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Persian Speakers' Use of Refusal Strategies Across Politeness Systems[1]

This study aimed at investigating the preferred refusal strategies in Persian. 3047 refusals collected by 108 field workers as well as 376 refusals collected through face to face interviews were analyzed and classified according to the descriptions proposed by Liao (1994) and Liao and Bresnahan (1996). The frequencies of the resulting direct and indirect refusal strategies were then used as the data for the current study. Politeness systems as suggested by the model proposed by Scollon and Scollon (2001) as well as refusers' demographic characteristics (i.e., their age, sex, and education level) were used as the independent variables of the study. Kruskal-Wallis *H* Test and Mann-Whitney *U* Test results indicated that teen-agers and low-education Persian speakers prefer non-performative refusal strategies. Power relations can also determine whether non-performative strategies are preferred to performative refusals. It was concluded that politeness is a dynamic concept that changes through time and with human generations.

1 Introduction

Utterances that serve performative function in language and communication have been termed performative acts by Austin (1962). In his treatment of performative acts, Austin relied heavily on his own mental abilities to the effect that his ideas were mostly perceptive in nature. Searle (1969, cited in Salmani Nodoushan 2014) expatiated on Austin's perceptive ideas and brought more systematicity into them. He suggested that 'meaning' boils down into 'doing', and proposed that studies of language should be conducted in the light of the theory of action (Salmani Nodoushan 2014). He drew on Austin's conceptions of illocutionary acts as well as illocutionary forces and developed them into what has been termed the Speech Act Theory, which is essentially a flashback to illocutionary acts (Salmani Nodoushan 2014), and which uses the term 'speech acts' to refer to Austin's 'performative acts'. Nevertheless, Searle's Speech Act Theory also described the conditioned and rules of conduct and interpretation which apply not only to the whole of any given conversation but also to the various speech acts which comprise conversation and discourse.

Speech acts, as described in the speech act theory, vary in the functions which they serve in interpersonal communication (e.g., apology, request, invitation, compliment, refusal, etc.) and also in the number of words that they employ (i.e., they range in length from a single word to quite long stretches of speech). Since they are part and parcel of real-life interaction, speech acts are informed by such socio-cultural variables as authority, distance, situational setting, politeness, and so forth. In addition, the influence these variables leave on speech acts differs from culture to culture.

In this connection, it should be noted that, since developments in commerce, tourism, travel, the Internet, and the like have made intercultural communication an ordinary everyday activity, the importance of cultural understanding should be emphasized much more than ever before, yet no such understanding is ever possible without access to knowledge and information. This entails the idea that a second/foreign language speaker needs to develop an in-depth understanding of the culture of the target language societies and at the same time master the intricacies and nuances of the linguistic formulae that are appropriate for interaction with the people in those societies. They therefore need to access precise descriptions of the target language pragmatic and cultural aspects. This requires that research studies be conducted with the aim of describing other societies' cultures and their culture-bound linguistic behavior.

The present study therefore focuses on one aspect of native-Iranian Persian speakers'

linguistic behavior — i.e., their preferred refusal strategies. The study specifically sought to answer the following question: Is there any significant difference in the type of refusal strategies which native speakers of Persian use when they perform refusals in different politeness systems? In addition, attempts were made to see if, and how, Persian speakers' demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, etc.) affect their choice of refusal strategies.

2 Background

A refusal is a speech act whereby a speaker provides a direct or indirect negative answer to a request or invitation. Through refusals, 'requestees' decline to engage in the action which the requester suggests or to provide the information which s/he tries to elicit (Salmani Nodoushan 1995, 2006a). As such, refusals fit in the category of 'commissive' speech acts in the sense that the refuser commits himself/herself not to take the course of action suggested by the listener (Searle 1979). Moreover, refusals are face-threatening in that the inviter or requester normally expects a positive response (Salmani Nodoushan 2007a; Salmani Nodoushan 2008; Salmani Nodoushan and Allami 2011). If the answer is 'no', it will definitely contradict listeners' expectations. Therefore, refusals threaten the addressee's positive face since they indicate that the speaker does not take the addressee's feelings and demands into account. Tanck (2003) noticed that refusals are quite frequently achieved indirectly because of their face-threatening nature. Needless to say, any polite individual generally tends to get along with others and tries to appear amiable in social encounters (Salmani Nodoushan 2006b; Salmani Nodoushan 2007b).

Although refusals are present in all the major and minor languages of the world, each language or culture has its own refusal strategies; while some languages — like Persian — by default expect that invitations be refused as a show of politeness (Salmani Nodoushan 2006a), some other languages may consider refusing an invitation as taboo. Earlier, Biesanz et al. (1999: 7) noticed that Costa Ricans (or Ticos) will "nod or say *si* even when they don't mean it simply to avoid conflict." In this connection, Melvin Mendez, a Costa Rican playwright, said, "We beat around the bush to avoid saying "no", a syllable which seems almost rude to us, and rather than hurt someone, we say one thing and do another" (cited in Biesanz et al. 1999: 7). Know (2004) noticed that refusals are innately offending, and that people use various strategies to avoid the offense hidden in refusals; an inappropriate refusal can jeopardize interpersonal relations. It is the very face-threatening nature of refusals that quite often makes them indirect, an assumption that led Yule (1999) to conclude that uttering a direct refusal is often taken to mean that the 'refuser' is claiming more social power. As such, direct refusals are less expected. Chen (1996), for example, employed semantic formulae to analyze a set of refusals and to conclude that, regardless of the refuser's first language, direct refusals are rare.

The question that ensues is whether all cultures and languages draw on the same strategies to make their refusals indirect. Non-native speakers need to master such strategies to make sure they will not socio-pragmatically and/or pragmalinguistically fail in their intercultural communication. This, as one of the reviewers of this paper rightly noticed, implies that the answer to the first question raised above is most probably 'no'. Nevertheless, if the strategies were the same, there would be nothing to learn. In this connection, Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) argued that the socio-cultural appropriateness of refusals is so important that refusals can be considered as 'striking points' for non-native speakers.

An overview of the existing literature on refusals implies that non-native speakers seem to know about the importance of appropriate refusal strategies, but that they do not know the strategies themselves, and therefore often tend to transfer their L1 refusal strategies and cultural schemata to L2/FL settings. The result is self-evident, and misunderstanding inevitable. In one study, Nelson, Al-Batal, and Echols (1996) reported that Egyptian Arabic speakers of American English failed to produce the 'offer' and 'suggestion' strategies which are quite frequent in American English refusals. This highlights a deficit in Egyptian Arabic speakers' pragmatic competence of American English. Sending and receiving '*no*' messages is one thing, and '*how*' to send such messages another (Al-Kahtani 2005). The question of 'how' to make refusals requires attention to form-function relationships, social elements, group values, and also cultural-linguistic values (Al-Kahtani 2005). It is not surprising, therefore, to see that Arab refusers are frequently labeled as "impolite"

by their American interlocutors.

Nelson, Al-Batal, and Echols (1996) and Al-Kahtani (2005) were not the first researchers to study refusals across cultures. Earlier, in 1974, Shigeta had used Discourse-Completion-Test (DCT) data to compare Americans and Japanese in terms of apologies, requests, and refusals. Shigeta argued that Japanese were more concerned with the status of their interlocutors whereas Americans cared more about their own relations and solidarity with their interactants. The Americans studied were outspoken and clear while the Japanese were vague and less clear. Along the same lines, Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) analyzed DCT data on refusals directed at addressees of higher, equal, or lower status. They argued that Japanese and American refusals differed in terms of semantic formulae, frequency of occurrence, and content. The Japanese frequently resorted to vague explanations as compensation strategies while the Americans for the most part offered specific details in their explanations. Moreover, Americans used indirect strategies in refusing requests while the Japanese preferred direct strategies specifically when they addressed listeners of lower status; the same was true about the Japanese refusing invitations. By way of contrast, the Japanese used more indirect strategies in addressing listeners of higher status whereas the Americans did not adjust their refusal of invitations to the direction of listeners' power (Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz 1990). In another study, Kitao (1996) found that the Japanese preferred an expression of regret followed by an excuse or reason while the American provided specific reasons.

Korean refusal strategies have also been researched. In a study of Korean refusal strategies, Lyuh (1992) found much more semantic formulae and politeness strategies in Korean refusals than in the American ones. The Koreans used avoidance and gratitude formulae quite productively. Plain refusals (i.e., refusals not furnished with compensatory strategies) were rare; Koreans avoided a plain use of '*no*' or '*thank you*' mainly because of their face-threatening loads. Along the same lines, Know's (2004) study supported the claim that Korean speakers are quite parsimonious in their use of direct refusals, that their refusals are often tentative and vague, and that their refusals often follow pauses and apologies. English speakers, on the other hand, tended to use statements of positive opinion and gratitude. Moreover, in the refusals they directed at higher-status listeners, Koreans resorted to mitigating strategies whereas English speakers seemed to be less sensitive to listeners' status.

Refusals have also been studied in the Arabic language. Stevens (1993), for instance, analyzed DCT data which were based on 15 scenarios, to conclude that such refusal strategies as 'partial acceptance', 'explanation', and 'white lies' are used almost equally frequently by Arabic and English speakers. In another study of Arabic refusals, Al-Issa (1998) observed that 'expressing regret' (e.g., *I am sorry*) was a much more frequent refusal strategy in Jordanian Arabic than in English, and that both groups used 'explanations' and 'reasons' quite frequently. Yemeni Arabic and American English were compared by Al-Eryani (2007) who delineated the differences in the frequency and content of the semantic formulae used by speakers of the two languages. Another conclusion of this research was that "interlocutor's status" and "eliciting acts" affect these semantic formulae. By eliciting acts is meant such speech acts as 'request', 'invitation', 'suggestion', and 'offer'. The studies reported above show that refusal strategies comprise a worthwhile topic for research. It is on this ground that the current study was undertaken.

It should be noted that the current study is not the first to address refusals in Persian. In his study of Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic transfer of Persian refusal strategies to English, Ghahraman (2003) concluded that Iranian EFL learners' foreign language performance was fraught with transferred pragmatic features from Persian — even at the most advanced level. He further concluded that the level of 'directness' and the amount of transfer were a function of a multitude of factors including 'the type of eliciting speech acts', 'the level of learners' language proficiency', 'the importance of L1 cultural values', and 'the ease of use of semantic formulae in L1 or L2'.

The studies reported above had all adopted Grice's (1975) principles and maxims as well as Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model as their backbones. However, as Watts, Idle, and Ehlich (1992) suggested, there should be a dichotomy between western and non-western modes of politeness. They argued that Grice's (1975) principles and maxims as well as Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness studies were based on the western mode of politeness and, as such, quite often fail to appropriately account for politeness patterns found in data gathered from non-

western languages (Liao and Bresnahan 1996). Therefore, if the Japanese use 'regret' or 'apology' as the salient refusal strategies in their social interactions, their behavior should not be described in terms of the western mode of politeness. The Japanese differ from the American in their choice of refusal strategies, but this should not be taken to mean that they are less polite (Takahashi and Beebe 1986). Liao and Bresnahan (1996) reported that Taiwanese people provide extrinsic reasons in their refusals to claim that they would love to accept if the extrinsic reasons left them with the choice. They behave as if they are forced to decline in spite of their unwillingness. They also observed that the use of refusal strategies was far less frequent in the speech of Taiwanese than Americans, and that people in the Far East use fewer strategies in refusing and apologizing. Along the same lines, Salmani Nodoushan (1995, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2012), too, noticed that Persian speakers have their own culture-specific ways and strategies of showing politeness. This observation led him to suggest an expanded view of politeness and face. He proposed a hypothetical model for face-attacking acts, and also suggested a new model for (im)politeness (Salmani Nodoushan 2012).

All in all, the studies described above, as well as several other studies not reviewed here, have yielded 24 refusal strategies used by different cultures and languages (Liao 1994; Liao and Bresnahan 1996); nevertheless, this number should not be taken as a magic number carved in tablets of stone, and the reader should notice that if further research is conducted in other languages, the number may change. Anyway, the 24 refusal strategies found by Liao (1994) and Liao and Bresnahan (1996) are listed in Table 1:

Table 1: *Main refusal strategies observable across different cultures and languages*

01	Silence, hesitation, lack of enthusiasm
02	Offering an alternative
03	Postponement
04	Putting the blame on a third party over which you have no control (Extrinsic reason)
05	Avoidance
06	General acceptance without giving details
07	General acceptance with excuse
08	Divert and distract the addressee
09	Saying what is offered or requested is inappropriate
10	External yes, internal no
11	Statement of philosophy
12	Direct no
13	Excuse or explanation
14	Complaining or appealing to feelings
15	Rationale
16	Joke
17	Criticism
18	Conditional yes
19	Questioning the justification of the request
20	Threat
21	External no, internal yes
22	Statement of principle
23	Expressing regret; Saying 'I'm sorry'
24	Code-switching

Along the same lines, Baron (2002) argued that, depending on the speech act they want to decline, refusals quite frequently consist of formulae of varying content, frequency, and order, and that these formulae are controlled by interlocutors' gender and social status. Earlier, in 1999, Caffi had argued that refusals involve a lot of mitigations, and that mitigations are often used by refusers to avoid conflict, loss of face, and so on. In a discussion of mitigation formulae, Bella (2011) noticed that mitigations are either external or internal modifications of refusals. An external mitigation modifies the context of the refusal, but an internal mitigation modifies the refusal statement itself (known as the head act). Therefore, it can be suggested that, like requests, refusals can be formulated as head acts (which may include internal supportive moves or mitigation) supported by external supportive moves that precede or follow the head acts.

> Refusal = (External Supportive Move) + HEAD ACT + (External Supportive Move)

External mitigators appear in the external supportive moves while internal mitigators appear in the refusal head acts. Bella (2011) notices that internal mitigators are linguistic elements found in refusal head acts whose job is not to help the identification of the illocutionary force of the head acts but to mitigate their potential negative effects. Internal mitigators are either syntactic (e.g., conditionals, tense, or aspect markings) or lexical (e.g., politeness markers, modals, psychological predicates, adjectives, modifiers of degree, etc.). In this connection, it is interesting to notice that internal mitigators are not innately polite, but that the way they are used in refusal head acts can give them a politeness value.

Informed by the literature reviewed above and using Liao and Bresnahan's (1996) framework, the current study set out to describe Persian speakers' preferred refusal strategies; it sought to describe such strategies in solidarity, distance, and power politeness systems.

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3 Method

3.1 Data

A pool of 3047 refusals was collected by 108 field workers who helped me collect the data for this study. The field workers observed and recorded any instance of refusal exchange they witnessed. They also reported the purpose of each refusal exchange, and described enough of the context in which the refusal took place so that the reported conversation would be comprehensible. Moreover, they quoted, as best as they could, exactly what had been said in each exchange, and also included the utterances that came before and after each refusal (i.e., the supportive moves). The field workers also reported the demographic characteristics of the people whose conversation they observed, including their age, sex, social class, and kind of relationship. The advantage of the examples collected this way is that they reflect a range of people observing spontaneous instances in a variety of naturalistic settings (Salmani Nodoushan 2006a).

Another set of refusals was gathered in face-to-face interviews. The researcher himself interviewed 94 people who volunteered to help. Each volunteer was asked to recall four refusals extended towards him/her. One refusal recalled was to involve a close friend, one a stranger or acquaintance of equal status, one a person of known higher status, and one a person of known lower status. Each interviewee was then asked to describe the context in which the refusal had taken place, and to provide demographic information about his/her interlocutor (i.e., sex, age, etc.). The interviewee was also asked to reenact the dialogue as best as s/he could. Table 2 displays the distribution of the observed and interviewed subjects based on research variables.

Table 2: *Demographic Distribution of the Observed and Interviewed Participants*

		Observation	Interview	Total
Age	13–20	678	21	699
	21–30	584	17	601

	31–40	628	16	644
	41–50	594	21	615
	50+	563	19	582
Gender	Male	1609	43	1652
	Female	1438	51	1489
Education	Diploma or below	936	31	967
	Bachelor's degree	815	26	841
	Master's degree	727	20	747
	PhD (candidate)	569	17	586

3.2 Frameworks

Two frameworks were used in this study: (a) Scollon and Scollon (2001) for data classification, and (b) Liao and Bresnahan (1996) for refusal strategy identification.

The framework used for data classification in this study was that of Scollon and Scollon (2001). This framework is based on the politeness framework presented by Brown and Levinson (1987), but it also took into account suggestions (e.g., Perceived Situational Seriousness) made by Fraser (1983) and Spencer-Oatey (1996). Reconsidering Brown and Levinson's view of politeness and blending it with suggestions from Fraser and Spencer-Oatey, Scollon and Scollon (2001) envisaged three politeness systems: Hierarchical Politeness System (HPS), Deferential Politeness System (DPS), and Solidarity Politeness System (SPS). The politeness systems are based on Perceived Situational Seriousness (PSS) which is, in turn, controlled by power and distance relationships between interlocutors. However, Scollon and Scollon (2001) employed the term "hierarchy" to describe the notion of "power" suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987); they also used the term "deference" to refer to Brown and Levinson's "distance." They further noticed that "social closeness" or "solidarity" can affect interlocutors' perception of Brown and Levinson's "size of imposition" (See Salmani Nodoushan and Allami (2011) for a discussion of Scollon and Scollon's politeness model).

Scollon and Scollon's (2001) framework for politeness is therefore based on three factors: (a) hierarchy, (b) deference, and (c) solidarity. The framework is summarized in Table 3:

Table 3: *Summary of Scollon and Scollon's Politeness Framework*

	Power	**Distance**	**Solidarity**	**Description**
HPS	+	+	–	interlocutors are in a subordinate vs. superordinate position (*e.g.,* boss vs. employee)
DPS	–	+	–	both interlocutors are of equal social status but share a distant relationship (*e.g.*, classmates)
SPS	–	–	+	both interlocutors are of equal social status and their relationship is close (*e.g.*, roommates)

The HPS system in this framework is a bit tricky. In social relations, 'power' can take either of the two directions: bottom up or top down. In relation to refusals, the direction of power has to do with whether the 'refuser' is the more powerful interlocutor or the less powerful one. In other words, whether the person who is the agent/doer of the refusal act is the subordinate or the superordinate interlocutor in the conversation will affect the choice of refusal strategies. Therefore, the direction of the refusal can be either top-down or bottom-up.

The framework used for coding the data and identifying the refusal strategies in them was that of Liao and Bresnahan (1996). The corpus for this study was

inspected in the light of this framework, and this resulted in the identification of the refusal strategies in the data.

3.3 Procedure

Two human coders separately inspected the corpus which had been collected through interview and observation. Both coders were university professors with a minimum of five years of experience in teaching post-graduate Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis courses. As the first step, each example from the corpus was inspected in light of the politeness framework proposed by Scollon and Scollon (2001). This was done for the purpose of classifying the examples into four categories: (1) top-down HPS refusals, (2) bottom-up HPS refusals, (3) DPS refusals, and (4) SPS refusals. The coders then used the framework proposed by Liao and Bresnahan (1996) and tried to identify in the corpus the type and frequency of each of the 24 refusal strategies proposed by them. For example, if a respondent refused an invitation by uttering "I'm sorry, I already have plans. Maybe next time," this was coded as [expression of regret] [excuse] [offer of alternative] (Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz 1990: 57). The frequency of use for each type of refusal strategy in each example was then obtained and was recorded for the appropriate politeness system.

Only after both coders had taken these steps did they meet to juxtapose what they had coded for any possible mismatch. Where there was a mismatch or difference in their codings, they would extensively discuss the issue to reach an agreement. They had agreed from the start that wide disagreements should discard the problematic example from the corpus. Based on this agreement, 29 examples (out of 3047 instances collected by field workers through observation), were omitted from the corpus.

As to the reliability of the codings, it was decided that the inter-coder agreement should be estimated. To this end, the reliability of the codings was estimated using the Spearman-Brown Correlation coefficient. The strategy frequencies identified by the two human coders were correlated through another one-tailed bivariate correlation analysis using Spearman's rho. The result was indicative of a high enough inter-coder agreement (*rho* = .841) to make the data reliable for further analysis.

4 Results

It was stated earlier that the current study aimed at evaluating refusal strategies in Persian in the light of solidarity, distance, and power politeness systems. Therefore, to test the null hypothesis that the three politeness systems do not affect Persian speakers' preference for different refusal strategies, a set of Kruskal-Wallis *H* Tests were performed on the data of this study. Notice that the HPS has two levels (top-down versus bottom-up); hence, *df* =3. The results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: *Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for Refusal Strategies across Politeness Systems*

	Chi-square	*df*	*Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)*
Performative	1.12	3	.77
Non-performative	18.54	3	.00*
Regret	56.07	3	.00*
Wish	4.81	3	.18
Excuse	50.23	3	.00*
Alternative	11.34	3	.01*
Condition	6.29	3	.10
Promise	18.62	3	.00*
Principle	15.14	3	.00*

Philosophy	3.41	3	.33
Dissuasion	2.79	3	.42
Acceptance	2.04	3	.56
Avoidance	12.60	3	.00*
Adjunct	81.15	3	.00*

Significant differences were observed among the three politeness systems in the case of 'non-performative' refusal strategy (chi^2 = 18.54, p = .00), 'regret' refusal strategy (chi^2=56.07, p =.00), 'excuse' refusal strategy (chi^2 = 50.23, p = .00), 'alternative' strategy (chi^2 = 11.34, p =.01), 'promise' strategy (chi^2 = 18.62, p=.00), 'principle' strategy (chi^2=15.14, p=.00), 'avoidance' strategy (chi^2=12.60, p=.00), and the 'adjunct' refusal strategy (chi^2 = 81.15, p=.00). In case of the 'non-performative' and 'promise' strategies, the highest mean ranks belonged to top-down HPS; for the 'excuse' strategy, the highest mean rank belonged to bottom-up HPS; for the 'principle', 'avoidance', and 'adjunct' strategies, it belonged to DPS; and for the 'regret' and 'alternative' strategies, the SPS had the highest mean rank.

It was hypothesized that the observed difference might be due to the gender of the participants in refusal speech acts. The researcher is well aware that gender is a social concept, but he avoided asking the interviewers if they were gay, lesbian, etc. since such questions are impolite and intimidating in the Iranian context. As such, the researcher and the field workers coded the participants' gender based on their apparent biological sexes. To determine if participants' gender/sex left any impact on the choice of refusal strategies, the data were fed into a series of Mann-Whitney *U* Tests. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5: *Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Male and Female Use of Different Refusal Strategies*

	Mann-Whitney U	*Wilcoxon W*	*Z*	*Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)*
Performative	15829	30025	-.66	.50
Non-performative	14827	33355	-1.43	.15
Regret	13896.50	32424.50	-2.58	.01*
Wish	15660	29856	-1.53	.13
Excuse	14893.50	33421.50	-1.30	.19
Alternative	15714	2991	-.59	.56
Condition	15378.50	33906.50	-1.79	.07
Promise	16085	34613	-.08	.94
Principle	15952.50	34480.50	-.38	.70
Philosophy	15805	30001	-1.48	.14
Dissuasion	15654	29850	-.68	.49
Acceptance	15792	29988	-1.88	.06
Avoidance	15859	34387	-.45	.65
Adjunct	15258	33786	-.99	.32
Accept	15228.50	29424.50	-1.49	.13

Based on the results obtained, male and female participants were found to differ significantly only in their use of the 'regret' type of refusal strategies (Z= -2.53, p= .01) with males using it much less than females (169 vs. 194 mean rank). They did not differ from each other in their use of any of the other strategies. Although the difference between their use of 'condition' refusal strategy was not significant, a

trend was observed in that case too (Z= -1.79, p=.07), males using that strategy less than females (177 vs. 185). The same thing happened for the 'acceptance' refusal strategy (Z = -1.88, p=.06). Unlike the previous cases, males used this strategy more than females (mean rank of 183 vs. 176).

Another demographic variable that was studied was the participants' age. The participants in this study belonged in five different age groups (13–20, 21–30, 31–40, 41–50, and 50^{+}). To determine if participants' age affected their use of refusal strategies, a Kruskal-Wallis H Test was conducted. Table 6 summarizes the results obtained.

Table 6: *Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for Different Age Groups and the Use of Different Refusal Strategies*

	Chi-square	*df*	*Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)*
Performative	4.68	4	.32
Non-performative	25	4	.00*
Regret	7.17	4	.12
Wish	5.09	4	.28
Excuse	9.10	4	.06
Alternative	11.91	4	.02*
Condition	1.95	4	.74
Promise	4.62	4	.33
Principle	3.10	4	.54
Philosophy	9.17	4	.06
Dissuasion	6.55	4	.16
Acceptance	1.60	4	.81
Avoidance	10.05	4	.04*
Adjunct	5.48	4	.24

A significant difference was observed among the age groups in the use of 'non-performative' refusal strategy (chi^2 = 25, p =.00), 'alternative' refusal strategy (chi^2 = 11.91, p =.02), and the 'avoidance' refusal strategy (chi^2 = 10.05, p =.04). A trend was also observed in the use of the 'excuse' (chi^2 =9.10, p =.00), and the 'philosophy' strategies (chi^2 =9.17, p =.00). As for the 'non-performative' strategy, the highest mean rank belonged to the age range of 13–20; for the 'alternative' strategy, the highest mean rank belonged to the age range of 31–40; and for the 'avoidance' strategy, the 50^{+} age range had the highest mean rank. For the two strategies for which a trend was observed, the highest mean ranks belonged to the age group of 13–20 for both the 'philosophy' and 'excuse' refusal strategies. These indicate that politeness is a dynamic concept, and signal a generation gap in present day Iran.

The connection between participants' level of education and their choice of refusal strategies was also studied. The participants belonged in one of the four education groups: high school diploma or below, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and PhD/PhD candidate. It was hypothesized that there is no significant difference among groups of participants with different educational background in their use of refusal strategies. To check this hypothesis, a Kruskal-Wallis H Test was used. Table 7 summarizes the results obtained.

Table 7: *Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for Different Educational Background and the Use of Different Refusal Strategies*

	Chi-square	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Performative	5.33	3	.13

Non-performative	11.55	3	.01*
Regret	13.17	3	.00*
Wish	20.80	3	.00*
Excuse	7.92	3	.05
Alternative	5.22	3	.15
Condition	1.00	3	.80
Promise	8.35	3	.09
Principle	1.99	3	.57
Philosophy	2.13	3	.53
Dissuasion	10.21	3	.01*
Acceptance	1.31	3	.70
Avoidance	2.30	3	.51
Adjunct	5.95	3	.11.

A significant difference was observed among the participants with different educational backgrounds in case of the 'non-performative' refusal strategy (chi^2 = 11.55, p =.01), 'regret' refusal strategy (chi^2 = 14.17, p =.00), 'wish' refusal strategy (chi^2 = 20.80, p =.00), 'excuse' strategy (chi^2 = 7.92, p=.05), and the 'dissuasion' strategy (chi^2 = 10.21, p =.01). In case of the 'non-performative' and 'dissuasion' strategies, the highest mean rank belonged to the group who had completed high school diploma or had received some high school education; for the 'regret' strategy, the highest mean rank belonged to the group holding MA/MS; and for the 'wish' and 'excuse' strategy, it belonged to the group holding PhDs.

5 Discussion

One striking finding of this study was that Persian 'refusers' only used 14 of the 24 strategies identified by Liao (1994) and Liao and Bresnahan (1996). It seems that the strategies used by Persian speakers are very much similar to the ones identified by Takahashi and Beebe (1986), and found in Arabic by Al-Eryani (2007) (See Appendix A).

Another finding of the study was that female participants more often tended to use 'regret' strategies; they often reject requests of invitations using phrases like:

vaqe?an mote?asefam.[2]	I am sorry.
?ehsaas badi daaram. Nemitunam qabul konam.	I feel bad. I cannot accept.

It should be noted that in the second example above, the modal 'can' signals that the refusal is made because of a lack of ability, not interest. Female refusers also tend to use the 'condition' or 'wish' strategy with generosity. They use expressions that function as conditionals for a possible acceptance of the request/invitation if the condition had been met. It should be noted that even when a 'wish' is uttered, it quite often functions as a condition. The 'wish' and 'condition' strategies function as refusals because they show lack of ability to accept the invitation/request due to some external cause. Examples of such expressions are:

kaash zudtar gofteh budin.	I wish you told me sooner than this.
?aga mehmoon nadashtam hatman mi? umadam.	I would join you if I did not have guests at home.

By way of contrast, male participants tend to use the 'acceptance' strategy more frequently. This difference in male versus female strategy preference is due to the cultural difference in power relations in Iran. The Iranian culture has always given males more power over females. This cultural factor has resulted in men's seeing

themselves as more powerful in comparison to women. Therefore, men see themselves in a higher position, and show no enthusiasm in a request or invitation or no regret to reject a request or offer.

A third finding of the study had to do with the role of participants' age in their choice of refusal strategies. People from the first age group (i.e., 13–20 years) preferred to use direct non-performative strategies quite frequently (e.g., flat 'no', or other expressions of negative willingness/ability like *nemitunam* = 'I can't', *nemikham* = 'I won't', or *fekr nemikonam* = 'I don't think so'). here is an example:

It was a Monday afternoon. Two male teen agers who were apparently close friends entered a shoe shop. One of them wanted to buy a pair of shoes. Pointing to a pair of shoes in the window, the other one said:

A:	*?ino bexar.*	Buy this pair.
B:	*Na, dusesh nadaaram.*	No, I don't like it.

They were also found to use indirect strategies like offering excuse (e.g., *farda emtehane saxti daaram* = I have a terrible exam tomorrow) or providing statement of philosophy (e.g., you can never be too careful). People in the 21–30 age group too were very similar to the teen-ager group in their use of non-performatives. They nevertheless tended to use more than one strategy in their refusals to modulate the intensity of the refusal. Here is an example:

It was Sunday. Ahmad and Farshad, two bachelor students at the University of Tehran were talking on the campus:

Ahmad:	*Fardaa miyaay berim sinemaa?*	Shall we go to the cinema tomorrow?
Farshad:	*Fardaa? Nemitunam. Chetore Jom?eh berim?*	Tomorrow? I can't. What about Friday? [avoidance+performative+alternative]

31–40-year-old participants, on the other hand, preferred to use the 'alternative' strategy of providing options. Here is an example:

After a hectic week of hard work in the office, the weekend is coming and Ali enters Vahid's office to invite him to dinner in a cozy restaurant. Not willing to accept the invitation, and knowing that Ali is never ready for a weekend excursion, Vahid suggests:

cheraa narim shomal?	Why don't we go to the North instead?]

The 41–50 age group tended to use adjuncts more frequently in their refusals although the frequency of adjuncts was not high enough to render a statistically significant difference. They often used pause fillers, expressions of empathy, and a statement of regret as supportive discourse moves in their refusals:

Desparate to borrow 10 million Rials which she says she will pay back in a month, Maryam enters Shahram's office on the campus and says:

Maryam:	*Moshkeli baraam pish ? umade va 10 million Rial laazem daram taa axere maah pas midam.*	I have a problem, I need 10 million Rials now and will give it back by the end of the month.
Shahram:	*Uhh, midunam ke tu sharaayete saxti hasti ? ammaa mote?asefam, ? al?aan dastam xaaliye.*	Uhh, I understand that you are in a hard situation now, but I am sorry, I don't have that money now. [adjunct+adjunct+statement of regret+excuse]

For participants belonging in the 50^{+} age group, hedging strategies (e.g., *motma?en nistam* = I am not that sure) and postponement (e.g., *dar baresh fekr mikonam* = I will sleep on it) were the preferred refusal strategies.

Parisa, a PhD candidate at the Islamic Azad University, talks to Parviz—the supervisor of her PhD dissertation—to ask him for help in getting the university to give her persmission to teach a couple of courses at the BA level. Not willing to mediate between the university and Parisa, Parviz, who has a reputation for being a conservative person, says:

motma?en nistam daaneshgaah darxaaste man raa qabul kone ? ammaa dar baresh fekr mikonam va behet ?ettelaa midam.	I am not sure if the university would accept my intervention, but I will sleep on your request and will let you know if I would intervene. [hedging+postponement]

It seems that with the coming of age also comes an increasing level of conservatism and social/interpersonal maturity which leads to a greater number of supportive discourse moves (or strategies) in any single refusal exchange. Nevertheless, age is only one of the variabls that affect the chice and frequency of refusal strategies. The overt and frank refusal behavior on the part of the 13–20 age group is most probably due to the fact that developments in the Internet and access to satellite TV channels has had a great impact on Iranian teen-agers. They find foreign cultures more appropriate and prefer to break away from the cultural ties of the Iranian society — which they find inferior to the western way of social conduct. This claim can be supported if one browses the concerns about cultural change and cultural hegemony that are expressed by conservative sociologists and authorities in Iranian mass media. The observed difference also lends support to the claim that politeness, as a human trait, is not a static concept. It is lively and dynamic, and it changes over time. As such, a static theory of politeness may not be able to account for data that are collected in social studies. As generations change, their view of politeness also changes. Whereas direct non-performative strategies are the least polite strategies in the eyes of the elderly, teen-agers prefer them as the dominant refusal strategy.

Participants' level of education also controlled their choice of refusal strategies. Participants with a high school diploma or lower level of education often used the blatant '*na*' (= No) or '*nemitunam*' (= I can't). They also used 'dissuasion' strategies; they were inclined towards warnings and criticism and often reminded the requester of the negative consequences. Take the following example:

> It was an evening. A young boy of 10–20 years of age was on the subway train in Tehran. It could be said from the book he was reading that he was a junior student at high school. At station, a friend of his stepped into the wagon and sat beside him. They started a conversation and the young man addressed his friend saying:
>
> A: *migam fardaa miay berim khuneh javad ina baraye shenaye jaanaaneh?*
> 'Would you like to go to Javad's house with me tomorrow for a lot of fun in the swimming pool?'
>
> B: *bebin, man aga jay to budam paam raa unjaa nemizaashtam; yaadet nist daf? eh pish maamaanesh che juri baahaamun raftaar kard?*
> 'Look, I wouldn't go there if I were you; don't you remember how his mother treated us the last time we were there?'

The blatant use of direct non-performative strategies is due to refusers' difficulty in understanding appropriate social behavior. People with low education often work in low-paid jobs, and belong to the lower class of the society. They often reside in neighborhoods that are culturally isolated from other parts of the society, especially in big cities. They have their own dialects and ways of social conduct. Narcotics are used in these neighborhoods in such great quantities as if they are going out of fashion. All these details of life go hand in hand to create a way of social conduct that stands in contrast to those of the other, higher-class neighborhoods. These people seem to have accepted their own social inferiority, and this acceptance of one's inferiority leaves no room for one to attempt to retain face. Needless to say, when one has nothing to lose, one does not need to worry about, mitigate, or care for one's face; politeness finds meaning only when one has a face to lose.

The last finding of the study was that in the top-down HPS where the refuser has more social power, participants were inclined towards the frequent use of 'non-performative' and 'promise' strategies; in a bottom-up HPS where the refuser is subordinate to the requester, on the other hand, the 'excuse' strategy was the one most frequently used. In the HPS system, power relations are vivid and the

interlocutors are conscious of their power relations. They, therefore, adjust their choice of refusal strategies to the requirements of the situation. In the DPS system where the refuser and the requester are considered to be of equal social status, although there is no overt power relation between the interlocutors, there is social distance which makes it possible for them to feel they can easily refuse an invitation, offer, or request. 'Principle,' 'avoidance,' and 'adjunct' strategies were the most frequent strategies in DPS. In the SPS, the determining factor is the solidarity between the interlocutors. Here, the refuser and the one refused are friends and they expect a lot from each other. As such, any act of refusing becomes emotionally charged, and the refuser finds it quite difficult to refuse. In such situations, refusers often tend to use 'regret' and 'alternative' strategies.

6 Conclusion

This study and other studies that address speech acts have a lot to do with intercultural communication. The developments in international trade, the advancement of transportation, and the growth of mass media and the Internet have all made it quite easy for people from different cultures to enter into conversation and social relations. The world has become a small village were people from different cultures come into close contact at an increasing rate. If they do not know about the nuances and delicacies of others' cultures, they may fail in their intercultural communication and relations. This understanding requires a description of the cultural values and social behavior of each and every society. Studies like this, that juxtapose different languages in terms of their socio-pragmatic characteristics, lend support to Kecskes' (2013) argument that intercultural communication involves both core common ground (or the relatively static, generalized, common knowledge that belongs to a certain speech community as a result of prior interaction and experience) and emergent common ground (or the relatively dynamic, actualized and particularized knowledge co-constructed in the course of communication that belongs to, and is privatized by, the individual(s)). They help us to build a repertoire of knowledge that describes core common grounds.

It was found that Persian speakers only use 14 refusal strategies, whereas Liao (1994) and Liao and Bresnahan (1996) had listed 24 different refusal strategies. A comparison of the results of the current study with those of the study conducted by Al-Eryani (2007) also revealed that Persian speakers are quite similar to Arabic speakers in their choice of refusal strategies. However, Persian speakers differ from other non-Arab communities in their refusal strategies. The list presented by Liao (1994) and Liao and Bresnahan (1996) indicates that both Persian speakers and their non-Arab counterparts need to learn about the appropriate choice of refusal strategies which will establish core common grounds for them if they intend to engage in successful intercultural communication (See chapter 7 of Kecskes (2013) for a full discussion of core and emergent common grounds in intercultural communication). Last but not least, a natural conclusion of studies like the current one is that people need to learn the differences between their own cultural values and those of other human societies. Governments, too, need to give more value to inter-cultural training to avoid conflicts and wars that can follow a misunderstanding fueled by a failure to realize the cultural values and social conduct of other communities.

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Appendix A: Refusal Strategies (Adopted from Al-Eryani (2007) with permission)

I Direct

A. Performative (e.g., "I refuse")

B. Non-performative statement

1. "No"

2. Negative willingness/ability ("I can't." "I won't." "I don't think so.")

II Indirect

A. Statement of regret (e.g., "I'm sorry…", "I feel terrible…")

B. Wish (e.g., "I wish I could help you….")

C. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., "My children will be home thatnight."; "I have a headache.")

D. Statement of alternative

1. I can do X instead of Y (e.g., "I'd rather do…""I'd prefer")

2. Why don't you do X instead of Y (e.g., "Why don't you asksomeone else?")

E. Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., "If you had asked meearlier, I would have…")

F. Promise of future acceptance (e.g., "I'll do it next time";" I promiseI'll…" or "Next time I'll…"- using "will" of promise or "promise")

G. Statement of principle (e.g., "I never do business with friends.")

H. Statement of philosophy (e.g., "One can't be too careful.")

I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor

1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester(e.g., "I won't be any fun tonight" to refuse an invitation)

2. Guilt trip (e.g., waitress to customers who want to sit a while:"I can't make a living off people who just order coffee.")

3. Criticize the request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or opinion); insult/attack (e.g., "Who do you think you are?"; "That's a terrible idea!")

4. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request.

5. Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g., "Don't worry about it.""That's okay." "You don't have to.")

6. Self-defense (e.g., "I'm trying my best." "I'm doing all I can."

J. Acceptance that functions as a refusal

1. Unspecific or indefinite reply

2. Lack of enthusiasm

K. Avoidance

1. Nonverbal

a. Silence

b. Hesitation

c. Do nothing

d. Physical departure

2. Verbal

a. Topic switch

b. Joke

c. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., "Monday?")

d. Postponement (e.g., "I'll think about it.")

e. Hedging (e.g., "Gee, I don't know." "I'm not sure.")

Adjuncts to refusals

A. Statement of positive opinions/feeling or agreement ("That's a good idea…";"I'd love to…")

B. Statement of empathy (e.g., "I realize you are in a difficult situation.")

C. Pause filler (e.g., "uhh"; "well"; "uhm")

D. Gratitude/appreciation

Appendix B: Guide to Persian transcription symbols.

Symbol	Example	Symbol	Example	Symbol	Example
aa	arm	p	pen	t	tea
o	or	s	so	j	joke
u	too	ch	change	h	house
a	hat	x	xub	d	door
e	ten	z	zoo	r	red
i	sheep	zh	vision	sh	shoe
q	Qom	n	noon	f	foot
k	kill	y	yard	g	good
l	land	?	?al?aan	m	moon
v	voice	b	bad		

Explanations:

1. The /?/ symbol represents glottal stop, and is used at the beginning of Persian syllables followed by a vowel.

2. The /q/ (i.e., a radical stop) and /x/ (i.e., a radical fricative) represent Persian-specific consonants.

3. The Persian sporadic feature *tashdid* is represented by the repetition of the phoneme that receives it.

Notes

[1] I am indebted to the 108 field workers who helped me collect part of the data for this study. I also would like to thank Mr Hamid Reza Parvaresh who helped me collect part of the data for this study.

[2] See Appendix B for a guide to phonetic symbols.