are almost never used by the opposite sex. Words and expression such as *Eva*, *Nazi*, *che lus*, *xoda margam bede*, are female used; and *čakerim*, *kaf kardam*, *nokaretam*, *xeili bahali*, are male used. In addition to linguistic differences, Smith (1985) points at paralinguistic differences as well. He presents two examples: a Mexican community called Mazateco in which men make use of special whistle-like sounds to transmit their messages whose meanings women pretend not to understand. And second, media Mongols where men make use of low pitch and nasalized sounds in their speech whereas high pitch in voice and smiling is known as feminine speech characteristics.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were 60 Iranian EFL university students from Tehran University. They were selected randomly from among graduated and postgraduate students. They participated in the study to answer both groups of questions, that is, English and Persian version of the test. The participants were divided equally into males and females; i.e. each group involved 30 males and 30 females.

### **Materials**

The data collection instrument in this study was the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). For the Persian version a translation of the same test was used. The DCT used in this study involved twelve situations designed to elicit refusals for four different speech act categories. Each category consists of three situations. Among the twelve DCT items, items 1, 2 and 12 are requests which are expected to be rejected by a refusal. An invitation is presented to the participants in items 3, 4, and 10. Items 7, 9, and 11 are three offers aiming to elicit refusals: Suggestions are the other category presented in items 5, 6, and 8. As the influence of the interlocutors' social status on the indirectness of the refusals is one of the main concerns of the present study, it is worth mentioning that in items 1, 3, 7 and 8 participants are in a higher, social status in comparison to their addressees, whereas in items (4, 6, 11 and 12) participants have a lower social rank. Finally, an equal status between the participants is seen in items 2, 5, 9 and 10.

## Procedures

This study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the original DCT was administered. Then, with an interval of two months, the Persian version was applied. The interval between the two phases was assumed to highly reduce the probable effects of the first phase on the second phase. Then the participants' answers to English and Persian DCTs were analyzed to show similarities and differences between the Persian and the English elicited data.

## Data analysis

In order to analyze the data, the participants' responses to each situation were divided into the related moves. Then the moves were assigned a refusal type according to Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification of refusals. For example, one of the participants' provided response to item 12 of the DCT, which was a request for staying late at night, was as follows:

I'd really like to, boss. But I'm invited to a dinner party tonight. I'm sorry.

This typical answer was analyzed in the following way:

1. I'd really like to, boss. (Statement of positive feeling)
2. But I'm invited to dinner party tonight. (Reason)
3. I'm sorry. (Statement of regret)

## Result

### The first research question states that:

Q1: Does the frequency of direct and indirect refusal differ across languages-English and Persian?

To answer the question a comparison was made between the means of total direct and indirect strategies for the English and Persian groups. The results showed that in both groups the average ratio of indirect strategy use in Persian refusals was higher than the English ones. While the means of indirect strategy use for the Persian group showed a value of 25 per 12 items, the related value for the English group was 22 (Table 1).

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of direct and indirect strategy in English and Persian refusals

	LANGUAGE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total indirect Strategy use	Persian	60	25.1167	6.99417	.90294
	English	60	22.4333	4.60790	.59488
Total direct Strategy use	Persian	60	4.0833	2.87179	.37075
	English	60	4.3000	1.95110	.25189

This difference was found statistically significant ( $p=0.014$ ). For the direct strategy use no difference was found between the English and the Persian group. As is shown in Table 1, in both groups the participants used more indirect strategies than direct ones.

### The second research question states that:

Q 2: Does interlocutors' social status have any effect on refusal strategy use?

To investigate the participants' variation in level of indirectness based on social rank, three social states were determined as follows: Refusals to a lower status person (lower status); Refusals to an equal status person (equal status); Refusals to a higher status person (higher status).

Detailed comparison was made between the two groups' refusals based on social rank. The average use of each strategy in lower, equal, and higher status by the two language groups was calculated. The results of these computations showed that in each of the three social states, both groups used the strategy of reasoning as the most frequent strategy. The second most frequent strategy on lower status items was letting the interlocutor off the hook. On equal status items, the second most frequent strategy was gratitude or appreciation. For the higher status items, the second most frequent refusal strategy was a statement of positive feeling or opinion. The third most frequent strategy type on equal and higher status items, utilized by both language groups, was a statement of regret. On lower items the third most frequent strategy was again a statement of positive feeling or opinion (see the discussion for further information). There were some items whose frequency of use was less than one per 12 items for each certain status, but their difference between the two language groups was statistically significant. On lower status items, the strategy types which showed a higher frequency of use for the English group involved IS9-2 and AS14. On the other hand, strategy types IS4-2, IS8, and IS9-3 had a higher frequency of use for the Persian group. On equal status items, all indirect strategies including IS7, IS9-2, IS9-3, IS9-5, and IS10-1 showed a higher frequency of use for the Persian group while adjuncts including AS12, AS14, and AS 15 show a higher utilization by the English group. On higher status items, like equal ones all the statistically significant different indirect strategies show a higher number of uses among the Persian group. These indirect strategies include IS3, IS7, IS9-3, and IS9-4. The two adjuncts with a significant difference of use between the two groups involved AS14 with higher frequency of use among the English group and AS 15 with a higher ratio of use within the Persian group.

The findings show that the Persian group used more indirect strategies when making refusals to someone of higher social status ( $x=8.01$ ,  $SD=2.84$ ). On the other hand, the English group used more adjuncts than the Persian group when refusing someone's request with an equal status. Other observed differences between the two groups showed no statistical significance.

### The third research question states that:

Q3: Does interlocutors' gender have any effect on of refusal strategy use?

In order to answer this question several comparisons were made to check the probable effects of participants' gender on the provided responses. First, the means of all females' direct and indirect strategies were compared with those of males. This comparison showed no statistically significant difference between the means of the two genders.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of refusals based on gender

	SEX	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total indirect	male	60	23.0333	6.80968	.87913
	female	60	24.5167	5.13047	.66234
Total direct	male	60	3.8667	2.58724	.33401
	female	60	4.5167	2.27359	.29352

Then another comparison was made between the two gender groups based on language distinction. The 30 males and 30 females in English group proved no significant difference in using direct and indirect refusal strategies. When we examined the results of the Persian group, we came to a similar conclusion (Tables 3 & 4).



Table 3: Means and standard deviations of refusals on the English questionnaire based on gender

	SEX	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total indirect	female	30	23.2667	4.20126	.76704
	male	30	21.6000	4.91023	.89648
Total direct	female	30	4.6333	1.93842	.35391
	male	30	3.9667	1.93842	.35391

Table 4: Means and standard deviations of refusals on the Persian questionnaire based on gender

	SEX	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total indirect	female	30	25.7667	5.71558	1.04352
	male	30	24.4667	8.12291	1.48303
Total direct	female	30	4.4000	2.59442	.47367
	male	30	3.7667	3.13691	.57272

Then, the effects of social, status on the produced refusals within each language group between males and females were examined. In this part the females' direct, indirect refusals in each of the three social states (lower, equal, and higher) were compared with those of the males. For the English group, the only observed difference in this part was males' and females' variation in using adjuncts when talking to someone of a higher social status. While females used 2.6 adjuncts on average per 12 refusals, males only used 1.7 adjuncts. In Persian group, the same comparison showed variation between the two sexes, when applying direct refusals to someone of equal status. Females appeared to refuse a request more directly when talking to someone of equal status. In summary, the results of the study concerning the third question of the research showed that there are not very great differences between males and females in refusal strategy use. That is, gender was not found to be an influential factor on subjects' refusals in terms of type and frequency. However, when the interlocutors' social status was taken into account some variations were observed.

## Discussion

Findings of this study indicate more similarities than differences between Iranian EFL learners use of English and Persian refusals. That the frequency of indirect refusals in both language groups exceeded the direct ones seems to be a confirmation of the universality of politeness as a mutual face-saving strategy proposed by Kasper & Rose (2003: 165). The observation that there were more similarities than differences in the results may also be a manifestation of Ochs' (1996:425) Universal Culture Principle which states that: "There are certain commonalities across the world's language communities[,] and communities of practice in the linguistic means used to constituent certain situation meanings. This principle suggests that human interlocutors use certain similar linguistic means to achieve certain similar social ends.

An element generally absent from the refusal data was the direct refusal. Although few participants use more direct refusals, such as "I can't" or "No, I don't", subjects generally avoided refusing directly. This is in accordance to findings of Chen (1996:73) who also found, in employing refusals, the majority

of subjects avoided a direct refusal (mere no) and tended to provide reasons, explanations or excuses as a way to imply their lack of ability or unwillingness. A typical example may give a better illustration. Example (1) is taken from one of the subjects' refusal to situation nine of the DCT in which he has refused to have another piece of cake:

(1) [Na, Motshakeram]. [Kheili khoshmazeh ast]. [Ama rastesho bekhay man alan rejim gerefteham.]

[No, thanks]. [It is very delicious]. [But to tell the truth, I'm on a diet.]

Instead of using a mere "no" the subject has used a combination of strategies (a direct refusal, gratitude, statement of positive feeling, and an explanation, respectively) to refuse the proposed offer. This higher number of indirect refusals in participants' native language may be due to their greater mastery over Persian language in comparison to English as a foreign language. Another justification for this phenomena may be the cultural norms of Iranian society in which making a refusal directly even to someone of lower social status is considered as discourtesy.

Regarding the type of refusal strategies used in the two versions of the test, the reasoning strategy (exemplified earlier in refusals categorization in chapter two) proved the most frequent strategy type within both. Since it was the most frequent strategy present in all the studies mentioned in the review section, this strategy type can be considered as a universal feature in politeness strategies for reacting to the speech act of refusal. Moreover, in social status and gender distinction analysis, this strategy again gained the first place among other types of strategies. Consequently, this strategy is not significantly affected by the interlocutors' social rank or gender.

Certain patterns preferred within the two tests indicate some similarities. The first, second, third, fourth, and sixth most frequent strategies (reasoning, consideration of addressee's feeling or opinion, statement of regret, letting interlocutor off the hook, and gratitude or appreciation, respectively) were similar. Examples (2a) and (2b) taken from the English and Persian tests respectively, are subjects' refusals to the tenth situation in the DCT in which the participants decline a friend's invitation to a dinner party. In both examples the subjects have advantaged "consideration of addressee's feeling or opinion" as one of their strategies in order to refuse the invitation indirectly:

(2a) I would love to. But my mother-in-law arrives on Sunday night, and I'll have to so to the airport to take home. I'm really sorry.

(2b) [Fekr-e-khoobie]. [Vali man ye seri moshkelat daram ke nemitonam oon shabo oonja bashamh [Jeddan moteasefam].

[That's a good idea], [But I have some problems that I can't be there on that night]. [I'm really sorry].

In (2a) and (2b) "I would love to" and "Fekr-e-khoobie (That's a good idea)" are examples of AS12, statement of positive feeling or opinion, which is a pre-refusal and often takes the initial position in a series of moves employed by the interlocutors in a refusal and informs the listener of the subsequent main refusal.

The second research question concerning the social status influence on the strategy types showed that in the Persian test subjects used more indirect strategies when making refusals to someone of higher social status. In addition to the Iranian culture-specific characteristics in which refusing someone directly even with a lower social status is considered somewhat impolite, another justification may be the greater consciousness of the hierarchical nature of employer-employee relationship, where people tend to defer to the individual with higher status and more power (Nelson et al., 2002:183). An interesting finding was both tests' utilization of statement of regret as the third most frequent refusal strategy which may be the result of the subjects' native language and culture influence, in which too much care is attended not to appear impolite even in encounters with, lower status addressees.

Investigating the influence of interlocutors' gender on strategy use was another concern of this study. My own presupposition before analyzing the data was that female subjects would enjoy the advantage of more indirect refusals in comparison to men. However, the findings showed no significant variation among males and females in making refusals. This reminds us of Thomas (1983) who states that the evidence of differences between males and females talk sometimes contradicts our "common-sense" ideas. Despite no significant difference between male and female subjects in making refusals, a few variations were observed when the social status was taken into account. The English group females' more use of adjuncts (particularly statement of positive feeling or opinion) when talking to someone of



higher status. This may be the result of women's more consciousness of the negative politeness. As Holmes (1995:84) points out. "For females being negatively polite involves agreeing with Others... expressing support verbally...". Example (3a) shows a female subject's use of adjunct strategies, statement of positive feeling (You're right & I'm really satisfied with your work) and pause fillers (well), in order to refuse a worker's request for an increase in pay (situation 1 in the DCT):

(3a) Well you're right. I'm really satisfied with your work. But as you know, our annual income has terribly decreased this year. Unfortunately, I'm not able to pay you more than this.

Compare it with (3b) in which a male subject's refusal to the same situation is proposed. Due to lack of adjuncts (3b) appears more direct.

(3b) I think your payment is quite fair. Moreover, because of this year's poor sales rate, I can't give you a raise.

In the Persian test, female subjects' making more direct refusal to addressees of equal status in comparison to men may be an indication of more intimacy and friendship ties that alleviate the need to use extra face-saving strategies (Nelson et al., 2002:183). A comparison, between two examples from the data can present a better illustration of this issue. In (4a) and (4b) a refusal to a friend's request for class notes by a female and a male subject on Persian test is presented.

(4a): [Na, moteasefam]. [Chand bar yaddashthamo behet gharz dadam]. [Dige behet gharz nemidam]. [Mikhasti khodet sare kelasa be tore monazam sherkat koni].

[No, sorry]. [I have lent you notes many times]. [I'm not going to lend them to you once again]. [It would be better if you attend classes regularly.]

(4b) [moteasefam]. [Ama man gholesho be yeki digeh dadam]. [Jeddan moteasefam.]

[Oh sorry]. [But I have promised to lend them to someone else]. [Really sorry.]

In (4a) the female subject has refused her friend's request respectively by a direct refusal, a statement of regret, criticizing the request, direct refusal, and a statement of alternative. However, in (4b) the same request is refused by a male subject in a less direct way. Using face-saving strategies including two statements of regret, and an excuse which are less offensive and face-threatening strategies indicate his care for the addressee's face values.

In summary, the results of this research showed more similarities than differences between Iranian masters' use of English and Persian refusals. The higher application of indirect refusals and the absence of mere direct refusals are a confirmation of universality of languages. Higher frequency of indirect refusals in the Persian data may be due to the subjects' cultural background of Persian culture. That the two tests data analysis resulted in some similarities was found as an authentication for the previous findings in the area which indicate that "similar speech act strategies between two languages result in pragmatic success". Iranian speakers may be able to transfer many of their refusal strategies from Persian to English if they can correctly assess the degree of sociopragmatic appropriateness that DCTs cannot capture. Finally, in intercultural communication, pragmatic failure has aroused much attention. People often fail to achieve the communicative goal due to misunderstanding with people from other cultures. Though being polite is preferred universally, the connotation of politeness might vary across culture and gender. Therefore, researchers need to probe into specific cultures for the exploitation of concrete speech acts and try to identify different patterns and discourse strategies.

## Conclusion

The results of this study showed that Iranian used more indirect strategies in the Persian test in comparison to the English one. This may be due to their greater mastery in Persian. Moreover, subjects on both tests used remarkably larger number of indirectness strategies in comparison to the direct ones. Also the influence of interlocutors' social status on the employed strategies was not something unexpected. However, some differences were observed in the English and Persian data in this study. While the subjects of the Persian test used more indirect strategies in encounters with addressees of higher social status (maybe due to their higher level of consciousness about hierarchical nature of social ranks or their native language society cultural norms), the subjects of the English test used more adjuncts when-refusing someone of an equal status' request (may be due to their friendship ties). Partic-

ipants' gender influence on the refusal strategies was also investigated but no significant difference was observed between males and females in making refusals.

This study has shown the capabilities and limitations of using DCTs as data eliciting device. Despite their being criticized for lack of contextual variation and having imaginary interactional settings, this data collection is still used abundantly in discourses unites particularly those conducted in the field of the speech acts for its simplicity and high degree of control over variables in comparison to other data eliciting devices. As Helson et al. (2002), have indicated, DCTs are suitable devices for gathering pragmalinguistic data, but they failed to reveal the sociopragmatic complexities of face-threatening acts like refusals. That was also better if we had narrowed down the broad and extensive classification of refusals by eliminating or revising the strategies which were not used at all or were found statistically insignificant. Another appropriate modification was eliminating or revising the ninth situation on the DCT which proved sociopragmatically inappropriate both in Persian and English tests. At the same time, the participants' pragmatic failure in this situation is an indication of more instruction requirement in such problematic situations.

While having acknowledged these problems, it would seem that evidence obtained from our research has shed some light on the Iranian reasons for using different ratio of indirect strategies. Furthermore, it provided some justifications on male and female Iranian approximately similar strategies in making refusals. Finally, it is to note that for generalizing the results of this research, the test should be repeated with different subjects (for example, participants with different educational level), and methodologies (like role-plays and naturally occurring talks).

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