J. King Saud Univ., Vol. 18, *Lang. & Transl.*, pp. 35-57, Riyadh (A.H. 1426/2005)

Refusals Realizations in Three Different Cultures: A Speech Act Theoretically-based Cross-cultural Study

Saad Ali W. Al-Kahtani

Assistant Professor, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Email: alkahtan@ksu.edu.sa

(Received 24/12/1425 A.H; accepted for publication 03/04/1426 A.H.)

Abstract. In this paper, the researcher assumes differences in the ways people from different cultural backgrounds perform refusals even while using the same linguistic code (i.e. English). Three groups of subjects, Americans, Arabs and Japanese are compared in the ways they perform refusals with respect to three dimensions of semantic formulas: order, frequency and content of semantic formulas. In addition, the subjects are given different status in which the refuser is equal, higher, or lower to the refusee. The aim of presenting the three groups of participants is to point out the differences in realizing speech acts of refusals in different cultures and problems posed to L2 learners when producing speech acts in the target language. The findings show that the subjects are different in the ways they perform refusals, but not across all situations. There are circumstances in which they tend to react in the same way (e.g. the request situations). Finally, the study recommends second language teachers to help learners enhance their knowledge or competence of appropriate use of speech acts in the target language. The enhanced sociolinguistic competence is necessary for not only avoiding communication errors, but also for establishing a fertile ground for increased interaction between native speakers of English and their non-native interlocutors.

Introduction

A speech act is an action performed by means of language, such as requesting something, complaining about something, or refusing something. We perform speech acts when we offer an apology, greeting, request, complaint, invitation, compliment, or refusal. Speech act theory begins with the work of the two philosophers, John Austin [1] and John Searle [2]. The concept was first introduced by Austin (1962) and then modified by his former student Searle (1969, 1975, 1976). According to Austin (1962), a speech act is an utterance that serves a function in communication. He points out that in uttering a sentence, we can do things as well as say things. That is, a speaker

performs an act when making an utterance. Phonetically, an utterance is a unit of speech bounded by silence. In conversation, what any one person says before or after another person begins to speak may be considered an utterance. Linguists sometimes use utterance simply to refer to a unit of speech under study. A speech act can be just one word to perform a refusal as in " no!" or several words: "No, I'll not come to your dinner tonight". In written language, the corresponding unit is a text of paragraphs that represents an extended unit of speech. Linguists use the term "utterance" in this context to distinguish it from the term "sentence" which structuralists usually used to refer to the linguistic form devoid of its context. Utterance came into use to bring in a new approach to the analysis of linguistic forms/expressions on the basis of their functions in the context(s) in which they are used. Utterances that we produce carry at least two kinds of meaning. The first kind is the locutionary act, which is the literal meaning of the utterance (i.e., the act of saying something). The second kind of meaning is illocutionary, which is the function that the utterance performs in the social context (i.e., the act of doing something). Searle (1979) points out that the second kind (illocutionary act) has endless number of illocutionary acts. He proposes five classes of illocutionary acts: representatives (e.g. acts of stating, asserting, denying, and confessing), directives (e.g. requesting, suggesting, and advising), commissives (e.g. promising, offering), expressive (e.g. thanking, congratulating, and welcoming), and declarations (e.g. appointing, resigning, surrendering, and so on) [3].

The study reported on here is an attempt to investigate the speech act of refusals among participants from three different cultures. Twelve contexts are used to elicit refusals from subjects through written role-play. The contexts are divided into four types of categories: request, invitation, offer and suggestion. In addition, the contexts give the subjects different statuses: higher, equal, and lower.

Scope of the Study

In this paper, the researcher hypothesizes that there must be differences in the ways people from different cultural backgrounds (Americans, Arabs, and Japanese) perform refusals even while using the same linguistic code (i.e. English). The aim of presenting the three groups of participants is to point out the differences in realizing speech acts of refusals in different cultures and problems posed to L2 learners when performing refusals in the target language. These concerns will be addressed by searching for answers to the following research questions:

1) Are there any differences in the ways people from different cultural backgrounds realize the speech act of refusals?
2) What are the mostly used semantic formulas by all groups (Americans, Arabs, and Japanese) in refusing request, invitation, offer, and suggestion?
3) How do they differ in the three dimensions of semantic formulas: the order, frequency, and content in each of the four situations?
4) How do the three groups realize the speech act of refusals when the refuser is lower, equal, or higher in status to the refusee?
5) Do non-native speakers of English employ the pragmatic knowledge of L1 in realizing the speech act of refusals?

Theoretical Framework

The following is a presentation of three examples of speech acts including refusals, compliments, and requests as given by the prominent scholars in the field. Although the scope of this paper is on refusals, the presentation of the other two examples of speech act (i.e. compliments and requests) reflects a variety of cultural norms and values, which the researcher deems relevant to the present study.

1) Refusals

A refusal is to respond negatively to an offer, request, invitation, etc. Searle and Vandervken (1985) define the speech act of refusal as follows: “the negative counterparts to acceptances and consentings are rejections and refusals. Just as one can accept offers, applications, and invitations, so each of these can be refused or rejected"[4, p. 195]. It is so difficult for some non-native speakers to say "no". In many cultures, how one says "no" is probably more important than the answer itself. Therefore, sending and receiving a message of "no" is a task that needs special skill. The interlocutor must know when to use the appropriate form and its function depending on each group and their cultural-linguistic values. The skills of refusing others' offers, requests, or invitations without hurting their feelings are very important to have since the "inability to say 'no' clearly has led many non-native speakers to offend their interlocutors " [5].

Refusal is considered a face-threatening act among the speech acts for it threatens the face wants of the speaker and the hearer by running contrary to their face wants. The face of the speaker or listener is risked when a refusal is called for or carried out. Consequently, refusals, as sensitive and high-risk, can provide much insight into speaker’s pragmatics. To perform refusals is highly indicative of one's non-native pragmatic competence [6].

Investigations into the speech act of refusing have been limited. Some significant studies have been conducted, however. Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) in their study " Pragmatic Transfer in ESL Refusals" compared Japanese learners of English with native speakers of English and Japanese. The aim of their study was to find evidence of pragmatic transfer in the order, frequency, and content of semantic formulas used in the Japanese ESL learners' refusals. Findings showed that there was pragmatic transfer from the native language in the order of semantic formulas that the Japanese speakers of English used. Findings also showed that Japanese refused differently based on the social status of interlocutors (higher, equal, and lower) in both English and Japanese, while the Americans were more influenced by the degree of familiarity or the social distance(1) from the interlocutors. Japanese did not apologize or express regret when they refused a lower status interlocutor, Americans, on the other hand, paid attention to social distance. Americans gave brief refusals to both higher and lower status, and more detailed responses to friends and acquaintances. They also tended to give specific excuses, whereas Japanese gave vague and unspecified ones [7].

In another study, Al-Shalawi (1997) investigated the semantic formulas used by Saudi and American male undergraduate students performing refusals. The result of his investigation revealed that Saudis and Americans used similar semantic formulas in refusing requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions. There were no significant differences between the two groups except in the employment of direct "no". They differed, however, in the employment of semantic formulas and in the content of refusals. The selection of semantic formulas reflected some important differences between Saudi and American cultures. Saudi refusals revealed collectivistic culture, while American refusals reflected individualistic culture. Americans were more specific and clear in their refusals than Saudis who gave little information and ambiguous explanations [8].

Ramos [5] conducted a study that describes the patterns, forms, rules, and strategies (sociolinguistic behavior) used by Puerto Rican speakers of Spanish in refusing requests, invitations and offers. The study also compared and contrasted refusals of Puerto Rican speakers of Spanish with native speakers of American English. The findings showed that refusals among Puerto Rican teenagers with low proficiency in English tended to be shorter, simpler and more direct than refusals by native speakers of American English.

(1) The social distance is in one way or another a net result of social status. For example, the social status of a university president determines how distant he wants to remain from his interlocutors.

2) Compliments

Olshtain and Cohen (1991) define compliments as one of the speech acts to express solidarity between speaker and hearer and to maintain social harmony [9]. It is obvious that there is a wide variety of compliments within one culture in terms of their roles and usage. Compliments are mainly aimed at maintaining the interlocutor's face. Inappropriate use of compliments can lead to a loss of face. Saito and Beecken (1997) investigated pragmatic transfer in American learners of Japanese responding to compliments. Their study revealed that Japanese normative responses to compliments were mixtures of positive ways (gratitude, etc.), negative ways (denial), and avoidance. This was not in accordance with a prototypical agreement among researchers that Japanese respond to compliments with denials or avoidance. Another result was that American learners of Japanese did not use avoidance as much as native speakers of Japanese. The study also showed that there was pragmatic transfer by American learners of Japanese because of the different norms regarding complementing acts between the two cultures [10].

3) Requests

Brown and Levinson (1978) define 'requests' as face-threatening acts to both the requester and the recipient since it has the potential to be intrusive and demanding. A request expresses a wish for the hearer to perform some action [11].

Blum-kulka and Olshtain (1984) classify the speech act of requesting into three levels according to the degree of directness:

a) The most direct and explicit level (e.g. performatives and hedged performatives).
b) The conventionally indirect level (e.g. requests that realize the act by referring to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance, as conventionalized in a given language).
c) The non-conventional indirect level (e.g. the open-ended group of indirect strategies that realize the act by either partial reference to an object or element needed for the implementation of the act) [12].

Blum-kulka *et al.* (1989) investigated the requesting behaviors of the speakers from five language backgrounds including Hebrew, Canadian French, Argentinean Spanish, Australian English and German. Based on the levels of requesting strategies, it was found that English speakers tend to use conventional indirectness strategies less than the other four groups. Spanish, Hebrew, French, and German speakers, on the other hand, switched levels of directness more often than English speakers and were more sensitive to

social/situational factors (e.g. employing a high level of directness in asking a low-imposition request and a high level of indirectness in a high-stake request) [13].

Fukushima and Iwata (1987) investigated the production of request among native speakers of Japanese and American English. They found that there was no significant difference between the strategies used by Japanese and Americans in request utterances. Both groups used the sequence of semantic formulas (apology - reason – request). The Japanese speakers, however, made distinctions between sociocultural strategies and sociolinguistic expressions with respect to the closeness of friendship, while the American speakers did not [14].

Most of the aforementioned studies focused on how the native and/or non-native speakers of the language produce or comprehend the speech acts, rather than on how the speakers develop the pragmatic competence, specifically the ability to produce and comprehend speech acts appropriately.

Methodology of the Study

1) Subjects(2)

Thirty subjects participated in this study: 10 Americans, 10 Arabs speaking English (AEs), and 10 Japanese speaking English (JEs). The American subjects are 7 females and 3 males. Six of the Americans are undergraduate students (4 females and 2 males) studying at an American university. The other four are three doctoral candidates (2 females and 1 male) and one non-degree female student with teaching experience. Arab subjects are 3 females and 7 males. Two of the females are doctoral students at the same school, and the other one is a high school teacher. Among the males are 5 doctoral, 1 masters, and the other one is a physician. The females are from Jordan, Egypt, and Syria. Three of the males are from Saudi Arabia (2 doctoral and 1 masters), 1 Syrian, 1 Jordanian, 1 Egyptian, and 1 from Morocco. Among the Japanese subjects are 4 undergraduate, 3 English language learners, and 3 graduate students.

2) Material

Following the most widely used technique, the researcher administered a discourse completion test (based on Beebe *et al*., 1990), with twelve contexts where the subjects need to refuse through written role-play. Beebe *et al.* claimed that the discourse completion test (DCT) method can draw an accurate picture of stereotypical refusals.

(2) ***Acknowledgment*** I am deeply indebted to my colleague Sittichai, from Thailand, and other classmates from Japan who assisted me in collecting data for this study. Their contributions are greatly appreciated.

The subjects read explanations about a situation first and read the interlocutor's utterances. Then, the subjects write their reactions to the utterances in the following blanks. Though they were not asked to refuse on the DCT, the interlocutors' answers after the blanks let them realize that they needed to refuse in the context. The contexts are divided into four types of categories: request, invitation, offer and suggestion. In addition, the contexts give the subjects different statuses: higher, equal, and lower. For example, in one of the contexts in the DCT, a boss asks the subject to spend extra time in the office. The type of this context is request, and subject's status is lower than the boss. After the blank in which the subjects fill out their reactions, they read the boss's answer, "That's too bad. I was hoping you could stay". This answer indicates that the subjects are expected to refuse in this context.

Data Analysis

The collected data of the refusals was analyzed along the line of Beebe *et al.* [7] in that data was classified into semantic formulas. In addition, the order, frequency, and content of semantic formulas were analyzed for respective groups: Americans, Japanese, and Arabs. After that, the typical order of semantic formulas in each item for each group (Tables 1.1-4.3) was identified. The number of each semantic formula was counted and found the four mostly used semantic formulas in each item (Tables 5.1-8.3). In the tables, the results of coding were shown according to the four stimulus types: request, invitation, offer, and suggestion, and refuser status for each stimulus type: lower, equal, and higher than the other interlocutors. The result was presented as such in order to see the differences of the results among the four stimulus types and the three-refuser status within each group, and to see the differences of the results among the three nationalities in the same stimulus type and the same refuser status.

For example, in #12 of the DCT, one Japanese subject refused his boss's request of spending an extra hour or two in the office such as, "I'm sorry but I have to go back home as soon as possible because of my family matter." This was coded as: [regret] [excuse]. After all the data was coded like this, 4 out of 10 Japanese subjects were found to use the order, [regret] [excuse]. Therefore, it can be said that the typical order of semantic formulas among Japanese subjects in #12 was [regret] [excuse]. As for the frequency, after counting the number of [excuse] among Japanese subjects in #12, 9 out of 10 subjects were found to use this semantic formula. Thus, the most frequently used semantic formula among Japanese in #12 was [excuse].

Findings

Differences with regard to semantic formulas can be found at three different levels including order, frequency and content of semantic formulas.

Order of Semantic Formulas

1) Request

Table 1.1. Typical order of semantic formulas in refusal of request in the 'stay late at night' situation (Item # 12)

Refuser Status	Group	Order	
		1	2
Lower	Americans	Regret	Excuse
	Arabs	Regret	Excuse
	Japanese	Regret	Excuse

Table 1.2. Typical order of semantic formulas in refusal of request in the 'borrow class notes' situation (Item #2)

Refuser Status	Group	Order	
		1	2
Equal	Americans	Regret	Excuse
	Arabs	Regret	Excuse
	Japanese	Regret	Excuse/Negative Ability

Table 1.3. Typical order of semantic formulas in refusal in the 'request raise' situation (Item #1)

Refuser Status	Group	Order	
		1	2
Higher	Americans	Positive agreement	Postponement
	Arabs	Positive agreement	Postponement
	Japanese	Positive agreement	Promise of future acceptance

Tables 1.1-1.3 show the typical orders of semantic formulas used in refusing requests across three situations, namely the 'Stay late at night' (in which the refuser is in a lower status relative to the interlocutor), the 'Borrow class notes' (in which the refuser is equal in status to the refusee) and the 'Request raise' situation (in which the refuser has a higher status than the interlocutor). In the first situation, it was found that most of

the subjects across the three cultural groups favored the same set of semantic formulas in the order of [regret] and [excuse]. For example, one American respondent said, "I'm sorry I have already made other plans that I can't reschedule on such short notice". Respondents from the three cultures similarly used the same order of semantic formulas in the second situation. However, the semantic formulas used in the third situation are different from those used in the first and second situations. In this situation, the respondents from the three cultures exploited the same order of semantic formulas which is [positive agreement] in the first place and [postponement] in the second order. This is exemplified by the response made by one of the Japanese subjects, "I know you are the best worker in this shop. Let me think about your salary a couple more months." Overall, the respondents from all the three cultures strikingly patterned with one another by using the same orders of formulas across the three situations. In sum, the native speakers of English (the Americans) and the non-native speakers of English (the Japanese and the Arabs) were found to be noticeably similar in that the majority of each group used the same order of semantic formulas across the three 'request' situations.

2) Invitations

Table 2.1. Typical order of semantic formulas in refusal in the 'boss's party' situation
(Item#4)

Refuser Status	Group	Order	
		1	2
Lower	Americans	Regret	Excuse
	Japanese	Regret	Excuse
	Arabs	Agreement	Excuse

Table 2.2. Typical order of semantic formulas in refusal in the 'dinner at friend's house' situation
(Item #10)

Refuser Status	Group	Order	
		1	2
Equal	Americans	Positive	Excuse
	Japanese	Excuse	Gratitude
	Arabs	Excuse	Postponement

Table 2.3. Typical order of semantic formulas in fefusal in the 'fancy restaurant (bribe)' situation
(Item #3)

Refuser Status	Group	Order	
		1	2
Higher	Americans	Positive agreement	Excuse
	Arabs	Gratitude	Excuse
	Japanese	Regret	Excuse

The typical orders of semantic formulas used in refusing invitations in three types of situations are shown in Tables 2.1-2.3. In the first situation in which the refuser has to turned down his boss's invitation to his party, all the cultural groups were found to use [excuse] at the second position. However, only the American and the Japanese subjects similarly expressed [regret] at the first position. Most of the Arab subjects favored [agreement] in the first position. In the second situation the Japanese patterned with the use of [excuse] in the first position. In the second situation, the Japanese patterned with the Arabs with the use of [excuse] in the first situation. They used different semantic formulas in combination with [excuse], though. In the third situation, most of the subjects from the three groups similarly put [excuse] at the second position. They, however, differed in the semantic formulas they used at the first position. The American subjects favored [agreement], e.g. one American respondent said, "That would be great, but I'm going to be busy for the next week or so". Most of the Arabic speakers started their refusals with an expression of [gratitude]. The majority of the Japanese respondents showed [regret] first.

3) Offers

Table 3.1. Typical order of semantic formulas in refusal of request in the 'promotion with move to small town' situation
(Item #11)

Refuser Status	Group	Order	
		1	2
Lower	Americans	Gratitude	Excuse
	Arabs	Gratitude	Excuse
	Japanese	Gratitude	Positive feeling/Excuse

Table 3.2. Typical order of Semantic formulas in refusal of request in the 'piece of cake' situation
(Item #9)

Refuser Status	Group	ORDER	
		1	2
Equal	Americans	No	Gratitude
	Arabs	No	Gratitude/Excuse
	Japanese	No	Gratitude

Table 3.3. Typical order of semantic formulas in refusal of request in the 'pay for broken vase' situation
(Item#7)

Refuser Status	Group	Order	
		1	2
Higher	Americans	Empathy	Off the hook
	Arabs	Off the hook	Reason
	Japanese	Off the hook	Reason

The typical orders of semantic formulas used in refusals of offers in three different situations including the 'Promotion with move to small town', 'Piece of cake' and 'Pay for broken vase' situations are presented in Tables 3.1-3.3. The subjects across the three cultures were found to similarly express [gratitude] first before stating [excuse] in the first situation. With respect to the 'Piece of cake' situation in which the respondents have to turn down an offer of a piece of cake made by a person of equal status, most of the subjects from the three groups unanimously started their refusals with direct 'No' reply followed by the expression of gratitude. In the third situation, the non-native speakers of English (the Japanese and the Arabs) were found to be different from the native speakers (Americans) with regard to their refusal strategies in that they started by letting the interlocutor (the maid who offers to pay for a broken vase) off the hook, whereas the Americans used the formula after they expressed [empathy].

4) Suggestions

Table 4.1. Typical order of semantic formulas in refusal of request in the 'write little reminders' situation
(Item #6)

Refuser status	Group	Order	
		1	2
Lower	Americans	Gratitude	Self-defense
	Arabs	Self-defense/Explanation	-
	Japanese	Gratitude/Agreement	Explanation

Table 4.2. Typical order of semantic formulas in refusal of request in the 'try a new diet' situation
(Item #5)

Refuser status	Group	Order	
		1	2
Equal	Americans	Negative willingness	Alternative
	Arabs	No	Explanation
	Japanese	Explanation	-

Table 4.3. Typical order of semantic formulas in refusal of request in the 'more conversation in foreign language class' situation
(Item #8)

Refuser Status	Group	ORDER	
		1	2
Higher	Americans	Gratitude	Principle
	Arabs	Reason	-
	Japanese	Agreement	Reason/Principle

Tables 4.1-4.3 show the typical orders of semantic formulas used in refusals of suggestions. In the first type of 'suggestion' situations in which the refuser is higher in status to the refusee, it was found that most of the American and the Japanese subjects were alike in the order of semantic formulas that they used in this situation in that they expressed [gratitude] first. The second formula for most of the Americans was [self-defense] and [explanation] for the majority of the Japanese. The Arab subjects were found to be unique in that they did not express [gratitude] in this situation at all. Turning to the next situation of suggestion in which each respondent was prompted to refuse the suggestion made by a person of equal status, most of the Americans and the Arabs were found to be similarly direct because they started their refusals with direct negatives (i.e., [No] or [negative willingness]). The Japanese respondents stand out from the two groups in that they did not explicitly refuse the suggestion. Instead, they gave [explanation] as indirect refusals. As for the 'suggestion' situation in which the refuser assumes a higher status than the refusee, the three groups were found to vary considerably in the semantic formulas that they used in the first position. The American subjects usually started with [gratitude]; most of the Arabs expressed only [reason] without any adjuncts; the Japanese subjects preferred to utter [agreement] first. Notice that the Americans and the Japanese were alike in their use of [statement of principle] as the second semantic formula.

Frequency of Semantic Formulas

Besides their differences in the ordering of semantic formulas, the three groups of speakers were found to use particular types of semantic formulas at different degrees of frequency.

1) Requests (see Tables 5.1-5.3)

Table 5.1. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of requests (the 'Stay late at night' situation (Item #12)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Lower	Americans	Excuse> Regret = Negative Willingness> Promise
	Arabs	Excuse> Regret> Negative Ability> Avoidance
	Japanese	Excuse> Regret> Wish

Table 5.2. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of requests (the 'Borrow class notes' situation
(Item #2)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Equal	Americans	Excuse> Regret> Negative Willingness> Set Condition
	Arabs	Excuse> Regret> Agreement> Wish
	Japanese	Excuse> Alternative = Negative Ability> Regret = Agreement

Table 5.3. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of requests the 'request raise' situation (Item #1)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Higher	Americans	Positive Agreement> Negative Willingness> Promise of Future Acceptance
	Arabs	Postponement> Agreement> Excuse> Negative Ability
	Japanese	Positive Agreement> Excuse = Negative Ability = Promise of Future Acceptance> Regret

In the first two of the request situations, namely the 'Stay late at night' situation in which the refuser has to turn down the request of his boss and the 'Borrow class notes' event in which the refuser is elicited to reject the request of his classmate (who has an equal status), the three groups of speakers were found to be similar in that they used the semantic formula [excuse] the most and [regret] the second most with an exception to

the Japanese in the second situation. Some Japanese gave [alternative] by letting the refusee make the copy of his/her notebook. However, in addition to [excuse] and [regret] each group employed different set of semantic formulas, e.g. the Americans used [negative willingness] and [promise] whereas the Arabs employed [negative ability] and [avoidance]. Meanwhile, the Japanese added [wish] to their set of semantic formulas. In the third situation of request in which the subjects were forced by the circumstances to turn down the request of a person who is lower in status (the 'Request raise' situation), the semantic formula which was used across the three groups was [positive agreement]. However, it was used the most often only among the American and Japanese subjects. Most of the Arabic speakers of English preferred to use [postponement] more often than [positive agreement].

2) Invitations (see Tables 6.1-6.3)

Table 6.1. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of invitations the 'boss's party' situation (Item #4)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Lower	Americans	Regret> Excuse
	Arabs	Excuse> Regret> Agreement> Wish
	Japanese	Excuse> Regret> Gratitude = Positive Opinion = Negative Ability

Table 6.2. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of invitations the 'dinner at friend's house' situation (Item #10)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Equal	Americans	Excuse> Positive agreement> Pause fillers = Negative willingness
	Arabs	Excuse> Postponement> Gratitude> Alternative
	Japanese	Excuse> Gratitude> Regret> Wish

Table 6.3. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of invitations the 'fancy restaurant (bribe)' situation (Item #3)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Higher	Americans	Excuse> Postponement = Positive agreement = Negative Willingness = Gratitude
	Arabs	Excuse> Postponement> Gratitude> Alternative
	Japanese	Excuse> Postponement> Agreement> Regret

With respect to the situation in which the refuser is in a lower status (refusing the invitation made by a boss), the respondents from the three cultures similarly used [excuse] and [regret]. However, the American subjects expressed [regret] more often than [excuse] while the Arabic and Japanese speakers used [excuse] the most frequently and [regret] the second most frequently. Moreover, the Japanese and Arab subjects also made use of an additional range of semantic formulas including [gratitude], [positive opinion] and [negative ability] whereas the Arabs exploited [agreement] and [wish]. In the refusals of the next type of invitation, the refuser is equal in status to the refusee. In this situation, the three groups of speakers similarly used [excuse] the most often in combination with a set of other semantic formulas. Interestingly, only the non-native speakers of English were found to express [gratitude] in this situation. In turning down the invitation of a person lower in status (a salesman in this case), all the three groups were found to be strikingly similar in that they made [excuse] the most often and used [postponement] the second most often. Like the Americans, the Arabs expressed [gratitude] in this situation whereas the Japanese did not. They did, instead, express [regret].

3) Offers (refer to Tables 7.1-7.3)

Table 7.1. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of offers the promotion with move to town situation
(Item #11)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Lower	Americans	Excuse> Gratitude> Negative willingness> Postponement = Positive opinion
	Arabs	Excuse> Gratitude
	Japanese	Excuse> Gratitude = Positive feeling> Regret = Negative Ability

Table 7.2. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of offers the 'piece of cake' situation.
(Item #9)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Equal	Americans	No> Gratitude> Excuse> Positive agreement
	Arabs	Excuse> No
	Japanese	Gratitude = Excuse> No > Agreement> Positive opinion

Table 7.3. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of offers the 'pay for broken vase' situation (Item #7)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Higher	Americans	Off the hook> Empathy> Alternative = Philosophy
	Arabs	Off the hook> No> Reason!
	Japanese	Off the hook> Reason> Philosophy> Future alternative

The three groups of subjects were found to be similar in the situation where the refuser turns down the offer of a person who is in a higher status in that they used [excuse] the most often and expressed [gratitude] the second most often. Additionally, while the Arabs seemed to be employing only two previously mentioned semantic formulas (i.e., [excuse] and [gratitude]) in this situation, the Americans and the Japanese were found to also use some other semantic formulas such as [negative willingness], [postponement] and [regret]. When being equal in status to the person who offers, the American subjects were found to use direct [no] the most often followed by [gratitude]. On the contrary, the Japanese and the Arabic respondents expressed [gratitude] more often than [no] in this situation. In fact the Japanese expressed [gratitude] as often as [excuse] in responding to this type of offer. In refusing the offer from a person of lower status, all the three groups were in agreement in using [off the hook] (e.g. "That's alright.") the most often.

4)Suggestions (see Tables 8.1-8.3)

Table 8.1. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of suggestion the write little reminder situation
(Item #6)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Lower	Americans	Self-defense> Explanation> Gratitude
	Arabs	Alternative> Self-defense = Explanation
	Japanese	Explanation> Self-defense = Gratitude = Agreement

Table 8.2. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of suggestion the 'try a new diet' situation
(Item #5)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Equal	Americans	Negative Willingness> Alternative = Gratitude = Excuse
	Arabs	Explanation> No
	Japanese	Explanation

Table 8.3. Frequency of semantic formulas used in refusals of suggestion the 'more conversation in foreign language class' situation

(Item #8)

Refuser status	Group	Semantic formulas used /arranged from most frequently used to least frequently used
Higher	Americans	Principle> Alternative> Self-Defense = Gratitude
	Arabs	Negative willingness> Reason
	Japanese	Excuse = Explanation = Principle> Agreement

With regard to the first situation of suggestion, the three groups were found to vary. The American respondents used [self-defense] the most often; most of the Arab subjects employed [alternative] the most frequently whereas the Japanese respondents relied on [explanation] the most in this situation. Interestingly, only the American and the Japanese respondents expressed [gratitude] in this situation. Where the subjects were prompted to make a refusal to the suggestion of a person of equal status, it was found that the native speakers of English (the American respondents) stand out from the non-native speakers (the Arabic and the Japanese subjects) because of their most often use of [negative willingness] and their expression of [gratitude]. The Arabic and the Japanese subjects were alike in that they made [explanation] the most often in this circumstance. Worth mentioning is that the Arabs also made use of explicit negative [No]. Turning now to the other type of 'suggestion' situation in which the respondents across the three groups assumed the status higher than that of the person who suggests, the three groups were found to differ regarding the frequency of semantic formulas they used. The Americans used [statement of principle] the most often; the Arabs employed [negative willingness] the most frequently while the Japanese exploited [excuse] as frequently as [explanation] and [statement of principle].

Content of Semantic Formulas

The differences between the three groups are identifiable not only at the level of order and frequency of semantic formulas, but also at the content level of semantic formulas. Arguably, even though two responses can be categorized into the same semantic formula, the ways they are verbalized can be culturally and linguistically distinctive. In this study, I am in agreement with Beebe *et al*. [7] in that the semantic

formulas whose content should be analyzed to find differences among cultures are [excuse], [statement of principle] and [statement of philosophy]. They are more interesting than the other semantic formulas regarding their semantic content because they represent personal ideas which are the most prone to be influenced by their background cultures. Moreover, It was found that most of the other semantic formulas such as [regret], [gratitude] and [wish] were verbalized in virtually the same way by the three groups. In other words, they were used formulaically and hence they were not distinguishable among the three groups.

Before considering the excuses made by the different groups of subjects in the present study, it would be useful to refer to Beebe *et al.*'s study [7]. In their study, the Japanese subjects' excuses were found to be vague in details and less specific compared to the Americans. For example, in refusing an invitation to a restaurant by a salesman (Item #3 in the Discourse Completion Test), a Japanese subject in their study responded 'I have to go to Europe soon'. In another event, a Japanese respondent refused the boss's invitation to a party by saying 'my children have problems at home'. They reported that the American subjects' excuses were more specific in place and time, thus they were considered to be more 'airtight' in making excuses. The findings of the present study are in support of Beebe, *et al.*'s study. I found that most of the Japanese and the Arabs were unclear and not as specific as the Americans in making excuses. For example, in turning down the invitation to a restaurant made by a salesman, a Japanese respondent in this study replied 'well, I have something important to think about right now. So, could you give me another chance to discuss it?' An Arab subject responded, "I am busy and I [sic] engaged with other appointments." In contrast, most of the excuses made by most of the Americans were more 'airtight'. One American respondent said (in response to the salesman's invitation to a fancy restaurant made as a bribe) 'I'd love to, thank you for the invitation. I have decided to sign with another company.' As to whether the fact that many of the non-native speakers of English (the Japanese and the Arabs) were not as specific and to the point as the native speakers (the Americans) could be attributed to their background cultural norms is beyond the scope of the present study. However, it can be hypothesized that the interference of background cultures of the non-native speakers might contribute to their 'vague' excuses.

Statement of Principle and Statement of Philosophy

Let’s turn now to the other two semantic formulas [statement of principle] and [statement of philosophy] which distinguish the Japanese subjects from the Americans

in terms of 'formality' in Beebe *et al.*'s study [7]. The findings, again, are in agreement with theirs. Beebe *et al*. reported that their Japanese respondents sounded more formal than the American counterparts because of their more frequent use of [statement of principle] and [statement of philosophy] which are formal by nature. Similarly, in this study, the Japanese subjects were found to use the two semantic formulas more often than the other two groups. Specifically speaking, they used [statement of philosophy] in the situation in which they had to turn down an offer of payment for a broken vase made by a housemaid (Item #7 in the Discourse Completion Test). A Japanese respondent replied' Really? It's okay. You do not need to worry. Someday it would be broken. Anyway did you have an injury?' Another said 'That's OK. Everybody makes mistakes.' They expressed [statement of principle] in turning down suggestions made by a person of lower status (situation #8 in the questionnaire). To illustrate, one Japanese subject said in this situation: "I am sorry, but this is the way I teach". As for the Arab subjects, it was found that they did not use the two semantic formulas "with such striking frequency" as the Japanese. It is worth mentioning that, even without using the two semantic formulas, the non-native speakers sounded formal with the particular styles of language (structures and vocabulary) they used. One clear example is from a Japanese subject responding to an offer of payment made by a housemaid: ' I was well aware of what you really had to support. I appreciate you from the bottom of my heart. I would like to offer you the broken vase for supporting my children. That is to say, the broken vase is yours. Therefore, you do not have to pay for it.' Another example of 'formal style' by the non-native subjects comes from an Arab respondent refusing an offer of promotion to a small town from the boss: ' I appreciate your promotion. However I would prefer to stay here, because my husband is ill. He will not be able to move with me to that town. '

Conclusion

By comparing the three groups of subjects, the Americans, the Arabs and the Japanese, it was found that they were different in the ways they realized the speech act of refusal with respect to the three dimensions of semantic formulas: the order, frequency and content. However, they were not different across all situations. There were circumstances in which they tended to react the same way (e.g. the 'request' situations). As has been mentioned before, different cultures have different ways to realize speech acts since there is a wide range of strategies. The native speakers of English (the Americans) and the non-native speakers employed different semantic strategies in realizing the speech act of refusals. The differences in verbalizing speech

act of refusals among the native speakers of English and the non-native speakers can be attributed to the interference of the non-native's first languages.

Implications for Pedagogy

As has been shown in the theoretical framework and in the study conducted, speech acts reflect the cultural norms and values that are possessed by the speakers of different language backgrounds. Different cultures have different ways to realize speech acts. Differences like these might cause misunderstanding or pragmatic failure when people from different cultures need to interact with each other. If the sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences are neglected in second language learning and teaching, the learners may encounter difficulties when interacting with people in real-life situations. In order to avoid this problem, it is crucial for second language teachers to help learners enhance their knowledge or competence of appropriate use of speech acts in the target language. The enhanced sociolinguistic competence is necessary not only for avoiding communication errors, but also for establishing fertile ground for increased interaction between native speakers of English and non-native interlocutors. Many current studies have been paying attention to whether speech acts can be taught to fill the gaps in the speech act behavior and to expedite the process.

To test the effectiveness of teaching acts (apologies, in particular), Olshtain and Cohen (1990) conducted a study involving ten Hebrew speakers learning English as a foreign language. Prior to the instructional treatment, the speakers were found to have difficulties in making apologies in English; for example their speech was considered' wordy' ("Did you wait for me? You must forgive me. I could not come because of problems and I tried to warn you by phone but..."). After receiving the twenty-minute-long instruction, the learners did improve their apologizing behaviors. Specifically, they were aware and made use of various types of intensification and downgrading in the L2; they realized the subtle differences between speech act strategy realizations in the target culture, and they took into consideration the situational variables (e.g. age, social distance) that matter in realizing speech acts in the target culture. This shows that the teaching of speech acts is feasible and does have an effect on the pragmatic competence development of the L2 learners [15]. Another small-scale empirical study by King and Silver (1993), however, revealed that the teaching had little effect on the refusing ability of the learners. They did not show any improvement in their refusals on any of the two post-test methods (i.e. questionnaire and telephone conversation) [16]. The contradictory findings from the two previously mentioned studies suggest that

more studies are needed to investigate whether the explicit instruction of L2 speech act strategies has an effect on the pragmatic competence of the learners.

Besides teaching typical and normative speech act use in the target culture, it is also important for teachers to encourage diversity in speech act performance to students. Saito and Beecken [10] suggest three steps for teaching speech acts: (a) introducing typical use, (b) teaching a variety of appropriate uses, and (c) encouraging learners to make their own choices regarding appropriate use.

Considering the cultural differences that emerge in refusals, second language teachers should present target normative refusals, which are different from the native ones. At the same time, they should provide a range of expressions that are acceptable in the target culture as well. In sum, teachers should encourage students to have an awareness of the cultural differences and the diverse use of the target language.

References

[1] Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962.

[2] Searle, J. R. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

[3] Searle J. R. *A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts in Expression and Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[4] Searle, J. and Vandervken, D. *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985

[5] Ramos, J. *Pragmatic Transfer in Refusals Among Puerto Rican Teenagers Speaking English*. Unpublished D.Ed. Dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1991.

[6] Chen, H. Julie. "Pragmatic Judgment on Refusals: Its Reliability and Consistency." *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language*, 20th, Anaheim, CA, November 1995, (Eric Document No. ED391381).

[7] Beebe, L.M., Takahashi, T. and Uliss-Weltz, R. "Pragmatics Transfer in ESL Refusals". In: R. Scarcella. E. Anderson and S.D. Krashen (Eds.), *On the Development of Communicative Competence in a Second Language*. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers, 1990.

[8] AI-Shalawi, H. *Refusal Strategies in Saudi and American Cultures*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of Linguistics and Languages, Michigan State University, 1997.

[9] Olshtain, E. and Cohen, A.D. "Teaching Speech Act Behavior to Non-native Speakers". In: M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, 154-169. New York: Newbury House/Harper Collins, 1991.

[10] Saito, H. and Beecken, M. "An Approach to Instruction of Pragmatic Aspects: Implications of Pragmatic Transfer by American Learners of Japanese". *The Modern Language Journal*, 3 (1997), 363-377.

[11] Brown, P. and Levinson, S. "Universal of Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena". In: E. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

[12] Blum-kulka, Sh. and Olshtain, E. "Requests and Apologies: A Cross-cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP)". *Applied Linguistics*, 5 (1984), (3).

[13] Blum-kulka, S., House, J. and Kasper, G. (Eds.). *Cross-cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1989.

[14] Fukushima, S. and Iwata, Y. "Politeness Strategies in Requesting and Offering". *JACET Bulletin*, 18 (1987), 31-48.

[15] Olshtain, E. and Cohen, A.D. "The Learning of Complex Speech Act Behavior." *TESL Canada Journal*, 2 (1990), 45-65.

[16] King, K. A., and Silver, RE. "Sticking Points: Effects of Instruction on NNS Refusal Strategies". *Penn Working Papers in Educational Linguistic*, 9, No. 1 (1993), 47-82.

أساليب الرفض عبر الثقافات: دراسة ذات منطلقات نظرية للكشف عن أساليب الرفض في ثلاث ثقافات مختلفة

سعد بن علي بن وهف القحطاني

أستاذ مساعد، جامعة الملك سعود، الرياض

Email: alkahtan@ksu.edu.sa

(قدم للنشر في ١٤٢٥/١٢/٢٤هـ؛ قبل للنشر في ١٤٢٦/٠٤/٠٣هـ)

ملخص البحث. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن أساليب الرفض المختلفة عند أشخاص من ثقافات متباينة، مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار عدة عوامل منها، رتبة الشخص ومكانته الاجتماعية في تحديد نوعية الرفض. وللكشف عن تلك الاختلافات الثقافية والمشكلات التي قد تسببها لمتعلم اللغة الثانية، فقد قارنت الدراسة طريقة الرفض عند ثلاث مجموعات من الأمريكان والعرب واليابانيين. وقد بينت نتائج الدراسة أن لكل ثقافة طريقة في الرفض تتفق أو تختلف كليا أو جزئيا مع الثقافات الأخرى. وقد تؤثر هذه الاختلافات الثقافية على عملية الاتصال حتى وإن كانت وسيلته اللغة الهدف (الإنجليزية مثلا) حيث يبقى هذا التأثير قائما طالما أن الثقافات مختلفة. وتوصي الدراسة في نهاية المطاف بأخذ هذه الاختلافات بعين الاعتبار عند تعليم اللغة الثانية للوصول بالمتعلم إلى كفاية لغوية تمكنه من إتمام عملية الاتصال بشكل جيد مع متحدثي اللغة الأصليين.