

# “Wallah, I’d Love to Attend but I Swear I Cannot”: The Case of Invitation Refusal in Iraqi Arabic Dialect

Arkan Abdulhasan Nassar<sup>a</sup>, Norma Saad<sup>b</sup>, Nur Rasyidah Mohd Nordin<sup>c</sup>,  
<sup>a</sup>PhD. Student, College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia,  
<sup>b,c</sup>Doctor of Applied Linguistics, College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti  
Utara, Email: <sup>a</sup>[jasim19822@gmail.com](mailto:jasim19822@gmail.com)

The study investigates the realisation of invitation refusals by Iraqi native speakers of Arabic and Iraqi Kurds who speak Arabic as a second language in Iraqi Arabic dialect. Data was obtained from a modified version of an open-ended Written Discourse Completion Task comprising of three situations in which the participants as lower status interlocutors were to refuse invitations from higher status interlocutors with close, familiar and distant social distance and were analysed descriptively according to a modified classification of semantic formulas developed by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990). Indirect refusal and adjuncts were the most frequent strategies used by both groups. However, Iraqi Kurds tended to use direct refusals more than Iraqi Arabs. Excuse was the most frequent semantic formula used by Iraqi Arabs in all levels of social distance. On the other hand, excuse was the most frequent semantic formulas by Iraqi Kurds only when the interlocutors have familiar social relation while negative willingness/ability was the most frequent strategy used when they have close and distant social relation with the interlocutor. Compliment, recompensing, address term, and sense of loss were only used by Iraqi Arabs while performative and let the interlocutor off the hook were only used by Iraqi Kurds. Teachers may use the findings to raise awareness among the two groups in regard to the differences and similarities in realisations of the speech act of invitation refusal. The findings will also help in reducing misunderstanding in any possible interaction between Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds, and thus enhancing solidarity. Previous studies focused on the social status while social distance has not been given its due importance. The present study focuses on social status and social distance.

**Key words:** *Invitation refusal, refusal strategies, social status, social distance, Iraqi Arabic dialect.*

## Introduction

In intercultural communication among people, one of the challenges is the ability to understand the speech acts cross-culturally since the cultural understanding of speech acts and the conceptualisations attached to them are different from one language and culture to another. Invitation refusal, request, apology, and thanking are speech acts or the communicative acts that are culturally specific, and they are performed differently across cultures. Wierzbicka (2003) states that fundamental cultural values are reflected through speech acts and it may be specific to a speech community. Hence, the appropriate use of a particular speech act is exposed to variation according to cultural differences among societies. For example, in the United States, when someone is complimented on his or her new dress, he or she accepts this compliment positively by giving appreciation (e.g. thank you) to the complimenter, while in other cultures such as India, refusing the compliment is considered a more appropriate response (Farnia & Wu, 2012). Therefore, what is considered polite behaviour in one culture may be understood as impolite in another (Zhao & Throssell, 2011).

The study of speech acts provides better understanding of “the interactional styles and differences in speech act behaviour within and across cultures” (Osborne, 2010, p. 63). Furthermore, successful communication can only be achieved when the non-native speakers have the knowledge of how to use a specific speech act in a given cultural setting. Previous studies have shown that the performance of second language learners in performing speech acts often differs from native language speakers as they lack the sociolinguistic rules of the second language (Kwon, 2003). The present study focuses on the realisation of refusal speech act of invitation among two different ethnics and cultural groups: Iraqi Arabs who speak Arabic as their native language and Iraqi Kurds who speak Arabic as a second language. Misconception and communication breakdown are highly possible to occur among these two groups as they have different cultures, languages, and ethnicities. This is what is referred to as sociopragmatic failure, which is “the mismatch which arises from cross-cultural different assessments within the social parameters affecting linguistic choice, size of imposition, social distance between speaker and hearer, relative rights and obligations etc.” (Thomas, 1984, p. 226). According to Wannaruk (2008), committing sociopragmatic failure is more problematic than committing linguistic failure since when a speaker does a linguistic error, he will be treated as lacking proficiency in language, but if he commits a pragmatic error, he might be misunderstood as being crude, impolite or disrespectful.

Invitation refusal is one of the speech acts in which miscommunication and misunderstanding can possibly happen. To reduce the risk of offending the inviter, the refuser must know the strategies to refuse among people of a different ethnicity, culture and language (Izadi & Zilaie, 2015). Refusal is a common speech act in all languages and performed in everyday communication. In many cultures, to say “no” is more difficult for a non-native speaker. To send and receive a message of “no” can be deemed as a task that requires special skill. Thus, “the interlocutor must know when to use the appropriate form and its function, the speech act and its social elements depending on each group and their cultural-linguistic values” (Al-Kahtani, 2005, p. 3). Brown and Levinson (1987) describe refusal as a face threatening act and when the speech act of refusal is performed, the speaker’s and listener’s positive and negative face may be threatened. A high-level of pragmatic competence is required to realise invitation refusal since it has the sensitivity to social factors including status, distance, age, sex, and level of education. Moreover, refusing contradicts with the social expectation and it is regarded as a face threatening act as it is usually subject to impoliteness judgement, therefore, for the invitee to lessen the risk of losing the inviter’s face, he/she must know the strategies to refuse invitations particularly among people who have different ethnicities, languages and cultures (Izadi & Zilaie, 2015).

The present study investigates the invitation refusal strategies used by Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds in performing the speech act of invitation refusals in Arabic dialect and to show the differences and similarities between these two groups in terms of type and frequency. The interactions between Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds are possible to happen in everyday communication since provinces such as Kirkuk, Mosul and Diyala have multi ethnic residents comprising Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds. The Iraqi Arabs belong to the Arab culture and speak Arabic while the Iraqi Kurds have their own culture and language, Kurdish, although most speak Arabic as a second language as well (Rowell, 2012, p. 69). The differences in the language and culture of the two groups may result in differences in strategies they employed in refusing invitation. Hence, this study aims to answer the following research question: What are the invitation refusal strategies used by Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds when refusing invitations from higher status interlocutors with close, familiar and distant social relation?

## Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted to account for the realisation of refusal with different views. However, invitation refusal was referred to generally as one of the four-eliciting acts: offer, suggest, request and invitation. Seven studies reviewed employed *Written Discourse Completion Test* (WDCT) and categorised refusal strategies according to Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990).

The first three studies investigated specific culture realisation of refusal speech act to examine the characteristics of refusals made by non-native speakers in English. Tuncer and Turhan (2019) examined refusal strategies used by Turkish pre-service English based on nine situations (three for lower, three for equal, and three for lower status). The findings of the study indicated that the most widely semantic formula used was “*excuse*” and that the participants tended to use more combinations of semantics formulas when they refused the interlocutors of higher status. Another study by Boonsuk and Ambele (2019) investigated the way of refusing requests by Thai EFL learners and the impact of refusal on the hearer’s face. The study showed that there were only two main refusal strategies used: *direct* and overwhelmingly *indirect* refusals. The participants employed four types of direct refusals including *direct performative*, *definitive or real No in the absence of any other phrase*, *adverse phrases with no phrase*, and *specific No but some other phrases*. This study also revealed that adjuncts to refusals were not used by the participants. The third study by Kreishan (2018) examined the realisation of refusal and complaint among Jordanian EFL learners. The participants were to refuse based on four eliciting acts: offer, suggestion, suggestion, and invitation. The results showed that the participants tended to employ indirect refusal in their responses. The most preferred semantic formulas used by the participants were *an explanation or excuse*, *apology*, *postponement*, and *adjuncts*. They tended to provide implicit and less specific *explanations* and *false excuses* when they refused.

The next two studies compared cross cultural groups realisation of refusal. Rahayu (2019) investigated refusal speech acts performed by three groups: Indonesian EFL learners, Indonesian native speakers, and American speakers of English. The participants had to a refuse request, offer, suggestion, and invitation made by interlocutors with higher, equal, and lower status. The results showed that there is a cross cultural variation among American participants and their Indonesian counterparts. Americans tended to refuse directly saying “No” easily compared to Indonesians while most Indonesians used the semantic formula “*putting the blame on the third party*” more than Americans. It seems that Indonesians EFL learners are influenced by their culture and negative pragmatic transfer which happened as they employed refusal strategies that are conforming to their culture. The second study by Shareef, Qyrio, and Ali (2018) examined refusal strategies by Kurdish and Syriac native speakers in their mother tongue i.e. Kurdish and Syriac using WDCT to collect the data consisting of six situations in which the participants were asked to refuse offers and requests made by a person of equal status with the speaker. The results found that *indirect* and *adjunct* strategies were frequently preferred by the Syriac native participants than direct ones while the Kurdish native participants preferred to use *direct* and *indirect* refusals more than *adjuncts*. However, the participants of both groups preferred to use more strategies when they refuse requests more than offers.

Finally, is a study by Farenkia (2015) who compared the refusal strategies employed by French speakers in Cameroon and in France when rejecting an invitation to a friend's birthday party, an invitation by a classmate to have a drink and an invitation to attend a talk given by a professor's colleague. The findings reveal similar preference for face-saving refusal strategies i.e. preference for indirect refusal and adjuncts to refusals and internal modification. Nonetheless, they differed with respect to the choices of indirect refusals.

The literature reviewed showed variations in the refusal strategies among the participants of different cultures and languages, and among speakers of the same language but differ regionally. Despite the variations, the findings also reveal a common trait in their refusal strategies across all cultures; prevalent use of indirectness particularly the use of *excuse* in refusing. Brown (2015) attributed the use of indirectness to “sugar coat” or to be less straightforward or more elaborate in order to take account of people’s feelings when interacting with others. Brown and Levinson (1987) cited politeness as the main motivation for people to use indirectness. They argued that indirect forms provide the hearers with some freedom of action. In other words, indirectness is regarded as a set of politeness strategies which can be employed by people to reduce imposition on the hearers or to establish and maintain solidarity between the speakers and the hearers. In this respect, they identified two types of faces: *positive face* and *negative face*. During interaction, people use *positive politeness* strategies to address the positive face of the hearer and to maintaining and keeping solidarity. On the other hand, *negative politeness* is used to show deference and respect to the hearer and not be imposed on. The review also indicates that most of the studies have focused on the social status while the social distance, which is regarded as an important sensitive factor in affecting refusal of invitations, has not been given due consideration in designing the situations. The present study focuses on refusal strategies employed by lower status interlocutors to refuse invitations by *higher* status interlocutors with *close*, *familiar* and *distant* social distance in the investigation of realisation of invitation refusal by Iraqi Arab and Iraqi Kurds in Iraqi Arabic dialect. The open-ended WDCT was piloted based on the results and modifications were made to the classification of semantic formulas of refusal. The classification is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Classification of Semantic Formulas Proposed by Beebe et al. (1990)

| Strategies   | Examples  |
|--|---|
| <b>Direct</b>                                      |   |
| Performative                                       | أرفض دعوتك I refuse your invitation   |
| Negative willingness/ability                       | ما أكرر I cannot  |
| <b>Indirect</b>                                    |   |
| Regret/Apology                                     | اسف I am sorry  |
| Excuse   | اريد اخذ والدي للمستشفى لأنه مريض I have to take my father to the hospital since he is sick |
| Promise of future acceptance                       | على المرة الجاية ان شاء الله I will do it next time, God willing                            |
| Let interlocutor off the hook                      | ماكو داعي احنه اخوان There is no need, we are brothers                                      |
| <b>Adjuncts</b>                                    |   |
| Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement | احب احضر الحفلة I would love to attend the party  |
| Gratitude/appreciation                             | شكرا لدعوتك Thank you for your invitation   |
| Invoking the name of God                           | ان شاء الله If God willing  |
| Swearing   | والله ما أكرر I swear by God I cannot   |
| Well-wishing                                       | أتمنالك التوفيق I wish you all the best   |
| Congratulation                                     | مبارك التخرج Congratulation for your graduation   |
| Recompensing                                       | هدية العرسان موجودة The groom's present is ready  |
| Address term                                       | حبيبي, Darling; اخوية, Brother  |
| Defining the relation                              | استاذي العزيز My dear professor   |
| Praising the speaker                               | انت احسن مشرف You are the best supervisor   |
| Return the invitation                              |   |
| Compliment   | اتشرف بدعوتك I am honoured with your invitation   |
| Sense of loss                                      | حرامات تفوتني الحفلة It is a big loss not to attend the party                               |
| Honorifics   | استاذ Professor   |

## Methodology

This study followed a descriptive qualitative analysis for the collected data. The open-ended *Written Discourse Completion Task* (WDCT) was used in this study to collect the written responses of three different situations from the participants. Table 2 summarises contextual variations in relation to the interlocutor's social status and social distance.

**Table 2:** Description of WDCT Situations

| Situation of invitation refusal | Refusal status relative to interlocutors | Status of hearer | Distance |
|---------------------------------|--|------------------|----------|
| 1. Party to celebrate promotion | Employee-boss                            | Higher           | Close    |
| 2. Homemade dinner              | Student-professor                        | Higher           | Familiar |
| 3. Poetry festival              | Student- professor                       | Higher           | Distant  |

After acquiring permission from classroom instructors, the procedure of collecting data was conducted in the classroom sections during the spring academic semester of 2019 at Mustansiriyah University and Salahaddin University. The participants were given 10 minutes to complete filling the WDCT. The data elicited from three WDCTs comprising three situations in which a person of lower status refuses invitations made by interlocutors of higher status having close, familiar and distant social relation. The data were analysed in terms of the types and the frequency of the semantic formulas as categorised according to Beebe et al. (1990) taxonomy. According to Cohen (1996, p. 265) a semantic formula refers to “a word, phrase, or sentence that meets a particular semantic criterion or strategy, any one or more of these can be used to perform the act in question”. For example, the following utterance can be coded as follows:

والله أحب احضر الحفلة بس مشغول ما أكرر اعذرني اوعدك على المرة الجاية

By God, I'd love to attend the party, but I am busy I can't. Forgive me, I promise to do it next time.

| Phrase   | Strategy                                |
|--|---|
| 1. والله<br>By God                                     | (Swearing)                              |
| 2. احب احضر الحفلة<br>I'd love to attend the party     | (Positive opinion/feeling or agreement) |
| 3. بس مشغول<br>But I am busy                           | (Excuse)                                |
| 4. ما أكرر<br>I can't                                  | (Negative willingness/ability)          |
| 5. اعذرني<br>Forgive me                                | (Regret/Apology)                        |
| 6. اوعدك على المرة الجاية<br>I promise to do next time | (promise of future acceptance)          |

Firstly, “Wallah” (i.e., by God) is coded as adjunct: *swearing*. Secondly, “I'd love to attend the party” is coded as “*statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement*”. The third

expression “but I am busy” is coded as indirect strategy: *excuse*. “I can’t” is coded as direct strategy: *negative willingness/ability*, and the fifth strategy “forgive me” is coded as indirect strategy: “regret/apology”. Finally, the last expression “*I promise to do it next time*” is coded as indirect strategy: “*promise of future acceptance*”.

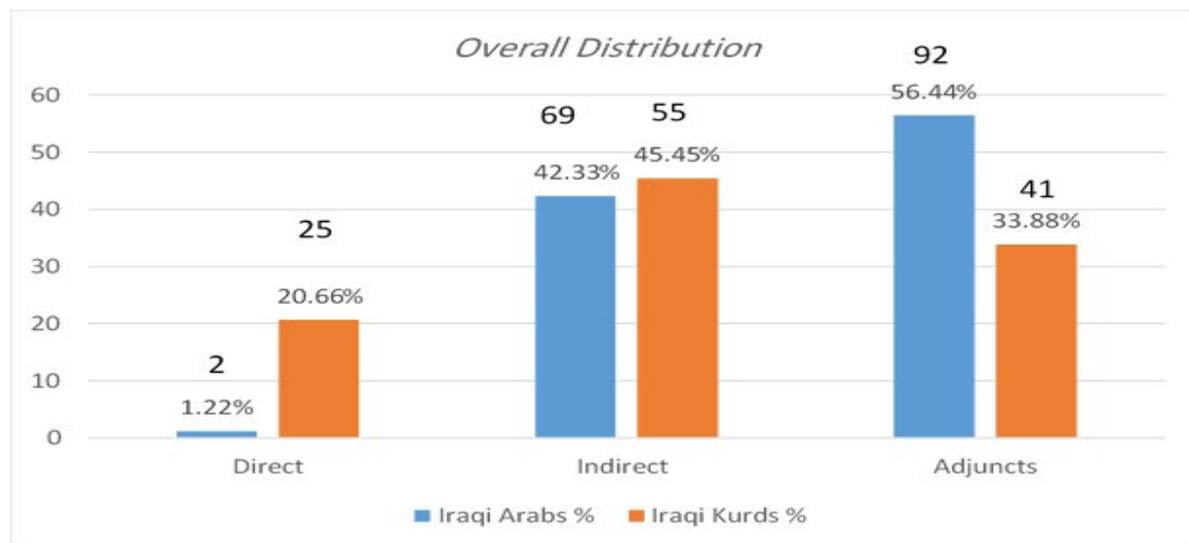
## Results and Discussion

The findings are presented in four sub-sections. It begins with an overview of Iraqi Arabs’ and Iraqi Kurds’ strategies while the other three subsections focus on refusal strategies of Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds when refusing invitations made by higher status interlocutors specific to the three social distance; *close*, *familiar* and *distant*. The strategies were categorised into their constituent strategies according to Beebe et al. (1990) classification as *direct*, *indirect*, and *adjuncts*.

### Overview of Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds Refusal Strategies

Figure 1 shows that Iraqi Arabs employed more strategies (163 strategies) than Iraqi Kurds (121 strategies). It also indicates that the two groups shared some similarities in adopting *direct*, *indirect*, and *adjuncts* when they refused invitations by three interlocutors of higher status.

**Figure 1.** Overall Strategies of Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds When Refusing Higher Status Interlocutor’s Invitation



Both groups used strategies from the direct category the least. The Iraqi Arabs employed direct strategies sparsely at just 2% compared to the Iraqi Kurds who used it more at 20.66%. This indicates their cautiousness as the invitations they had to decline were from interlocutors

of higher status: their boss, supervisor and professor. Hence the power factor has influenced them to adopt substantial face saving strategies via indirect and adjunct to refusal strategies while the face threatening strategies i.e. direct strategies were used minimally. Iraqi Arabs had high employment of adjuncts to refusal followed by indirect strategies while Iraqi Kurds utilized the opposite i.e. high use of indirect strategies followed by adjuncts to refusal strategies. Farenkia (2015) maintains that by using strategies from indirect and adjuncts to refusal categories the invitee attempts to mitigate the threat to the inviter's face. *Adjuncts* compose of different types of speech acts coming before or after *direct* and *indirect* refusal. They cannot be used alone as refusal of invitation, but "they are external modification devices used to soften refusals" (Farenkia, 2015, p. 591).

***Iraqi Arabs' and Iraqi Kurds' Refusal Strategies: Refusing an Invitation of Higher Status Interlocutor with Close Social Distance***

Table 3 shows that Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds had taken different approaches in refusing their boss's invitation to a party to celebrate his promotion.

**Table 3:** Overall Strategies Use in Refusing Invitation of Higher Status Interlocutor with Close Social Distance

| Strategy     | Iraqi Arabs |             | Iraqi Kurds |             |  |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--|
|              | No          | %           | No          | %           |  |
| Direct       | -           | -           | 10          | 26.31       |  |
| Indirect     | 21          | 40.38       | 16          | 42.10       |  |
| Adjuncts     | 31          | 59.61       | 12          | 31.57       |  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>52</b>   | <b>100%</b> | <b>38</b>   | <b>100%</b> |  |

In general, both groups showed preference for indirectness. Iraqi Arabs for instance employed 40.38% of the strategies from indirect category and even a higher employment of adjunct to refusal strategies i.e. 59.61%. Iraqi Kurds employed slightly more indirect strategies at 42.10% but lesser percentage of adjunct to refusal strategies i.e. 31.57%. In terms of direct strategies, Iraqi Arabs did not use any strategies from this category whereas Iraqi Kurds employed 26% of these strategies. This means that Iraqi Kurds are more direct than Iraqi Arabs. Iraqi Arabs also employed more strategies i.e. 52 strategies than Iraqi Kurds who utilized 38 strategies.

**Table 4:** Specific Strategies Used in Refusing Invitation of Higher Status Interlocutor with Close Social distance

| Types of Strategies                                | Iraqi Arabs |            | Iraqi Kurds |            |
|--|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
|  | No          | %          | No          | %          |
| <b>Direct</b>                                      |             |            |             |            |
| Performative                                       | -           | -          | 1           | 2.63       |
| Negative willingness/ability                       |             | -          | 9           | 23.68      |
| Total of Direct Strategies                         | -           | -          | 10          | 26.31      |
| <b>Indirect</b>                                    |             |            |             |            |
| Regret/Apology                                     | 5           | 9.61       | 8           | 21.05      |
| Excuse   | 15          | 28.84      | 8           | 21.05      |
| Promise of future acceptance                       | 1           | 1.92       | -           | -          |
| Total of Indirect Strategies                       | 21          | 40.38      | 16          | 42.10      |
| <b>Adjuncts</b>                                    |             |            |             |            |
| Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement | 1           | 1.92       | -           | -          |
| Invoking the name of God                           | 3           | 5.76       | 7           | 18.42      |
| Swearing   | 3           | 5.76       | 1           | 2.63       |
| Well-wishing                                       | 9           | 17.30      | -           | -          |
| Congratulation                                     | 10          | 19.23      | 2           | 5.26       |
| Defining the relation                              | 1           | 1.92       | 2           | 5.26       |
| Recompensing                                       | 1           | 1.92       | -           | -          |
| Address term                                       | 3           | 5.76       | -           | -          |
| Total of Adjuncts to Refusal Strategies            | 31          | 59.61      | 12          | 31.57      |
| <b>Overall Total</b>                               | <b>52</b>   | <b>100</b> | <b>38</b>   | <b>100</b> |

Table 4 summarizes specific strategies employed by the two groups to refuse the invitation by their employee who they had close social relations with, to a party to celebrate his promotion. Iraqi Arabs employed 11 types of strategies while Iraqi Kurds employed 8 types. The results indicated that there are similarities and differences among the participants of both groups in employing the semantic formulas in their invitations refusal responses. For instance, four prominent strategies employed by Iraqi Arabs were from *indirect* and *adjuncts to refusal* categories. *Excuse* ranked as the most frequent semantic formula at 28.84% followed by *congratulation* at 19.23%, *well wishing* at 17.30% and *regret/apology* at 9.61 %. In contrast, Iraqi Kurds used *negative willingness* from *direct* strategy as the most frequent strategies followed by two strategies from *indirect* category, i.e. *excuse* and *regret/apology* both at 21.05% and one strategy from adjuncts to refusal *invoking the name of God* employed at 18.42%.

***Iraqi Arabs' and Iraqi Kurds' Refusal Strategies: Refusing an Invitation of Higher Status Interlocutor with Familiar Social Distance***

Table 5 shows an overview of refusal strategies employed by the two groups in the second situation in which they had to decline an invitation to a homemade dinner by their professor who they were *familiar with*.

**Table 5:** Overall Strategies Use in Refusing Invitation of Higher Status Interlocutor with familiar social distance

| Strategy     | Iraqi Arabs |             | Iraqi Kurds |             |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|              | No          | %           | No          | %           |
| Direct       | -           | -           | 5           | 11.62       |
| Indirect     | 27          | 39.14       | 23          | 53.48       |
| Adjuncts     | 42          | 60.86       | 15          | 34.88       |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>69</b>   | <b>100%</b> | <b>43</b>   | <b>100%</b> |

Similar to the first situation, i.e. refusing higher status interlocutor with close social relation, Iraqi Arabs still retained the same pattern of strategies in the second situation when they refused a higher status interlocutor with familiar social distance. Iraqi Arabs used substantial *adjuncts to refusal* followed by *indirect strategies* and restricted their refusal strategies just within these two categories. Iraqi Kurds employed a slightly different approach. Although they still used strategies from all three categories, strategies from direct strategies were lessened to just 11.62% while strategies from indirect and adjunct categories were employed more with indirect strategies still ranked first followed by strategies from adjunct. This indicates the Iraqi Kurds are more affable towards their high status interlocutor who they are familiar with. Both groups also used more strategies compared to the first situation.

**Table 6:** Specific Strategies Used in Refusing Invitation of Higher Status Interlocutor with Familiar Social Distance

| Types of Strategies                                | Iraqi Arabs |             | Iraqi Kurds |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|  | No          | %           | No          | %           |
| <b>Direct Strategies</b>                           |             |             |             |             |
| Negative willingness/ability                       | -           | -           | 5           | 11.62       |
| Total of Direct Strategies                         | -           | -           | 5           | 11.62%      |
| <b>Indirect</b>                                    |             |             |             |             |
| Regret/Apology                                     | 9           | 13.05       | 9           | 20.93       |
| Excuse   | 14          | 20.28       | 12          | 27.90       |
| Promise of future acceptance                       | 4           | 5.79        | 2           | 4.65        |
| Total of Indirect Strategies                       | 27          | 39.13%      | 23          | 53.48       |
| <b>Adjuncts</b>                                    |             |             |             |             |
| Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement | 4           | 5.79        | 4           | 9.30        |
| Gratitude/appreciation                             | 3           | 4.34        | -           | -           |
| Invoking the name of God                           | 5           | 7.24        | 2           | 4.65        |
| Swearing   | -           | -           | 1           | 2.32        |
| Well-wishing                                       | 9           | 13.04       | -           | -           |
| Congratulation                                     | 5           | 7.24        | 2           | 4.65        |
| Honorifics   | 6           | 8.69        | 4           | 9.30        |
| Defining the relation                              | 7           | 10.14       | 1           | 2.32        |
| Praising the speaker                               | 1           | 1.44        | 1           | 2.32        |
| Sense of loss                                      | 1           | 1.44        | -           | -           |
| Compliment   | 1           | 1.44        | -           | -           |
| Total of Adjuncts to Refusal Strategies            | 42          | 60.86       | 15          | 34.88       |
| <b>Overall Total</b>                               | <b>69</b>   | <b>100%</b> | <b>43</b>   | <b>100%</b> |

The results in Table 6 show that Iraqi Arabs used more types of strategies, for example 13 types of strategies than Iraqi Kurds who employed 11 types in refusing invitations to their professor who they had *familiar* social relation. In regard to the percentage of the semantic formulas, the results indicated a number of similarities between the participants of the two groups. Both groups employed only three types of indirect strategies: excuse, *regret/apology* strategies and *promise for acceptance* to decline their professor's invitation. *Excuse* was the most frequent strategies used by Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds at 20.28% and 27.90% respectively affirming the face threatening nature of invitation refusal. This strategy is referred to as *positive politeness* strategy which used to save the positive face of the inviter and to keep solidarity, friendliness, and intimacy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Accordingly, it is used by the interlocutors to indicate that they are obliged to refuse due to external factors. Both groups also employed *regrets/apologies* as the next most used strategies but Iraqi Kurds

expressed *regrets/apologies* more at 20.93% compared to Iraqi Arabs who used the strategy at 13.05%.

Similar to their refusal towards their boss's invitation who was close to them, Iraqi Kurds employed substantial strategies (53.48%) from *indirect category* while Iraqi Arabs employed considerable *adjuncts to refusal strategies* (69%) when refusing their professor who was familiar to them. Once again Iraqi Arabs had a wider repertoire of adjuncts to refusal i.e. 10 types of strategies. Among these strategies *well-wishing* ranked first at 13.04 followed by *defining relation* (10.14%), *honorifics* (8.69%) *congratulation* (7.24%) and *invoking the name of God* (7.24%). Iraqi Kurds only employed 7 strategies in which the more salient strategies from this category are *positive opinion* and *defining relation* both at 9.30%.

### ***Iraqi Arabs' and Iraqi Kurds' Refusal Strategies: Refusing an Invitation of Higher Status Interlocutor with Distant Social Distance***

Table 7 presents an overview of refusal strategies employed by Iraqi Arab and Iraqi Kurds when refusing an invitation from their professor who had *distant* social relation to participate in a poetry festival.

**Table 7:** Overall Strategies Used in Refusing an Invitation of Higher Status Interlocutor with Distant Social Distance

| Strategy     | Iraqi Arabs |            | Iraqi Kurds |            |
|--------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
|              | No          | %          | No          | %          |
| Direct       | 2           | 4.76       | 10          | 25.00      |
| Indirect     | 21          | 50.00      | 16          | 40.00      |
| Adjuncts     | 19          | 45.24      | 14          | 35.00      |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>42</b>   | <b>100</b> | <b>40</b>   | <b>100</b> |

Iraqi Arabs employed a total of 42 strategies comprising a hybrid of 4.76% of *direct*, 50% of *indirect*, and 45.24% of adjuncts to refusal strategies, while Iraqi Kurds employed 40 strategies consisting of 25% of direct, 40% of indirect and 35% of adjuncts to refusal. Table 7 indicates that Iraqi Arabs employed slightly different approaches when declining high status interlocutor who was distant to them. In contrast to the other two interlocutors, Iraqi Arabs used more indirect strategies than adjunct strategies and included direct strategy in their repertoire of strategies. Iraqi Kurds, on the other hand, are consistent in their pattern of strategies such as substantial employment of direct and indirect strategies and dominant use of adjuncts. Specific strategies employed for this situation are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8:** Specific Strategies Used in Refusing Invitation of Higher Status Interlocutor with Distant Social Distance

| Types of Strategies                                | Iraqi Arabs |             | Iraqi Kurds |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|  | No          | %           | No          | %           |
| <b>Direct</b>                                      |             |             |             |             |
| Negative willingness/ability                       | 2           | 4.76        | 10          | 25          |
| Total of Direct Strategies                         | 2           | 4.76        | 10          | 25          |
| <b>Indirect</b>                                    |             |             |             |             |
| Regret/Apology                                     | 8           | 19.04       | 6           | 15          |
| Excuse   | 12          | 28.57       | 8           | 20          |
| Promise of future acceptance                       | 1           | 2.38        | 1           | 2.5         |
| Let the interlocutor off the hook                  | -           |             | 1           | 2.5         |
| Total of Indirect Strategies                       | 21          | 50.0%       | 16          | 40%         |
| <b>Adjuncts</b>                                    |             |             |             |             |
| Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement | 3           | 7.14        | 1           | 2.5         |
| Gratitude/appreciation                             | 8           | 19.04       | 9           | 22.5        |
| Invoking the name of God                           | 2           | 4.76        | 1           | 2.5         |
| Swearing   | 1           | 2.38        | -           | -           |
| Well-wishing                                       | 3           | 7.14        | -           | -           |
| Honorifics   | -           | -           | 1           | 2.5         |
| Defining the relation                              | 2           | 4.76        | 1           | 2.5         |
| Praising the speaker                               | -           | -           | 1           | 2.5         |
| Total of Adjuncts to Refusal                       | 19          | 45.23       | 14          | 35          |
| <b>Overall Total</b>                               | <b>42</b>   | <b>100%</b> | <b>40</b>   | <b>100%</b> |

Table 8 shows that Iraqi Arabs employed more indirect strategies and maintained *excuse* as the most frequent strategy at 28.57% followed by *regret/apology* two most used strategies. The difference is that Iraqi Arabs apologised the most to their high status distant interlocutor at 19% while their high status familiar interlocutor at 13% and the least at 9% to high status interlocutor who was close to them. But the Iraqi Arabs used different adjunct to refusal strategy for a distant interlocutor. They employed the use of ample *well-wishing* and *congratulating* when refusing the interlocutors with close and familiar social distance but to decline an interlocutor with *distant* social relation they employed ample *gratitude/appreciation* at 19% and *well-wishing* at reduce percentage of 7% and added statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement which was used at 7%. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement in this situation is a positive politeness strategy which is directed towards the positive face of the hearer to “maintain harmony with the interlocutor and to show solidarity and friendliness among the interlocutors” (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008, p. 80).

Iraqi Kurds retained the same approach of using strategies from all three categories for the interlocutors but there are subtle differences in terms of salient strategies employed to refuse a professor who had distant social distance. A strategy from direct category *negative willingness* ranked first as the most used strategy at 25% followed by a strategy from an adjunct category i.e. *gratitude/appreciation* at 22%, and the last two from indirect strategies; *excuse* at 20 % and *regret/apology* at 15%. Although the Kurds employed a direct strategy, the impact is not great as their use of direct strategies is restricted to the non-performative direct refusal strategy i.e. negative willingness. Boonsuk and Ambele (2019) maintain that although this strategy is still regarded as a face-threatening act, the hearer does not really feel hurt and humiliated as compared to the use of the direct performative. The Iraqi Kurds have also taken the effort to mitigate the impact of directness through the ample use of *gratitude/appreciation*, *excuse* and *apology/regret*.

Aside from these differences, *gratitude/appreciation* was the second frequent semantic formulas used by the participants of both groups with slight differences at the percentage of 19.04% and 22.5% respectively. This shows the need to mitigate the threat to the inviter positive face since invitation is for the invitee's benefit, therefore the invitee has to adopt a positive politeness strategy to keep and maintain relation with the inviter. As a positive politeness strategy, *gratitude/appreciation* reflects different cultural values and norms. Apte (1974) showed that in Marathi and Hindi cultures using gratitude among friends and family members is not possible to happen since in these cultures "verbalization of gratitude indicates a distant relationship" (p, 75). However, in this study it is used as the most frequent *adjuncts* to keep and maintain *close* distance between the speaker and hearer. Al-Kahtani (2005) stated that Arabs tended to begin their refusal with *gratitude/appreciation* since invitation is related to hospitality and thus making it difficult to refuse invitations.

## Conclusion

The overall results of the study revealed the Iraqi Arabs' and Iraqi Kurds' prevalent use of indirectness particularly the use of excuse in refusing higher status interlocutors. This finding is similar to the findings of previous studies by Turhan (2019) on Turkish pre service English teachers' refusal, Boonsuk and Ambele (2019) on refusal of Thai EFL and Kreishan (2019) on Jordanian EFL refusal.

Closer examination of the results, however, shows that the two groups differ with regard to their use of direct, indirect and adjuncts to refusal strategies. The Iraqi Kurds employed *direct strategies* quite prominently throughout the three social relations: close, familiar and distant. In contrast, the Iraqi Arab did not use direct strategies at all when refusing their close and familiar interlocutors, and only employed this category minimally with their distant interlocutor. The Iraqi Arabs also employed substantial *adjunct to refusal strategies*

particularly when refusing high status interlocutor who were close and also familiar to them whereas the Iraqi Kurds maintained their dominant use of *indirect strategies* throughout their refusal of the *close, familiar and distant* social relation interlocutors. These findings are parallel to the findings of Shareef, Oyrio and Ali's (2018) investigation of Kurds' and Syriac' refusal in their mother tongue. They found that *indirect* and *adjunct* strategies were frequently preferred by the Syriac than direct ones while the Kurds preferred *direct* and *indirect* strategies more than the *adjuncts*.

Specific investigation based on social relation of the participants with the high status interlocutors, shows some similarities and also differences in the strategies employed by Iraqi Arabs' and Iraqi Kurds'. When refusing high status interlocutor with close social relation, the Iraqi Arabs repertoire of strategies were ample with *excuses* and *regrets/apologies* from *indirect category* as well as ample *well-wishing* and *congratulating* from adjuncts to refusal. The Iraqi Kurds' salient strategies were *negative willingness* from the *direct* category as the most used strategy followed by ample *excuses* and *regrets/apologies* from the *indirect category* as well as *invoking the name of God* from *adjuncts to refusal* category. Both groups employed similar strategies but with slight variation of strategies to refuse their high status interlocutor with familiar social relation. The Iraqi Arabs' prominent strategies still comprised ample *excuses* and *regrets/apologies* from *indirect* category but more prominent use of adjuncts to refusal: *well-wishing, defining relation, honorific, congratulating and invoking the name of God*. The Iraqi Kurds, however, reduced their use of negative willingness from the direct category which ranked third in terms of most used strategy while *excuses* and *regrets/apologies* ranked first and second followed by two strategies form adjuncts to refusal: *statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement and honorific*. The two groups' strategies to decline their high status interlocutor with distant social relation showed that both groups expressed ample *gratitude/appreciation*. The Iraqi Arabs' repertoire of strategies consisted of *excuse* ranked first while *regret/apology* and *gratitude/appreciation* ranked second followed by other *adjuncts to refusal*: *statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement, well-wishing and honorific*. Although *negative willingness* from the *direct strategy* was in the list, it was only used by two participants. Conversely, the Iraqi Kurds had negative willingness ranked first as the most used strategy followed by *gratitude/appreciation* from *adjuncts to refusal* which ranked second at a slightly lower percentage. The next strategies in descending frequency of use were *excuses* and *regrets/apologies*.

It is worth noting that some types of semantic formulas were only used by Iraqi Arabs including *compliment, recompensing, address term, and sense of loss* while other strategies were only used by Iraqi Kurds. These include *performative, let the interlocutor off the hook*. Moreover, the results indicated that some of the strategies used by both groups were not included by Beebe et al. (1990), but they were used by other researchers such as *invoking the*



*name of God, swearing, well-wishing, congratulating, honorifics, defining the relation, address term, compliment, praising the speaker, and sense of loss.* However, *recompensing* was used only by Iraqi Arabs as a new category of semantic formula that was not included in Beebe et al. (1990) or by other researchers.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

This present study is limited to invitation refusal performed by Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds. It is important to indicate that the present study focuses on *social distance* in its three levels. However, there are many social variables such as age, gender and level of formality which are effective in the performance of refusing invitation. Therefore, further research should focus on other social variables. In addition, this study adopts only WDCT as an instrument to collect the data, further studies can suggest adopting other instruments such role play, or naturally occurring data to enhance our understanding of invitation refusal in natural settings.

## REFERENCES

- Al-Kahtani, S.W. (2005). Refusals realisations in three different cultures: A speech act theoretically-based cross-cultural study. *Journal of King Saud University*, 18, 35-57.
- Apte, M. L. (1974). Thank you and south Asian Languages: A comparative sociolinguistic study. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 3, 67-89.
- Beebe, L. M., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatics transfer in ESL refusals. In R. Scarcella., E. Anderson & S. D. Krashen (Eds.), *On the development of communicative competence in a second language* (pp.55-73). Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers.
- Boonsuk, Y., & A Ambele, E. (2019). Refusal as a social speech act among Thai EFL university students. *Arab World English Journal*, 10(2), 213-224.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, A. D. (1996). Developing the ability to perform speech acts. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18(2), 253-267.
- Farenkia, M. B. (2015). Invitation refusals in Cameroon French and hexagonal French. *Multilingua*, 34(4), 577-603.
- Farnia, M., & Wu, X. (2012). An intercultural communication study of Chinese and Malaysian university students' refusal to invitation. *International journal of English linguistics*, 2(1), 162-176.
- Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2008). *Politeness in Mexico and the United States: A contrastive study of the realisation and perception of refusals*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Izadi, A., & Zilaie, F. (2015). Refusal strategies in Persian. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 25(2), 246-264.
- Kreishan, L. (2018). Politeness and speech acts of refusal and complaint among Jordanian undergraduate students. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(4), 68-76.
- Kwon, J. (2003). Pragmatic transfer and proficiency in refusals of Korean EFL learners. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Boston University, USA.



- Osborne, D. M. (2010). The realisation of speech acts of refusals of an invitation among Brazilian friends. *Rev. Est. Ling., Belo Horizonte*, 18(2), 61-85.
- Rahayu, N. S. (2019). Refusal strategy performed by Indonesian EFL learner. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 5(1), 67-76.
- Rowell, R. (2012). *Iraq: Countries of the world*. Abdo Publishing Company: United States of America.
- Shareef, D. M., Qyrio, M. I., & Ali, C. N. (2018). An investigation of refusal strategies as used by Bahdini Kurdish and Syriac Aramaic speakers. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 9(1), 89-101.
- Thomas, J., (1984). Cross-cultural discourse as unequal encounter: Towards a pragmatic analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, 5(2), 226–235.
- Tuncer, H., & Turhan, B. (2019). Refusal strategies of Turkish pre-service teachers of English: A focus on gender and status of interlocutor. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 15(1), 01-19
- Wannaruk, A. (2008). Pragmatic transfer in Thai EFL refusals. *RELC*, 39(3), 318-337.
- Wierzbicka, A. (2003). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Zhao, Y., & Throssell, P. (2011). Speech act theory and its application to EFL teaching in China. *Language Society and Culture*, 32(32), 88 - 95.