A contrastive study of the speech act of refusal: Iranian ESL learners and native English speaking Americans

Narges Kazemi Gol

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A Thesis

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A Contrastive Study of the Speech Act of Refusal;
Iranian ESL Learners and Native English Speaking Americans

by

Narges Kazemi Zadeh Gol

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment for
The Master of Arts Degree in English with concentration in ESL

Dr. Douglas W. Coleman, Committee Chair

Dr. Heather Blakemore, Committee Member

Dr. Gaby Semaan, Committee Member

Dr. Patricia R. Komuniecki, Dean

College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

May 2013
An Abstract of

A Contrastive Study of the Speech Act of Refusal; 
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The current research is a contrastive study of the speech act of refusal. Iranian 
ESL learners who have been in the US for at least one year and therefore are to some 
extent familiar with the target language culture are compared to native English speaking 
(NES) Americans. The data were gathered from 50 Iranian ESL learners and NES 
Americans using a role play scenario consisting of requests, suggestions, invitations, and 
offers. Data were then coded based on “The classification of illocutionary acts” by Searle 
(1976). Statistical analysis reveals that the responses of the two groups are very similar in 
the speech act categories used. Finding contrasts with the results of other research that 
compare native Persian speakers or Iranian EFL learners with NES Americans, based on 
the classification of refusals by Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz (1990) as a unit of 
analysis, which suggest a high level of differences in producing the speech act of refusal. 
Generally, the perception and production of refusals as dual face-threatening acts in a 
second language especially for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) is a 
complex task which requires acquisition of pragmatic competence of the target language 
at a higher degree compared to other speech acts. Since it is the first time that Searle’s
classification has been used as a basis of analysis that has more advantages than Beebe et al.’s classification of refusal (1990), the current research recommends future researchers to replicate this study with Iranian EFL learners to observe the results and also offers some solutions to the EFL students and teachers to overcome the negative pragmatic transfer.
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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

1.1 Pragmatic Competence

It is a noteworthy fact that pragmatics plays a very significant role in the production and perception of speech. Crystal (1985) as cited in Allami & Naeimi (2011) defines pragmatics as “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (p. 240). One of the main factors in the process of communication is pragmatic competence. How interlocutors produce and perceive speech in diverse situations is an important issue as creating inappropriate utterances would cause misunderstanding and miscommunication (Sahragard & Javanmardi, 2011).

The lack the pragmatic knowledge of the target language by EFL/ESL learners has been frequently observed (Eslami, 2010). Therefore, their attempt to communicate successfully with the native speakers of the target language is likely to lead to intercultural miscommunication. One of the main reasons for the pragmatic errors,
committed by EFL/ESL learners, is negative pragmatic transfer which is the use of native language pragmatic feature that leads to an inappropriate form in the target language, and hence miscommunication (Atashaneh & Izadi, 2011). Since, language learners, in general, do not have enough knowledge of the target language norms; they are influenced by their native language and transfer their first language pragmatics to the second language (Sahragard & Javanmardi, 2011).

The pragmatic development for producing and understanding the target language speech appropriately in various situations is very essential for language learners. Failure to do so may cause serious communication breakdown and also label language users as insensitive and rude people (Allami & Naeimi, 2011). We should bear in mind that while native speakers often ignore phonological, syntactic, and lexical errors, they are sensitive to pragmatic errors (Hassani, Mardani, & Hossein, 2011).

1.2 Speech Acts

The main source of miscommunication is the inability to perceive and produce speech acts appropriately in the context by language learners. According to Austin (1962) as cited in Vaezi (2011), a speech act is a functional unit in communication. It is an act that speakers implement when making utterances. All languages have almost unique ways of performing speech acts. Although speech acts are universals, the method used in performing speech acts is dissimilar in different cultures (Vaezi, 2011).
Successful production of the speech acts in a language needs not only the speaker's linguistic proficiency, but also the pragmatic perception of speech acts. Performing the speech acts properly in a first and second language is very challenging as it comes from both linguistic and cultural variations between the languages (Hassani, Mardani, & Hossein, 2011).

1.3 The Speech Act of Refusal

Refusal is a type of speech act that is projected as a response to another individual's request, invitation, offer or suggestion which means it is not speaker-initiative (Hassani, Mardani, & Hossein, 2011). Since refusal is a speech act potentially including a level of rudeness and discourtesy, performing inappropriate refusal strategies may harm the relationship between interlocutors. Thus, proper perception and production of refusals requires a certain degree of cultural awareness (Hassani, Mardani, & Hossein, 2011).

Moreover, refusal is a face-threatening act to the listener, because it is not well-matched with his or her expectations. Thus, to avoid appearing offensive or impolite, non-native speakers often overuse indirect strategies that could be misinterpreted by native speakers (Al-Eryani, 2007). According to Al-Kahtani (2005), saying no is difficult for non-native speakers of a language. How one says 'no' is more important in many societies than the answer itself. Therefore, sending and receiving a message of 'no' is a
task that needs special skills. The speaker must know when to use the appropriate form and its function depending on his and her interlocutor's cultural-linguistic values.

Since, failure to refuse appropriately may risk the interlocutors’ relations; refusals have variety of strategies to avoid offending. However, sociocultural appropriateness of these strategies differs in languages and cultures. Rubin (1981) as cited in Keshavarz, Eslami, & Ghahraman (2006) states that for language learners with limitations in linguistic as well as sociocultural norms of the target language, performing refusal appropriately necessitates a higher level of pragmatic competence than other speech acts. Thus, pragmatic transfer from the first to the second language is more likely to occur in uttering a complicated and face threatening speech act like refusal (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990).

1.4 Production of Refusal by Language Learners

In the background review, I have tried to show the previous research studies regarding the production of refusal by Foreign Language (FL) learners and particularly, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, which refers to students who learn English as a foreign language in their home country. Likewise, in the next section, the previous research studies concerning the production of refusal by Second Language (SL) learners and mainly, English as Second Language (ESL) learners, people who learn a second language out of their country and in the target language environment, have been
investigated. These studies in the two following sections have performed worldwide and particularly in Iran.

**1.4.1 Production of Refusal by Foreign Language Learners**

A number of studies have made contributions to the general study of the speech act of refusal worldwide, specially the production of refusal by people who learn a foreign language out of the target language environment, and comparing the results by native speakers. They generally concluded that these learners have a lack of the pragmatic knowledge necessary to produce such a face-threatening act. Consequently, language learners use the norms and pragmatic features of their mother tongues in the production of refusals which leads to an improper form in the target language, and therefore miscommunication.

A major study carried out by Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz (1990) compared the refusals produced by native speakers of Japanese and native speakers of English, using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). (DCT used in linguistics and pragmatics is a one-sided role play including a situational prompt which a participant read to produce the responses of another participant to elicit particular speech acts.) The participants of the study were 20 Japanese speaking in Japanese, 20 Japanese-speaking in English, and 20 Americans speaking in English with the aim of investigating pragmatic knowledge in refusals to a higher-, equal-, and lower-status interlocutors. Findings showed that
Japanese speakers of English and native speakers differ in three areas: the order of the semantic formula, the frequency of the formula, and the content of the utterances. For example, Americans inclined to offer specific details when giving explanations, while the Japanese subjects often produced explanations that might be interpreted as ambiguous. The results also verified the importance of status in the refusal strategies selected by the respondents. Americans, in refusing requests usually employed a form of indirect communication. On the other hand, the Japanese used more direct strategies if the interlocutor was a lower-status person. Status was also an important factor in refusing invitations. As with requests, the Japanese respondents were more likely to use direct strategies in refusing from someone of lower status. However, in refusing invitations from persons of higher status, the Japanese were more polite, using more indirect strategies than in addressing persons of lower status. However, Americans used similar indirect strategies in refusing invitations. With status equals, they often ended the refusal with a “thank you”. Generally speaking, the difference was that Japanese learners were mostly conscious of the status difference in interactions, while the Americans denied such differences.

Al-Eryani (2007) has investigated a pragmatic study of the speech act of refusal. The refusals of 20 Yemeni learners of English to six different situations were compared to those of Yemeni Arabic native speakers and American English native speakers. The data collected from DCT and were categorized according to the classification of refusal by Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990 (Beebe’s classification has been described at the end of Chapter 1). Results indicate that although a similar range of refusal strategies
were available to the two language groups, cross-cultural variation existed in the frequency and content of communicative formulas used by each language group in relation to the status of interlocutors (higher, equal, or lower) and eliciting acts i.e., requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions). For instance, Yemeni Arabic native speakers tended to be less direct in their refusals by offering “reasons” or “explanations”. Due to their high proficiency in English, Yemeni learners of English showed evidence of pragmatic competence of the target language in constructing their refusal in three areas: First, the order in which communicative formulas for refusing were used for instance: Yemeni Arabic native speakers used excuses in the first and the second positions of the semantic formulas; the Yemeni EFL learners used excuses in all positions, whereas American English native speakers used excuses only in the third position. Second, the frequency of semantic formula which was occurred in their refusal strategies according to their social status in the situation, higher, equal, or lower and third the content of communicative formulas according to the situation itself, a request, an offer, an invitation or a suggestion. However, EFL learners displayed some of their native language norms and cultural background while refusing in the target language.

Genc & Tekyildiz (2009) explore the ways in which Turkish learners of English use the speech act of refusal and to find out if regional variety affects the kind of refusal strategies used. Data were collected through a DCT in order to investigate the similarities and differences between the use of refusal strategies by Turkish learners of English in urban areas and rural areas as well as native speakers of English in urban areas and rural areas. 101 Turkish EFL learners and 50 native speakers of English participated in this
study. Results showed that subjects in all groups used the refusal strategies in a similar way. In addition, the status of interlocutor was observed as an important factor in strategy choice for participants. All the subjects seem to refuse similarly in using direct and indirect strategies in their responses to the different social status interlocutors.

Wannaruk (2008) investigates similarities and differences between refusals by American native English speaking and Thai and to find out if there is any pragmatic transfer from the first to the second language by Thai EFL learners while making refusals in English. The participants of the study include Thai and American native speakers and EFL learners. All participants are graduate students. The data were collected by DCT. EFL data for refusals were compared with similar data gathered from native speakers of American English and Thai. Results reveal that generally all three groups share most of the refusal strategies; however the pragmatic transfer exist in the choice and content of refusal strategies. Regarding language proficiency, EFL learners with lower English proficiency translate in a higher degree from L1 to L2 because of their lack of target language pragmatic knowledge.

Qadoury Abed (2011) deals with pragmatic transfer of Iraqi EFL learners' refusal strategies compared with Iraqi native speakers of Arabic and American native speakers of English. The DCT consisted of 12 situations including requests, offers, suggestions, and invitations with higher, equal, and lower status interlocutors. Data analyzed according to frequency types of refusal strategies and interlocutor's social status. Findings reveal that the frequency of use of refusals by Iraqi EFL leaners is different from that of Americans,
however they share some similarities. Iraqi EFL learners prefer to express refusals with caution by using more statements of reason, regret, wish and refusal adjuncts in their responses than Americans. Americans are more sensitive to their interlocutor's higher and equal status, whereas Iraqi EFL learners to lower status.

Félix-Brasdefer (2008) examines the cognitive processes and perceptions of learners of Spanish when refusing invitations from a person of equal and higher status in Spanish. Twenty male native speakers (NSs) of US English who were advanced learners of Spanish as a foreign language participated in two refusal interactions with two NSs of Spanish. The data were collected by a role-play task. Findings revealed that the data were contributory in gathering relevant information about learners’ cognitive processes concerning: (1) cognition (attention during the planning and production of a refusal to politeness, discourse, grammar and vocabulary; (2) the selection of the language of thought (English and Spanish) for pragmatic transfer; and (3) the perception of insistence after refusing an invitation. The study aims at informing researchers and teachers of the kinds of language-learning and language-use strategies that learners use to communicate in the target language.

Kwon (2004) investigates refusals of 40 Korean speakers in Korea and 37 American English speakers in America. Data were collected by a DCT taken from Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990). Data were analyzed based on semantic formula and categorized according to the classification of refusals by Beebe et al. (1990). Results showed that although a similar range of refusal strategies were available to the two
language groups, cross-cultural variation exists in the frequency and content of semantic formulas used by each language group in relation to the status of interlocutors (higher, equal, lower status) and eliciting acts (requests, invitations, offers, suggestions). For instance, Korean speakers hesitated more and used direct refusal much less frequently than did English speakers. In addition, Korean speakers frequently paused and apologized before refusing, while English speakers often expressed positive opinions and gratitude for a proposed action. Furthermore, Korean speakers tended to take a more mitigating approach in refusing a higher status person as compared to other status types, whereas English speakers did not seem to be sensitive to different status in their refusals. The author concluded that these differences in Korean and English refusals cause pragmatic failure when Korean learners of English use their native language cultural norms in production of refusal in interacting with native English speakers.

Al-Issa (2003) investigates pragmatic transfer in the performance of the speech act of refusal by Jordanian EFL learners. Two research questions of this study are:

1) If pragmatic transfer from Arabic to English would exist in production of refusal by Jordanian EFL learners in English.

2) The factors that would motivate this transfer.

In order to find pragmatic transfer, refusal data, using a DCT, were elicited from 150 participants divided equally into three groups: the target group, consisting of Jordanian advanced EFL learners, the reference groups, Jordanian native speakers of Arabic, and American native speakers of English. Data were analyzed by using semantic formulas as units of analysis. Regarding the motivating factors behind pragmatic transfer, interviews
were conducted with the Jordanian EFL group. Findings indicated that pragmatic transfer was evident in the refusal responses by the Jordanian EFL learners in four different areas: in the frequency of the semantic formulas used; in the choice of selecting a semantic formula; in the average number of the semantic formulas used per response; and in the specific content of the semantic formulas used. In each of these areas, Jordanian EFL speakers were influenced by their native language/culture and diverged from the Americans' speech norms. Moreover, based on the interview data, several factors seemed to play a role in motivating pragmatic transfer including learners' love and pride of their native language; political factors which had to do with Arabs' perceptions of westerners in general; religious beliefs; learners' own purpose of learning English; lack of exposure to English native speakers; and linguistic difficulty.

Chang (2009) investigates pragmatic transfer in refusals by native speakers of Mandarin learners of English, and to what degree transfer is influenced by the learners’ level of English language proficiency. Data were collected by DCT developed by Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz (1990). Participants were 35 American college students (AE), 41 English-major seniors (SE), 40 English-major freshmen (FE), and 40 Chinese-major sophomores (CC). The refusals were analyzed in terms of the frequency and content of communicative formulas. Findings show that while all participants employed a similar range of communicative formulas in production of refusals, they differed in the frequency and content of the communicative formulas.
Morkus (2009) investigates how the speech act of refusal is produced in Egyptian Arabic by intermediate and advanced American learners of Arabic as a foreign language with comparing the performance of the learners to that of native speakers of Egyptian Arabic and native speakers of American English. The study also investigates the relationship between the learners’ language proficiency and their pragmatic competence as well as the correlation between the degree of pragmatic transfer from L1 and the level of L2 proficiency. Four groups participated in the study: 10 native speakers of Egyptian Arabic, 10 native speakers of American English, 10 American learners of Arabic at the intermediate level, and 10 at the advanced level. Data were collected using role plays including six situations eliciting refusals of offers and requests in equal and unequal status situations. Results show that there exist important differences between the two learner groups and the native speakers of Egyptian Arabic with regard to individual strategy use and the frequency of direct and indirect strategies. For instance, the learners used a higher percentage of direct strategies and a lower percentage of indirect strategies with higher status interlocutors compared to the native speakers of Egyptian Arabic. The learners also used a higher percentage of the Statement of Regret and Request for Information/Clarification strategies and a lower percentage of the Postponement strategies than the Egyptians (see the classification of refusal by Beebe et al. 1990 end of the Chapter 1). With regard to L2 proficiency, the advanced students use an overall lower percentage of direct strategies and a higher percentage of indirect strategies than their intermediate counterparts. Also, positive and negative pragmatic transfer was observed in the two learner groups; although advanced students had a higher degree of pragmatic transfer.
The results of the study by Felix-Brasdefer (2008) comparing refusals by the Mexicans and the Dominicans show that although situational variation was the norm between both groups, the Mexicans used a significantly higher number of refusal strategies than the Dominicans. According to the author, the Mexicans used mostly indirect refusals and mitigation whereas the Dominicans apply more direct, unmitigated refusals.

In the study by Al-Kahtani (2005), the researcher explores the differences in the ways people from different cultural backgrounds perform refusals while using the same linguistic code (English). Three groups of subjects, Americans, Arabs and Japanese are compared in production of refusals based on three factors of semantic formulas: order, frequency and content of semantic formulas. In addition, the subjects are given different situations with equal, higher, or lower interlocutors. The findings show that the participants are different in the ways they perform refusals, but not across all situations. Finally, the author recommends that second language teachers help learners improve their knowledge or competence of appropriate use of speech acts in the target language. The increased pragmatic competence is essential for not only avoiding communication errors, but also for establishing a sound interaction between native and non-native speakers of English.

Hong (2011) did an empirical study of refusal strategies in Chinese by native speakers (NS) and nonnative Chinese learners (NNS). Sixty participants were asked to
refuse an invitation by “the professor” to a Chinese New Year’s party. The study found that the NS group produced ten strategies, while the NNS group produced seven strategies. Among the total number of strategies, both groups preferred the use of “apology” and “explanation” with similar frequency while differing in the choice of other strategies and their usage frequency. In direct refusals, the author noticed negative pragmatic transfer from L1 (English) to Chinese. Results showed that there are fewer similarities and more differences in perception and production of refusals by Chinese native and non-native speakers probably due to lack of cultural knowledge of Chinese language by learners.

Production of Refusal by Iranian Foreign Language Learners

Furthermore, there are some refusal studies investigating the differences between production of refusals in the target language (English) by Iranians learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Iran with refusals by native Persian speakers and/or native English speakers. The results demonstrate that Iranian EFL learners are significantly influenced by Persian culture while refusing in the target language (English) in ways that show negative pragmatic transfer.

Allami & Naeimi (2011) investigate the production of refusals by Iranian EFL learners, focusing effects of the frequency, shift and content of communicative formulas regarding learners’ language proficiency, status of interlocutors (lower, equal and higher) and types of eliciting acts (requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions) on use of the
strategies. Thirty Persian speaking learners of English filled out a DCT, containing of 12 situations of four types of refusal eliciting acts. Furthermore, 31 native speakers of Persian filled out the same DCT, translated into Persian, for comparing results. Responses of 37 American native speakers in a relevant study conducted by Kwon (2004) were established as baseline. All data were coded and analyzed according to the classification of refusals by Beebe et al. 1990 (see Beebe’s classification end of the Chapter 1). The findings showed that there were variances in the frequency, shift and content of communicative formulas used in refusals by Iranian and American speakers when responding to a higher, an equal, and a lower status person. For example, for providing an excuse/reason for the refusal, the American participants’ excuses were more specific and to the point in both place and time compared to Iranians. In addition, native Persian speakers demonstrated a high level of frequency shift in their communicative formulas which means to adjust the refusal strategies according to the interlocutor’s status (low, equal, high), while Americans refused fairly consistent regardless of that. Data indicated pragmatic transfer in the realization of the speech act of refusal among Iranian EFL learners. Also, there was a positive correlation between L2 proficiency and pragmatic transfer that means upper-intermediate learners transfer more sociocultural norms of their first language to the target language and made more pragmatic errors than the lower intermediate learners. The results indicate that refusing in an L2 is a complex task as it requires the acquisition of the cultural norms of the target language.

Hassani, Mardani, & Hossein (2011) investigate the differences between production of refusals by Iranian EFL learners and Persian native speakers as well as the
influence of social status and gender on their responses. The subjects of this research were 60 graduate Iranian students majoring in English. They were divided equally into males and females. The study was done in two stages with the same participants and a break of two months in between. Each student participated in both English and Persian version of the test. The data provided by DCT were analyzed to find out the frequencies of direct and indirect strategy use, the types of employed strategies, and the effects of participants' social status and gender on the refusals. The results showed that participants used more indirect strategies in the Persian compared to English. Also, there were no significant variances between males’ and females’ refusal strategies. Regarding social status, the finding showed that the Persian group used more indirect strategies with a higher status interlocutor.

Vaezi (2011) investigates the similarities and differences in refusing between Persian learners of English as a foreign language with Persian native speakers in Iran. The data was gathered from 30 students in Iran by DCT, typical communication, and role play. Findings show that Persian native speakers tended to use different indirect reasons in refusal to avoid annoying their interlocutors. Conversely, Iranian EFL learners are more frank and are more likely to refuse their friends’ requests, suggestions, and invitations. Moreover, social distance and power play an important role in production of refusal by Persian native speakers.

Sahragard & Javanmardi (2011) investigate how Iranian EFL learners use different pragmatic patterns and strategies to produce the speech act of refusal in various
conditions. Also, to find out if there is any correlation between the type of refusal strategies used by students and their level of education at the university (undergraduate, graduate). Forty-eight students, males and females, were randomly selected to be representative of the different levels of education who are 20 MA students majoring in TEFL and 28 BA students majoring in English Literature. The students were given a DCT to fill out. Each refusal was classified, analyzed and interpreted based on a modified version of Beebe et al. (1990) classification of refusals. The results indicated that Iranian EFL learners usually followed indirect strategies to refuse their interlocutors in a way that they would not cause any offence to their listener’s face since, indirect speech act usually meant politeness in the Iranian culture. (Brown and Levinson, 1987, consider face in the concept of courtesy with two positive and negative aspects. Positive face is a person’s desire to be accepted by other group members and negative face relates to the desire to act based on one’s will and to be unhindered by others). Lastly, no difference was found between the participants in both levels of education in using the aforementioned strategies.

Atashaneh & Izadi (2011) investigate the similarities and differences between Iranian EFL learners’ use of English and Persian refusals by using a role play. It also studied the influence of participants’ first language on the production of refusals in the target language as well as the effect of interlocutor’s social distance and power on the choice of strategies. The participants of the study were 30 Iranian students majoring in English. The study was done in two phases with the same participants and a three month interval time between the two stages. They acted the role play situations once in English
and once in Persian. The data provided by the role plays was analyzed to find out the frequencies and length of direct and indirect strategies, the types of employed strategies, and the effects of interlocutors’ power and gender on the responses. The results revealed that participants used more indirect strategies in Persian compared to when they spoke English. Furthermore, the interlocutors’ power and social distance affected the type, frequency and length of the strategies used by the EFL learners.

1.4.2 Production of Refusal by Second Language Learners

Moreover, there have been investigations worldwide comparing the perception and production of the speech act of refusal by people who learn English as a second language in the target language environment and among native speakers.

Sasaki & Beamer (2002) investigate the correlation between the transfers of learners’ perceptions of speech acts of refusal from their native language (Japanese) to their length of residence in the target language (English) environment. Data were gathered from three different groups: Japanese native speakers living in Japan, Japanese learners of English living in the US, and American English native speakers. The data were analyzed for the effects of pragmatic transfer. This study revealed that length of residence does lessen negative transfer of refusal strategies from L1 to L2 among Japanese learners of English.
Bella (2011) investigates the politeness strategies used by native speakers and non-native advanced learners of Greek while refusing a close friend’s invitation. It also examines if length of residence or interaction with native speakers affect non-native speakers’ performance. The data provided from role plays completed by native speakers and non-native speakers of two different groups: The first group with prolonged length of residence but minor social interaction with native speakers and the second group with less extended length of residence but significantly more opportunities for social interaction. Findings show that for the speech act of refusing an invitation from a friend, length of residence cannot be a sufficient criterion compared to the interaction with native speakers that has better results in pragmatic appropriateness and politeness. The significant deviances between native speakers and non-native speakers with limited opportunities for interaction reveal that migrants cannot rely on length of residence alone in order to acquire sociocultural norms and develop pragmatic ability in the use of speech acts.

Barron (2007) focuses on the acquisition of upgrading in refusals of offers by 33 Irish learners of German over a period of 10 months spent in a study abroad situation. Learner, German NS, and Irish English NS data were gathered by a DCT. As time goes on, upgrading in refusals increased in an L2-like movement. This development was observed by a decrease in negative pragmatic transfer from Irish English in the refusing of offer at the end of the one year abroad.
Jungheim (2006) investigates how 16 learners of Japanese as a second language and 17 Japanese native speakers interpret a culturally specific Japanese refusal gesture that Morris (1994) calls “the Hand Fan”. Results point out that learners are significantly poorer than native speakers at interpreting this exclusively Japanese refusal gesture. This suggests that the acquisition of even simple yet unique conventional gestures may not be so easy for language learners both in perception and production of the target language.

1.4.3 Discussion and Summary of the Literature Review

According to the abovementioned research studies, generally, EFL students are significantly influenced by their first language culture while refusing in the target language. The findings show that perception and production of the speech acts differ preeminently across cultures and languages. Even though foreign language learners may have access to the same speech acts and strategies as do native speakers, they can vary from native speakers in the strategies that they choose and use. Comparing the speech acts of refusal from the two different cultures of Iranian and American discovered that the same speech act may be understood differently across cultures (Allami & Naeimi, 2011). On the other hand, the production of refusal by second language learners has more native like manner which shows their pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence involves selecting the appropriate communication strategy based on the properties of the people, their relations to each other and the setting they are in. Indeed, greater length of residence in the target language environment as well as interaction with native speakers give
second language learners the required pragmatic competence compared to the foreign language learners who lack this opportunity.

Among the various research studies regarding the production of refusals by people who learn English as a second language in the target language environment; it is rare to find a study concerning native Persian speaking learners of English as a second language. The only research that partially investigates this subject is Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar (2011) who compare the refusal strategies used by four groups of native and nonnative speakers of English, namely, American English speakers, Persian/Azeri speakers with little knowledge of English, advanced Iranian learners of English and Iranians living in the U.S. for an average of 10 years. A DCT developed by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Welts (1990) was used to elicit the relevant data. The analysis showed that Iranian residents and advanced learners used different strategies to refuse requests, invitations, offers and suggestion from Iranians living aboard who acted more similarly to native speakers of English living in the US.

As an Iranian student who has been living in the US for a few years and studying English as a second language, I noticed a gap in the previous studies, which can be filled by answering the question “how would Iranian ESL students refuse in the target language?” ESL students learn English while living in an English-speaking society and interacting within the target language culture as well as the native English speakers. As a result, they are much more familiar with the cultural norms and pragmatic knowledge of the second language environment than EFL students who learn English in Iran. It is more
probable that their type of refusal strategy could be influenced by the target culture and therefore, be similar to that of the native speakers. Thus, this study aims to investigate probable similarities and differences between Iranian ESL students’ use of refusals in English with those of Americans. It also examines the probable effects of power (refusing a higher/ equal status) and distance (refusing a person with high/low social distance) as two social variables.

1.5 The Classification of Refusals by Beebe et al.

For investigating and categorizing the refusal data, most researchers have used the Classification of Refusals by Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz (1990) as the basis for analysis. According to Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz (1990), refusals are divided into two main groups 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 would have done 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 is 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."
There are some problems regarding the above classification. Mainly, its categories are not mutually exclusive, which means a given item in the refusal data could be matched with more than one category. Hence, it is not reliable. For example, in the above classification, number 1, statement of regret, and number 13, statement of empathy, are mainly the same. Therefore, “I am sorry” could be matched with both number 1 and 13. The similar problem exists between number 7, statement of principle, and number 8, statement of philosophy. Also, a phrase such as "It's a silly suggestion" can be categorized under number 9-2, Criticize the requester and 9-3, Guilt trip. This similarity can be seen between 10-1, Unspecific or indefinite reply "I don't know when I can give them to you", and 11-2, Verbal (topic switch, joke, repetition of past request, postponement and hedge). Thus, one particular answer might fall into more than one category. This classification also does not cover all possible refusal answers or situations and lacks a clear logic. Therefore, it has been decided for the first time to use “the classification of illocutionary acts” by John R. Searle (1976) as the basis of analysis for the current research. This classification is much simpler than Beebe et al. (1990). It is also based on the function that interlocutors use in perception and production of the speech act of refusal. Moreover, the refusal data can be classified in more than one category according the Searle’s classification of illocutionary acts.
1.6 The Classification of Illocutionary Acts by Searle

As stated by Searle (1976), the five basic kinds of illocutionary acts are representatives (or assertives), expressives, directives, commissives, and declarations.

**Representatives.** Searle describes the purpose of the representative class as committing the speaker to the truth of the uttered proposition. All members of the representative class are assessable as being either true or false. For instance, “boast”, “complain”, “conclude”, and “deduce” (P.10).

**Expressives.** Based on Searle, an expressive is a kind of illocutionary act for communicating the psychological state of the speech about a set of circumstances mainly in the propositional content such as "thank”, “congratulate”, “apologize”, “condole”, and “welcome” (P. 12).

**Directives.** Searle defines directives as illocutionary acts which are speakers’ attempts to get the hearer to do something. They could be very modest attempts as when A invites B to do C or suggest B to do C. They also may be very strong attempts as when A insists that B do C. These include verbs such as “ask”, “order”, “command”, “request”, “beg”, “plead”, “pray”, “invite”, “permit”, and “advise” (P.11).

**Commissives.** According to Searle, commissives are those illocutionary acts whose purpose is to commit the speaker to a certain course of action such as “promise”, “commit”, “oblige”, and “pledge” (P.11).

**Declarations.** Last, Searle defines declarations as speech acts in which the utterance results in correspondence between the propositional content and reality. For example, if A successfully performs the act of declaring a state of war, then the parties
involved begin to be officially at war or if A successfully performs the act of marrying B and C, then B and C are married to each other. Thus, “You're fired” and “I resign” are under this category (P.13). However, it should be mentioned that declaration as an illocutionary act is not a case in the current refusal study.

Therefore the questions to be answered are as follows.

1.7 Research Questions

1. Based on the classification of illocutionary acts and compared to the native English speakers, how do Persian native speakers who have been studying/living in an English speaking society (America), between one to five years refuse invitations, suggestions, offers and requests in the target language (English)?

2. Are there any differences between native English speakers and ESL Persians in using speech acts for their initial and final parts of refusals?

3. How do the rates of refusal of native English speakers and ESL Persians compare on the eight scenarios that include invitations, suggestions, offers and requests?
Chapter 2

2 Methods

This chapter will examine the methods used in this thesis study for participant selection, data collection, and data coding.

2.1 Participants

The 50 participants in the present study consist of 25 native Persian speaking Iranians and 25 native English speaking Americans. The Iranian participants have been living in the United States between one to five years and have different levels of English proficiency. The participants, aged between 25 to 35 years old, are of both genders. The recruitment process was performed by word of mouth. The American participants were mostly my fellow graduate students at the department of English and the Iranian participants were graduate students in other departments of the university and their spouses.
2.2 Instruments

The data collection instrument in this study consisted of role play scenarios which have adapted from Atashaneh & Izadi (2011). After giving instructions of how the scenario works, the students were asked to play the role of a responder in each situation in English. Participants were not told that the research was about refusals. The role play scenarios which were used in this study involved eight situations designed to elicit refusals as a response to four different initiating speech acts: suggestions, invitations, requests, and offers. Each situation was based on two social variables: “relative power” and “social distance” between the interlocutors. Examples follow:

1) A suggestion from a higher status with high social distance interlocutor:

   ROLE PLAY: You are a senior student in The University of Toledo. You go to your department chair so he can approve one elective course. You took one course with him [or her] in your second year and failed because you couldn't understand his [or her] lecture style. This is your last semester; you need to pass all your courses to graduate.

   THE INTERVIEWER: I suggest you take my course instead of this one. What do you think?

   In (1) the responder, a senior student (lower status), has to answer (refuse) the suggestion (taking the course instead of the other one) of the department chair (higher
status). Indeed there is a high social distance between the student and the department chair.

2) A request from an equal status with high social distance interlocutor:

ROLE PLAY: You just bought a brand new car two weeks ago. Your lab mate (whom you are not very close to) asks to borrow your car in order to drive to the airport to pick up his/her relative that is visiting for the week. Your lab mate is known for being quite a reckless driver: he/she frequently gets pulled over for speeding and running stop signs. In fact, the reason he/she needs to borrow your car is because he/she wrecked his/her own car last week in an accident. Since you spent a considerable amount of your savings on the car, you are very protective of it and do not want to take the risk of letting your friend drive it.

THE INTERVIEWER: My car is still in the shop, but I need to pick up my relative from the airport this Sunday. Do you mind if I borrow yours?

In (2) the responder and the lab mate are both students and have equal status. Responder has to answer (refuse) his/her lab mate’s request (borrowing the car). Also, they are not very close to each other, which means there is a high social distance between the two interlocutors.

3) An invitation from an equal status with low social distance interlocutor:

ROLE PLAY: One of your close American friends tells you about a rally in favor of an Ohio political issue. You have noticed that people on both sides of this issue have strong feelings and the police are often called in to keep order at the rallies. You are an international student with no interest in American politics and worried about your visa status.
THE INTERVIEWER: This issue is important to everyone. You really should join us at this rally.

In (3) the responder and his/her friend have equal status. They are close friends which shows there is a low social distance between the interlocutors. The responder has to answer (refuse) his or her friend’s invitation (joining the rally in favor of Ohio).

4) An offer from a higher status with low social distance interlocutor:

ROLE PLAY: Your uncle, who has been living and working in the US for more than 30 years and likes to set people up on dates; asks you to go on a date with one of his wife’s relatives (who is American). You don't want to disappoint him but you have met this guy/girl before, and you don't find him/her very attractive, nor do you think you have much in common with him/her.

THE INTERVIEWER: You have to go out with that guy/girl! Do you want me to give him/her a call and set it up?

In (4) the responder has a lower status compared to the uncle (higher status) based on the age. There is a low social distance between the uncle and his nephew/niece. The responder also has to answer (refuse) the uncle’s offer (go out with that guy/girl).

Table shows the situations based on the three criteria: Manner of Asking (including two suggestions, two requests, two invitations and two offers), Social Power (high/equal), and Social Distance (high/low) of interlocutors.
The role play scenarios were created using Power Point and consisted of 16 slides for eight different situations (two suggestions, two requests, two invitations and two offers). Each pair of slides was related to one case. The researcher asked participants to read the first slide which described the situation. Then, the next slide showed a suggestion, invitation, request, or offer associated with that situation with a related picture to provide the participants with a more natural sense of the case. At that point, the participant orally responded to the situation and his/her response was recorded.

Table 2.1: The eight situations regarding the Manner of Asking along with the Social Power and Social Distance of interlocutors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Manner of Asking</th>
<th>Social Power</th>
<th>Social Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Request</td>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Request</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Invitation</td>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Invitation</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures 2-1 and 2-2 show samples of Power Point slides which include a suggestion (going to the Starbucks instead of the class) from one friend to the other. They are close friends which means have equal social status with low social distance. The first slide shows the situation and the second slide displays the suggestion with a related picture (a Starbucks store).

Figure 2-1: The First Power Point Slide shows the situation.

Figure 1-2: The Second Power Point Slide is a suggestion along with the related picture.
2.3 Data Coding

In the present study, I coded and classified the data obtained from the role play scenarios according to the classification of illocutionary acts by John R. Searle (1976) including: representatives, directives, commissives and expressives. This approach has more advantages than using Beebe’s categories (see end of Chapter 1). Then, I rechecked the coding as well as doubtful examples in the data set with my thesis advisor to make sure we were in agreement. Below are some refusals by Iranians and Americans as a sample of the four types of illocutionary acts.

- I would love to do so (Expressive: to express the psychological state.) but, I have to go to the class and prepare myself for the exam (Commissive: to commit the speaker to a certain course of action.)

- No, I will not do that (Representative: to commit the speaker to the truth of the uttered proposition.)

- I do not know (Expressive: to express the psychological state.) Does the hospital have a mask that fits me? (Directive: speakers’ attempts to get the hearer to do something.)

I recorded the kind of illocutionary act in the initial and final part of each refusal as representative, directive, commissive and expressive. Examples follow.
- I have to go to the class (Initial/Commissive: to commit the speaker to a certain course of action). This course is very important for me. I am an international student and need to study more for tomorrow exam (Final/Representative: to commit the speaker to the truth of the uttered proposition).

- I would be happy to join you (Initial/Expressive: to express the psychological state) but I already made another commitment. Sorry about that (Final/Expressive: to express the psychological state).

- I really like to come to the rally (Initial/Expressive: to express the psychological state) but I don’t want to get arrested. Are you sure is it safe enough for me to come? (Final/Directive: speakers’ attempts to get the hearer to do something).

In addition, the act of refusing or agreement for each situation which is either the responders refused or agreed the suggestions, requests, invitations and offers, was recorded.

Eight questions were asked of the 50 students for a total of 400 questions. For both groups (Iranians and Americans), each response was divided into seven categories including the number of representatives, directives, commissives, and expressives, as well as the initial and final type of the speech act in the response. Finally, it was noted whether the subject refused or agreed on that particular item. Hence, a total of $50 \times 8 \times 7 = 2800$ items were analyzed.
Below are the alternative hypotheses in testable form which will lead to answers to the research questions that arose out of the discussion in Chapter 1.

2.4 Alternative Hypotheses

1. Persian native speakers who have been studying/ living in an English speaking society (America), between one to five years, while refusing invitations, suggestions, offers and requests in the target language (English) use almost the same illocutionary acts as native English speakers do.

2. There is no correlation between the language status and the choice of illocutionary acts for the initial and final parts of refusal by Persian and English native speakers.

3. There is no correlation between the native language and the numbers of refusals to the eliciting acts (invitations, suggestions, offers and requests) by Persian and English native speakers.
Chapter 3

3 Results and Discussion

Since the methodology for the study has been established, this thesis can now move to a presentation of the findings. After the results have been illustrated for the reader, this chapter will attempt to offer a discussion of those results.

3.1 Results

For comparing the refusal data by the two groups, Iranians and Americans, first the recorded answers were transcribed and then coded based on four types of illocutionary acts by Searle (1976) including, representatives, directives, commissives and expressives. For each case individually, the kind of illocutionary act and the number of times it was used by the 25 Iranian and the 25 American participants was summarized. The first research question asks: “According to the classification of illocutionary acts and compared to the native English speakers, how do Persian native speakers refuse the invitations, suggestions, offers and requests in the target language?” In order to answer it,
I performed Chi-square in the SPSS statistics 17.0 for each of the eight test items described in Chapter 2.

Based on the coded data, there are no significant differences at the 95% confidence level (A 95% confidence level is equivalent to $P \leq 0.05$) between native Persian and native English speakers in the type of illocutionary act in their production of refusals in any of the items. See Table 3.1, below, which includes the Chi-square results testing the correlation of native language and type of illocutionary act for each item.

The results show that Persian native speakers who have been studying/ living in an English speaking society (America), between one to five years, while refusing invitations, suggestions, offers and requests in the target language (English) use almost the same illocutionary acts as native English speakers do.

Table 3.1: No significant differences between native Persian and native English speakers in the type of illocutionary act for production of refusals in any of the items (1)-(8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>d. f.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.367</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.507</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.316</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.709</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.439</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For answering the second research question, which asks whether are there any differences between the native English and native Persian speakers in using speech acts for their initial and final parts of refusals; first, the initial and Final part of each refusal for the eight different scenarios by the 25 Iranians and the 25 Americans were classified based on the four types of illocutionary acts, representatives, directives, commissives and expressives (see examples in Chapter 2). Then, the correlation between the type of illocutionary act applied to the initial and final parts of refusal with the status of language were measured by using Chi-square test in the SPSS 17.0.

Based on the coded data, there are no significant differences at the 95% confidence level ($P \leq 0.05$) between native Persian and native English speakers in the choice of illocutionary act for the initial and final parts of refusal in any of the items. See Table 3.2 and 3.3, below, which include the Chi-square results testing the correlation of native language and type of illocutionary act for initial and final part of each item. Therefore, there is no correlation between the language status and the choice of
illocutionary acts for the initial and final parts of refusal by Persian and English native speakers.

Table 3.2: No significant differences between native Persian and native English speakers in the choice of illocutionary act for the initial part of refusals in any of the items (1) - (8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>d. f.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>0.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.241</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.755</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.432</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.554</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.236</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.601</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.887</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.409</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3: Differences between native Persian and native English speakers in the choice of illocutionary act for the final part of refusals in any of the items (1) - (8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>d. f.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.832</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5.998</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.005</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.402</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.175</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.386</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By looking at the table 3.3, we notice a borderline statistically significant difference (P ≤ 0.05) in the item 4 between the Iranian and American participants regarding the applied illocutionary acts for the final part of their refusal to the eliciting act of request between interlocutors with equal social power status and high social distance. Item (4) follows:

ROLE PLAY: You just bought a brand new car two weeks ago. Your lab mate (whom you are not very close to) asks to borrow your car in order to drive to the airport to pick up his/her relative that is visiting for the week. Your lab mate
is known for being quite a reckless driver: he/she frequently gets pulled over for speeding and running stop signs. In fact, the reason he/she needs to borrow your car is because he/she wrecked his/her own car last week in an accident. Since you spent a considerable amount of your savings on the car, you are very protective of it and do not want to take the risk of letting your friend drive it.

THE INTERVIEWER: My car is still in the shop, but I need to pick up my relative from the airport this Sunday. Do you mind if I borrow yours?

Qualitative examples show that the final part of refusals are extremely similar in the content. For instance:

Two Iranians and two Americans ended their refusal by “I am sorry.”

Five Americans and two Iranians ended by “I need my car that day.”

One Iranian and one American ended by “I usually do not lend my car to anybody.”

In terms of Searle’s speech act categories, the significant differences are first in the number of commisives that the Iranians applied more by expressing their willingness to drive compared to the Americans. Twelve Iranian participants ended their refusal with “let’s go together and pick up your relative from the airport.” while only seven Americans ended with “I will drive for you.” In addition, two Iranians ended their refusals with “I ask my friend for you.” while two Americans ended with “you can find another way.” which illustrates use of commisives by the Iranians again. Second, the American participants applied more directive speech act compared to the Iranians who refused more indirectly by using representative speech act. For example: two Americans ended their refusal with “rent a car.” while one Iranian ended with “I know a rental car
place.” Thus, the pragmatic differences between the American and Iranian participants which influenced the use of different speech act categories is likely to be the only reason for the minor differences between the two groups in production of refusal in this item.

The third research question asks: “How do the rates of refusal of native English speakers and Persians compare on the eight scenarios that include invitations, suggestions, offers and requests?” In order to answer it, I measured the correlation between the numbers of agreements for each case by the 50 participants with their native language by using a Chi-square test in SPSS 17.0.

Based on the coded data, there are no significant differences at the 95% confidence level (P ≤ 0.05) between native Persian and native English speakers in the numbers of refusal to the eliciting acts including invitations, suggestions, offers and requests, in any of the items. See Table 3.4, below, which includes the Chi-square results testing the correlation of native language and the rates of refusal to the eliciting acts of each item. Hence, there is no correlation between the native language and the numbers of refusal to the eliciting acts, invitations, suggestions, offers and requests, by Persian and English native speakers.
Table 3.4: No significant differences between native Persian and native English speakers in the rate of refusal to the four eliciting acts in any of the items (1) - (8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>d. f.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0.234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.556</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.663</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Discussion

The main reason for studying the Persian communication style is the fact that so little is known about the Iranian second language learners’ pragmatic competence.

According to Farahian, Rezaee, & Gholami (2012), second language settings are more advantageous than foreign language contexts for learning pragmatic rules. Learners
in a second language environment are completely exposed to the target language norms in their everyday life, and they have opportunities to use them in the appropriate situations. Bella (2011) claims that the majority of researchers have found positive effects of length of residence on pragmatic competence by investigating the intercultural communication of second language learners who live in the target language community. Based on Yamanaka (2003), these learners usually have enough opportunity for social contact with native speakers that accordingly increases their pragmatic competence. He adds this exposure to culturally rich input may provide learners with additional opportunities for becoming familiar with the pragmatic rules that native speakers apply in different situations and can contribute to greater opportunities for acquisition.

Therefore, second language learners compared to the foreign language students present a much more native-like production of refusal strategies. In the current research according to the classification of illocutionary acts by Searle (1976) the participants, Iranian second language learners, used almost equal illocutionary acts for production of refusal to the four eliciting acts including invitation, suggestion, offer, and request with regards to the two social variables, the social status of interlocutor (higher/equal) and the social distance between interlocutors (high/low), in a very native-like manner. In addition, they applied similar illocutionary acts to initiate and finalize their refusals compared to the native speakers of English. Likewise, in refusing the four eliciting acts including invitation, suggestion, offer, and request, there were not any statistically significant or important qualitative differences between Iranian second language learners and English native speakers. From this result, we can conclude that these learners’
extended exposure and interaction with native speakers has helped them to overcome social and cultural barriers and developed their pragmatic competence. Therefore with the production of refusal in the target language, Iranian second language learners who have been living for a while in the target language environment are less influenced by their first culture and use the cultural norms of the second language more. Furthermore, it is possible that our findings are partially because of using a different categorization schema, Searle’s Speech Act categories (1976). However, Searle’s categories have advantages over the Beebe’s classification which has been used in most of other refusal research studies so far (see end of Chapter 1).

The findings of this study confirm claims that the acquisition of pragmatic competence because of length of residence depends on the quality and quantity of the cultural input available to second language learners (Klein et al., 1995; Hoffman-Hicks, 1999; Kim, 2000 as cited in Bella, 2011).

As Farahian, Rezaee, & Gholami (2012) mention, compared to second language learners living in the target language environment, learners who are learning the language in a foreign language context do not have the chance to get involved in communicative situations in order to totally develop their pragmatic competence. Moreover, they hardly have the opportunity to communicate with native speakers. Hence, creating conditions to develop learner’s pragmatic competence is a must for those who are studying in foreign language contexts. Therefore, teachers should not assume that linguistic mastery of language is the final goal of foreign language instruction. Foreign language learners
should be taught to make use of pragmatic features of the target language. Such lessons could be incorporated into classroom activities by making use of films, videos, and Internet as well as authentic materials. Examples that can be learned from have to be put to use so that the learners can understand what is going on just from having the experience itself (of seeing a video of native speakers interacting) rather than from hearing lectures about them. The input coming from watching a video goes entirely to the procedural memory, not partially to the procedural memory and partially to the declarative memory. In general, these tools illustrate the culture of the target language in everyday life to the foreign language learners who do not have the opportunity to experience that culture by themselves and develop their pragmatic competence.

The main issue nowadays in the educational system of Iran is that teaching English, as the main foreign language offered in Iran, demonstrates nothing regarding the target language culture. According to Dahmardeh and Wary (2011), in Islamic countries such as Iran, the culture of English speaking countries is often interpreted as having features that are markedly opposite of those of Islamic ideology. Hence, the policy is to teach students English through the Islamic Iranian culture. The text books are written by Iranian authors under the supervision of the Iranian Education Ministry. For instance, in illustrations in English text books taught in schools, all women are dressed in an Islamic style of dressing and the setting is shown based on that culture. Dahmardeh and Wary add that English as it is currently taught in Iran is nothing but a representation of Islamic and Persian ideology which is mixed together presently. Consequently, students do not become familiar with the culture and real life situations of the target language. To support
this, Al-Issa, (2003) claims that the role of religion, in addition to the perceptions towards Westerners in general and English language native speakers in particular, are relevant when investigating how Muslim Arab students use English.

Dahmardeh and Wary (2011) indicate in countries such as Iran, where there is a negative attitude towards the countries whose language is taught, there are always concerns regarding cultural issues. However in fact, making students familiar with the target language culture does not necessarily mean jeopardizing their own culture and also does not prescribe that students should adapt their behavior to the target culture. In actuality, introducing students to new cultural values gives them a better understanding of their own culture and also promotes cross-cultural understanding. Further, culture is not something that we can separate from language. If the students do not know anything about the target language culture, they never learn to communicate proficiently in the target culture. In fact, language itself is an abstraction and a logical domain entity and culture is a physical reality — a full set of potential human interactions and environments in which they may occur. Hence, according to Celce-Murcia (2001), the complexity of teaching culture lies in the fact that, unlike other language skills, culture does not represent a separate part of foreign language instruction. In fact, the learning of the target language culture makes students better communicators, develops their pragmatic competence, and enhances the cross cultural communications and understanding. Therefore, based on the current study, in foreign language classrooms by teaching authentically the target language cultural norms in the production of refusal as the most
face threatening speech act, students will earn the required pragmatic competence and avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation in real life situations.
Chapter 4

4 Implications, Limitation and Suggestion

4.1 Implications

Different cultures have different ways of perception and of production of speech acts. These differences may cause misunderstanding or pragmatic failure when intercultural communications happen. If pragmatic competence is ignored in foreign language class rooms, the learners may encounter misunderstandings when interacting later (Al-Kahtani, 2005).

Recently, researchers have been wondering if speech acts can be taught to fill gaps in cross cultural communications (teaching here means training which affects procedural memory by providing experiences from which learning can occur). To test the effectiveness of teaching the speech act of apology as a sample, Olshtain and Cohen (1990) as cited in Al-Kahtani (2005) piloted a study including ten Hebrew speakers learning English as a foreign language. Before the instructions, the speakers had difficulties in making apologies in English; their apology was 'wordy' compared to the
native speakers. After receiving the twenty-minute instruction, the exposure to target cultural behaviors through videos, etc. the learners improved their apologizing behaviors so that they were more native like. Participants understood the major differences between the speech act strategy between their native language and the target culture. Thus, they used several kinds of intensification and downgrading as well as considering the situational variables such as age and social distance that matter in the target culture. The findings showed that teaching speech acts is possible and indeed has influence on developing the pragmatic competence in the foreign language learners.

Considering the cultural differences that exist in refusals, foreign language teachers should illustrate the typical types of refusal in the target language, which are different from the native ones. Overall, teachers should encourage students to have the knowledge of the cultural differences and the diverse use of the target language (Al-Kahtani, 2005). Based on Lingli & Wannaruk (2010) when English refusal patterns are taught to EFL learners, English culture and learners’ native culture need to be included in instruction to give the learners a very clear picture of the differences between the two cultures. According to Allami & Naeimi (2011) it is essential for language teachers to help students improve their knowledge of suitable use of speech acts in the target language by implementing instruction in pragmatics. Also, material developers should adjust teaching materials with EFL students’ need to develop communicative competence (Atashaneh & Izadi, 2011).
As Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar (2011) mention, while most advanced EFL learners gain mastery of linguistic competence to even a very high level, they have difficulties in communicating appropriately in a target context. Thus, for language learners to become competent in the target language, they need more knowledge about the pragmatic rules of the L2 speech community (Al-Issa, 2003).

Therefore, as Soler & Pitarch (2010) point out, pedagogical activities indeed will work in teaching pragmatics in EFL contexts. It seems that providing learners with opportunities for audiovisual pragmatic input, awareness and comprehension of various pragmatic meanings, makes a difference in learners’ use of refusals. In addition, teaching the speech act of refusals at the discourse level may indirectly help learners focus on other conversational skills such as negotiation strategies that are often ignored in pragmatic instruction, which facilitates the teaching of speech acts.

4.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The major difficulty I encountered was the limitation in the availability of Iranian ESL learners and their range of age and gender. Also, The Iranian participants were not equal in terms of time in the US, the amount of interaction with native English speaking Americans, and the proficiency in English.
Since it was the first time that the classification of illocutionary acts by Searle (1976) was applied as the basis of analysis, it would be useful to measure the results of similar role play scenarios with Iranian EFL learners, who have comparable English proficiency levels as ESL learners but have not lived in an English speaking country for a significant amount of time, to compare the outcomes with the findings of this study. It would be valuable to confirm whether the difference between Iranian ESL and EFL learners is because of the exposure of ESL learners to the cultural community that the EFL learners lack or if it is because I used a different categorization scheme, Searle's Speech Act categories, rather than Beebe's classifications (see end of Chapter 1).

Regarding the existing limitations, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other contexts as in different settings and under different circumstances, the results may vary. Hence, the researcher recommends a replication of this study with larger sample sizes, more role play scenarios, and controlling the effect of other variables such as length of stay in the target language environment, gender, age, and proficiency levels to confirm the findings of this study in regard to pragmatic competence in speech acts and particularly the speech act of refusal. I hope the current research will eventually contribute to smoother cross-cultural communication.
References


Appendix A

Power Point Slides for the Role Play Scenarios

The role play scenarios were created using Power Point and consist of 16 slides for eight different situations including two suggestions, two requests, two invitations and two offers in regard to the two social variables, power and distance. Each two slides were related to one case. The first slide describes a situation. The second slide is a suggestion, invitation, request, or offer associated with the situation with a related picture to provide participants with a more natural sense of that case.
CASE. 1

You are a senior student in The University of Toledo. You go to your department chair so he/she can approve one elective course. You took one course with him/her in your second year and failed because you couldn’t understand his/her lecture style. This is your last semester; you need to pass all your courses to graduate.

Your department chair:
I suggest you take my course instead of this one. What do you think?
CASE 2

You are on a bench outside of the Student Union, studying for tomorrow's exam. You're really worried about the exam. Your American close friend (same sex) in your next class, comes to join you. You've worked in the class together and gathered socially and you know him/her well. Suddenly it's time for the class which is a review session for the tomorrow's exam.

Your friend:
Starbucks is right inside the Student Union. Instead of going to the class, let's go get a coffee, OK?
CASE. 3

Your grandmother has just asked you to visit her daughter in the Toledo Hospital, who is also your aunt. However, your grandmother informed you that your aunt has a contagious illness, active tuberculosis.

Your grandmother:
Let’s visit her today.
CASE 4

You just bought a brand new car two weeks ago. Your lab mate (whom you are not very close to) asks to borrow your car in order to drive to the airport to pick up his/her relative that is visiting for the week. Your lab mate is known for being quite a reckless driver: he/she frequently gets pulled over for speeding and running stop signs. In fact, the reason he/she needs to borrow your car is because he/she wrecked his/her own car last week in an accident. Since you spent a considerable amount of your savings on the car, you are very protective of it and do not want to take the risk of letting your friend drive it.

Your lab mate:
My car is still in the shop, but I need to pick up my relative from the airport this Sunday. Do you mind if I borrow yours?
CASE. 5

You have been working together with your boss for the past three years at Ford Motor Company. You get along quite well with him/her, although you don’t socialize outside of the office. He/She has received a promotion, which will require him/her to move to San Francisco. He/She is having a goodbye party on Friday evening with the entire department at a restaurant. You would really like to attend but you have a previous engagement to go to that evening.

Your boss:
I’m having a goodbye party this Friday, and everyone’s going to be there! You have to come!
Case 6

One of your close American friends tells you about a rally in favor of an Ohio political issue. You have noticed that people on both sides of this issue have strong feelings and the police are often called in to keep order at the rallies. You are an international student with no interest in American politics and worried about your visa status.

Your friend:
This issue is important to everyone. You really should join us at this rally.
CASE 7

Your uncle, who has been living and working in the US for more than 30 years and likes to set people up on dates; asks you to go on a date with one of his wife’s relatives (who is American). You don’t want to disappoint him but you have met this guy/girl before, and you don’t find him/her very attractive, nor do you think you have much in common with him/her.

Your uncle:
You have to go out with that guy/girl! Do you want me to give him/her a call and set it up?
CASE. 8

You are at the dinner table with one of your coworkers (whom you are not very close to). He/she is serving a new dish with some ingredients but is not aware you don't like these ingredients. You try some of the dish, but not very much. You also don't want to tell your coworker that you don't like the food.

Your coworker:
Go ahead, don't be shy! Have some more to eat.