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GENDER AND THE REALIZATION OF REFUSALS: EVIDENCE FROM A
PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

The core concern of this study is to explore the refusal speech act strategies that male and female Pakistani undergraduate English language learners employ in classroom discourses. Undoubtedly, the significance of learning pragmatics cannot be simply overlooked while considering the notion of refusal, carried out in our daily interactions across different situations. Hence, the researchers have tried to examine gender roles in their use of the strategies and finally explore any difference (if any) in the pattern of strategies employed by male and female participants. Based on Lakoff's (1975) notion of difference approach, the researcher benefited from a qualitative mode of inquiry for investigating each refusal act which was analyzed and interpreted according to the taxonomy developed by Beebe et al. (1990). Therefore, sixty undergraduate students, both males, and females were purposively selected. Refusal data were collected using a written discourse completion test, oral role-plays, and retrospective verbal reports. Concerning gender differences, it was found that female participants from both groups are prone more to use indirect refusal strategies, and sustained politeness than male respondents. Furthermore, it was observed that female participants were found predisposed in the employment of indirect refusal strategies not only to save the interlocutors' face during the interaction but also to evade the face-threatening act and it was evident that the male respondents tended to use direct refusal. Therefore, L2 learners need to be taught the pragmatic

norms on the basis of gender differences which utterly need a certain application in the English language classroom.

INTRODUCTION

In the present times, communication is an integral part of different speech communities. Similarly, for effective communication users are required to take into consideration a deep understanding of cultural and linguistic knowledge. Therefore, human communication varies, with both women and men using it in diverse ways for a variety of purposes (Moaveni, 2014). In the early 1950s, Austin, a British philosopher introduced his theory of speech act on the topic of *How to Do Things with Words*. Austin (1962) declared that if you are uttering something, at same time, you are also involved in doing something. In this regard, Kasper and Rose (2001) affirmed that an interaction taking place in social setting, speakers make use of various speech acts to attain well defined communicative aims, including speech acts of refusals. Likewise, Fraser (1990) and Smith (1998) establish in their researches that the speech act of refusals could be predisposed by certain societal factors, for instance, gender, age, tertiary milieu, authority, and social relative distance. It augmented that a speaker must utilize the proper refusal strategy, otherwise, it will turn down the hearer's face and their relationship may be broken, and it is of utmost importance for the interlocutors to maintain the diverse refusal strategies to minimize the depressing manipulation of the refusal speech act. Beebe et.al. (1990) investigated the strategies of refusal, and broadly draw a line in the categories across the strategies into three such as in/direct refusal and adjuncts. Moreover, the speech act of refusal has been viewed as more challenging for second language (hereafter, L2) learners because it tends to create an undue offense and miscommunication. Therefore, the speech act of refusals is regarded as less preferred reaction that manipulates the prospect of interlocutors; hence it shows that a balanced pragmatic competence is essential to accomplish it out in appropriate manner. Studies conducted in the recent past by Blum-Kulka and House (1989) House and Kasper (1987), Murphy and Neu (1996), Tanck (2004), Allami, et.al. (2017) focused on the different levels in employing the strategies of speech act of refusals. In recent decades, researchers have tried to amalgamate the refusal strategies across their native languages, traditions and English learning. Lana (2018) identified refusal speech acts and the utility of refusal strategies among English and Russian. Tuncer (2016), Tuncer, et.al. (2019) who observed that the refusal strategies were mainly influenced in terms of gender disparity and the social standing an interlocutor possess in Turkey. Among some Chinese researchers, Ma Yuelan (2000) who identified eleven different kinds of refusal strategies employed in different situations by Chinese learning English language. Likely, Lan and Ping (2018) examined that Chinese English learner are more prone to utilize an indirect refusal strategy whenever an interaction takes place between interlocutors.

Regarding gender differences, Garcia (1992) draw a comparison in the accomplishment of the speech act of refusals between two groups who were the native speakers of Spanish carried out by male and female. Similarly, research in the past has showed several instances that the notion of gender enacts among people using language for a particular purpose across different social context. Several scholars investigating phenomena in sociolinguistics have attempted to

elucidate the gender-based differences in the use of language. In this vein, Lakoff (1975) has introduced three approaches on gender research such as dominance approach, difference approach, and social constructionist approach. Presenting views on dominance approach, Lakoff (1975) asserts that a certain kind of features that differentiate the speech and use of language on the basis of gender differences, and the evidence for females who are found as more polite than males' interlocutors in speech act is the true outcome of the gender differences. On the other hand, the difference approach suggests that there exist a gender difference in the use of peculiar and particular oral practices and communicative patterns, which are created in same-sex child peer groups. In her work *You Just Don't Understand*, Tannen (1990), argued that cross-cultural communication tends to be very hard because of the wide difference which cannot be overlooked in language use, however, speakers of different languages can put together an effort to curtail the misunderstandings. By Social Constructionist Approach, the gender is treated as a communal and societal construction, and the difference among gender exists not only in language users but also in interactions. The studies to find out the linguistic gender difference in Pakistan have not developed, and the research in this field is not nourished yet.

The present study uses the difference approach to investigate male and female English language learners' performance of speech act of refusal in different situations and different status. This study also focuses on to identify the differences between male and female learners' performance during the accomplishment of speech act of refusal. Learning pragmatics has always been a crucial task for learning a second language (L2) because learners are usually anticipated to comprehend the conventions that administer the use of the language. In the process of learning, refusals are particularly complex in nature because they are mainly influenced by social and cultural variables such as education, gender, and social category. Therefore, refusals may be intricate to articulate or distinguish properly, particularly by L2 learners who rely more on their native language due to possessing less pragmatic knowledge. Therefore, the implication of this attempt lies to analyze the gender differences in Pakistani university students' speech act of refusal; the paper in a way could be helpful for both male and female to understand more about each other so to uphold awareness in the cross-gender communication in our daily life. Thus, the study aims to highlight the differences between male and female refusal strategies carried out in their English discourses.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study is an attempt to give an answer to the following research questions:

1. What are the refusal strategies mostly preferred by Pashto and Siraiki male and female learners of English when refusing others?
2. How do the strategies used by male and female English language learners differ regarding gender?

3. Why the selected male and female English language learners tend to employ different strategies in the accomplishment of the speech act of refusal?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on qualitative research paradigm, this study delineates itself to the theoretical framework of Lakoff (1975) on gender differences. Further, the difference approach embodies the notion that women and men adopt some particular and peculiar strategies developed during interactions with different communicative patterns, which is the central tenant of this theory. It further propounds numerous and repeatedly interactive behaviour that shapes our notion about manliness and womanliness within existing culture. Therefore, this paper is guided mainly on difference approach, focusing to explore the differences between male and female realization of refusals. The study has used three tools for data collection, i.e. The WDCT (Written Discourse Completing Test) adapted from Tanck Sharyl (2004) further tailored, oral open role-plays and retrospective verbal reports (hereafter, RVP) which helps out to find out learners' ability processes that cannot otherwise be observed (Culpeper, Mackey, & Taguchi, 2018; Gass & Mackey, 2016). Sixty participants (30 male and 30 female), 15 male and 15 female were selected from each ethnic groups of Pashto and Siraiki learners of English through purposive sampling. The study is conducted in a Pakistani University English language classroom. They were enrolled in 4 years undergraduate program. The ages of the participants ranged between 20 and 23 years. The respondents were enrolled in their third- and fourth-year undergraduate in English as major discipline who were admitted on the basis of having balanced linguistic proficiency in English. After filling out the demographic form, they filled in their responses to complete the DCT by writing.

DATA ANALYSIS

In the following section, analysis for the data collected via WDCTs which has been categorized, codified is presented below.

Note: The italicized passage manifests the extracts taken from the data.

Situation 1: Refusal of Invitation

A professor refuses the invitation of students for joining them on a trip, and the participants of the study were supposed to refuse or decline the refusal. Among the different strategies, the most repeatedly utilized strategy was the indirect refusal realized mostly by female participants of the study while the male participants remained very direct in their refusal strategies by showing negative ability (for instance, I can't). It was observed that female participants utilized indirect refusal strategies of regret (e.g., I'm sorry) by Siraiki speaking female (codified as SSF) Thank you for invitation. I wish to join you but I regret to say that I have a very busy schedule next week. This example illustrates that while interacting with students the female participants didn't show any sign of a direct refusal. In first part of the above example, a wish has expressed to decrease an offence, and to refute the invitation in a polite manner. On the other hand, male participants tend to be more direct in their interaction even in the circle of friends. It serves as evidence about learners' sensitivity towards social status.

Thus, it can be assumed the male participants of both groups were hesitant to refuse directly to the students because they perceived their relationship with the professor more patriarchic than that with the friends.

Furthermore, some similarities were found in the use of refusal strategies but female participants were inclined to utilize considerably more indirect strategies than direct ones which manifests that female participant remained more indirect in their interaction and were more polite than male. As a result, it can be inferred that female respondents were found almost more polite and supportive in special initiating speech acts than male respondents. Likewise, it can be illustrated that the male respondents tended to be direct in refusing invitation, but it seems very rigid for female respondents to refuse invitation. Consequently, a noticeable variation was traced out between male and female respondents particularly in refusing an invitation, that is, a great portion of male respondents selected direct strategies while many female participants selected indirect strategies. Such as a female Saraiki participant uttered: Owing to some busy schedule, I wouldn't be able to join you on this trip.

Among the other strategies used by the respondents of both the groups, the strategy of explanation in the first part of the sentence was more frequently utilized by female respondents as compared to that of male respondents. Considering the option for the use of head acts in the second episode, the female participants of both diverse background groups frequently employed indirect head act with less prominence on repudiation duly followed by appreciation to diminish the illocutionary vigor of the refusal. Thus, it is contemplated that female participants of both groups bluntly discarded an immediate denunciation rather opted for indirect refusal with a purpose as not to be rude at the hearer's end but also to save their own face. In sharp contrast, male respondents of both groups remained more direct in sharing same standing, and remained indirect in the position of holding lower-upper class background.

Situation 2: Refusal of Request

A request has been forwarded by a friend to another friend to get a cup of tea but he/she refuses to abide by immediately with the forwarded request. In contrast to the earlier situation, the interlocutors are sharing equal status. It was evident from the results that the participants from both groups were inclined to use different strategies. At the outset, Pashtu speaking respondents employed performative verbs as a strategy more than Saraiki respondents. On the other hand, the strategy of ensuring reason/explanation was almost equally used by the participants of both groups. For instance, a Pashtu female responded stated thus: I wouldn't be able to do so as I have many other things to do at home. It can be inferred here that a regret has been deeply expressed which indicates the inability instead forwarding a straight forward refusal which could be regarded as face threatening.

Following the use of other strategies, it was asserted that Saraiki female respondents prefer to employ the strategy of positive opinion in order to modify their head acts. At same time, the strategy of pause fillers has been used most frequently by Saraiki speaking respondents than Pashtu speaking respondents.

In contrast, the Pashtu speaking respondents have employed reason/explanation as a strategy in refusal to mitigate the intent of their refusals. Considering as an example of Pashtu female responded who was of the view that; please don't be embarrassed. I am not in the position to bring a cup of tea this time. It is apt to mention that the respondents didn't prefer to use the provision of any reason while realizing the speech acts of refusal. Having a closer look at the data, it was traced out that Pashtu speaking group didn't employ specific reason(s) at all particularly in the first episode of their refusals. Hence, the head acts as a strategy was employed in the second episode with an aural stress on reversal followed by appreciation to alleviate the illocutionary vigor of the refusal. To recall, the respondents refused the forwarded request in an indirect manner as it was the integrity of a classmate that's why alternatives instead of blunt refusal has been used as a strategy keeping in view the harmony of friendship and to save their friends 'positive face'. This asserts that as refusal as a speech act can be threatening to the hearer's face, most probably that's why the speaker tends to mitigate the force of refusal.

ANALYSIS OF ORAL ROLE PLAYS

Situation 1: Refusal of Invitation:

The professor has been invited by students to join them on a trip that consent is pre-requisite in this situation. Surprisingly, both the groups have employed the use of adjuncts to mitigate their refusal that don't stand alone as an indicator of blunt refusal. For instance, a Pashtu participant responded in such manner: I am very busy so that's why I wouldn't be able to join you. At same time, different strategies were employed in their responses to this situation. Subsequently, the gender difference could be seen not only in penchant of strategies and chronological association of refusals, but also in the substance of strategies. Since the respondents of both the groups favoured to use reason/explanation as refusal strategy, the substance of such a strategy was evaluated critically with a deliberate intent to discover what type(s) of justifications were regarded apposite and the marked distinction between genders of learners of English are worth significant.

An interesting and apt to trace out that among the respondents of both the groups never selected to opt in order to afford any state for neither approval nor the strategy of proclamation of attitude and announcement of viewpoint in their refusals. Nonetheless, it goes in contrast with the respondents of Pashtu speaking who have employed the strategy of promise of acceptance most frequently than Saraiki respondents. For example, a Pashtu speaking female redounded: First of all thanks to all you for this invitation but I remain too busy these days. It is illustrated that the refusal sequence for the first episode indicates the use of gratitude which shows future possibility etc. It also revealed that the reason being given twofold in the first occurrence was not distinctively elaborated. As a consequence, the domino effect have illustrated that some particular indirect strategies were employed to moderate upon the speech act of refusal so to evade the committed offence of the interlocutor.

Situation 2: Refusal of Request:

Unlike the other state, the respondents are allocated in similar categories that are rendering their services as colleagues since long at a famous saloon. It is interesting that Saraiki participants were using direct refusal in the form of negative ability by using most frequently performative verbs. It was observed that fewer participants from Pashtu group used it as a strategy. In this regard, the Saraiki respondents used regrets to decline the request of a friend, such as: No means No and a big No because you can see that I am sweeping the floor of the saloon. Following the results obtained from the data it was found that Pashtu female participants employed predominantly the indirect strategies than the direct ones. The most frequent choice of indirect refusal found in the present study is the provision of genuine and cogent reasons accompanied with a lot of explanations. Further, the substance of reasons also speckled which really reflected the speakers' culture. The deficiency of performing direct strategy by only using performative verbs indicates that all respondents seemed to be influenced by dwindling the extent of directness. Giving alternatives were more chosen by Pashtu group respondents whereas the Saraiki group respondents bluntly declined the demand carried out by their same class interlocutors.

Analysis of Retrospective Verbal Reports

It was interesting to know through retrospective verbal reports that respondents employ alternates in case of declining the request while holding the status of a professor. On the other hand, it was rarely employed in case of their interaction with the friends. This tendency of the respondents could be attributive because the respondents were ensuring the provision of refusal. Moreover, it can be asserted from the responses in RVRs that the realization of refusal was delayed deliberately by female respondents in order to mitigate the force of the act. It simply indicates that female respondents found it more inconvenient to express refusal in case of professor while the male participants tended to be more convenient in a direct refusal. Further, the female respondents remained much polite and indirect that their male counterparts. It was true with male Pashtu speaking respondents who remained direct as it creates only a pragmatic ambiguity that's why rounded and dulled refusals were favoured by viewing a direct rebuff of the request for not parting the interlocutor in any expedition or remote liberty. It also indicates that respondents were deficient in pragmatic aptitude in English as the participants were unable to detach the social norms already acquired of the mother tongue when executing a speech act, as a result, it does impinge on subsequently the pragmatic ability. Naima, a female respondent from Pashtu speaking community stated thus:

I think female speaking different languages across the world would be more polite and indirect apart from keeping the status difference. It could be that if ever we (female) refuse someone's offer, we would opt for indirect refusal because we don't want to offend the interlocutor. So, in such alarming scenarios the listener would keep this in mind forever.

All this goes in contradiction when Gulab, a male respondent from Pashtu speaking group stated that we refuse in the form of simple rejection of a

forwarded request because it becomes hard to delay or postpone the accomplishment of the act accordingly the way being wished. It was also affirmed further that male speakers had a wish to compensate the force of request. Another male respondent from Saraiki group elaborated his estimation that ensuring adequate reasons following the nonconformity with the request safely shields and protects both the speaker and hearer. He affirmed that as there is no widespread sphere of influence which is uniformly shared mutually by both genders across all languages. Besides, the employment of hyperbole manifests that the male respondents wanted to maintain an individual identity taking place during an interaction. This respondent also emphasized upon the notion to make the listener believe of being sorry for noncompliance to him/her. It was sharply pointed out that the execution of this speech act expresses the body language expediently endorsed by the hearer. Hence, it is concluded here that differences in the comprehension of the speech act of refusal occur which cannot be simply overlooked or overstated.

Findings of the Study

From the results stated above, it can be inferred that female respondents were found using substantially more indirect strategies than direct strategies as compared to their male respondents in most cases. It was noted that indirect strategies were chosen by female respondents of these two groups, but there still lies a wide difference between male and female respondents that can be traced out regarding the prospect of indirectness. Consequently, female respondents' refusals were apt and more tender, moderate and indirect compared with male respondents. In addition, female respondents were found to provide more explanation with some cogent reasons, that's why a comprehensive and explicit retort was given as a substitute of a direct "no". On the other hand, male respondents' refusals have a propensity for more direct, concise and still blunted. The refusal strategies of respondents were analyzed in two different scenarios. It is apt to mention here that both gender respondents' tendencies in the use of different refusal strategies were almost analogous on the occasion when refusing the speech acts of request and offered invitation, but significant and obvious distinction was found in particular when refusing offers. Direct strategies were most repeatedly employed in refusing offer by male respondents. Moreover, the results showed that both male and female respondents have different propensity in refusing offers. Likewise, the female respondents were inclined to employ more frequently indirect refusal strategies than male participants do whenever refusing the invitations given by others', but also found in forwarded requests and offers. It was also found different that female respondents were inclined to utilize more frequently hedges, and it could be asserted to be vaguer on the occasion to refuse others offers.

Subsequently, the sharp contrast of gender differences in the realization of refusal showed that the strategy of indirect refusal employed considerably by female respondents is noticeably more than that employed by the male respondents, which marked that the female respondents favoured to employ strategies encompassing politeness when compared to the male respondents. While applying the strategies of indirectness for refusal, an obvious and apparent gender difference was found in terms of suggestion, promise and

apology. Regarding the use of some refusal strategies like warning and explanation, background stipulation and adjuncts, the differences on the basis of gender do not make bigger fissure among the respondents of both the groups. Besides, there are some other considerable gender differences in the use of refusal strategies. It was found that a very less number of female respondents tended to use direct refusals, while male respondents were found frequently using direct refusal strategies, which marked relatively higher than female respondents. Thus, it can be assumed here that these results show the man's ascendancy in Pakistan because in Pakistani established norms of culture wherein a man has got the right or the supremacy to forward a verdict directly (Cao, 2004). Like, in Scenario 2, much of the male respondents use "no" directly even to their professor, classmate and close friends. The employment of such non-performative responses expresses directly the negative readiness embark to prompt a refusal. Hence, a conclusion can be drawn that the female respondents remained more polite in their refusals when compare to the male respondents. Thus, it is hereby assumed overall, keeping in view the psychological standpoint that the females are very susceptible, placid, yielding, serene, compassionate and thoughtful to the other's stance and act very cautiously not to harm the others' face (Wu, 2016).

DISCUSSION

As stated above, the findings of the current study revealed gender differences in the accomplishment of refusal by Pashtu and Saraiki English language learners. Comparing these findings with those reported in studies involving gender difference revealed a clear effect of socio-cultural differences on the performance of refusal. The results of this study show that the female respondents, as non-native speakers, preferred to use indirect strategies in the performance of refusal. As mentioned, the most frequently used refusal strategies entailed an explanation or excuse, apology, negative ability, postponement, or adjuncts to refusals. The result goes in similar vein to the studies wherein NNSs are generally more likely than NSs to use indirect refusal strategies (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2016). Although both groups employed the explanation strategy but the female respondents of the study were found less direct in giving reasons for their refusals. In the present study, the most frequent strategy used for refusals comprising the polite and nonthreatening apology and explanation.

The results of this study shows much resembles with the findings of previous literature in learners' use of strategies. Regardless of whether these are Pakistani EL learners' salient features, it should be distinguished that their predisposition to take up such strategy helped them to stand less direct and more polite to the interlocutors. This study forwards an argument that the interactions in the role-plays are not consequential, authentic, or natural (Gass & Houck, 1999; Kasper & Youn, 2018). Female respondents in this study were found and remained more indirect and polite, and instead many explanations were ensured when refusing others. Male and female students also show differences when they refuse others in terms of different initiating speech act. It was also found that the male respondents of this study were using direct strategies, and even on certain occasions remained blunt in their responses. Apart from all this, there was a marked difference in the employment of refusal strategies when refusing

suggestions. Moreover, it was evident from the answers given in the RVRs that female respondents by and large deem much about others' mind-set and contemplation, and were found deliberate to soothe others and evade throbbing others' face. Therefore, this attempt would be helpful to both male and female to be acquainted more about them, and it has become a need of the hour to comprehend the selections and practice of others regarding different gender, then cross-gender communication can be preceded lucratively.

CONCLUSION

Keeping in view the fact that pragmatics plays a very significant role in the progression of communication and the action of refusal is performed in our daily lives and in a variety of situations, refusal speech act has become one of the important topics in the discourse pragmatic research over the past few decades. Therefore, in the present study, the researcher has tried to investigate how Pakistani EL learners followed different pragmatic patterns to produce the speech act of refusal. And also to examine if their use of the strategies were dependent on gender and finally to see if there was any difference in the type of strategies used by students at different levels of education at the university. It is palpable that the different gender uses the diverse and special strategies when accomplishing the speech acts of refusal. Hence it was obvious that female respondents employed indirect refusal strategies, on the other hand, the male respondents tended to be more direct or less indirect refusal. As an alarming notion, the interlocutors should know to maintain the most relevant and suitable strategies when accomplishing the speech acts of refusal to evade face threatening and to add further politeness in order to attain the well defined communicative goals. To sum up, studies on gender difference and refusal in future necessitate reflecting on some social factors, such as social status and power distance. Likewise, gender difference in the accomplishment of other speech acts need to be explored in future studies. Additional research needs to be conducted with a greater number of participants; it would then be possible to classify the learners into a finer classification of proficiency levels or some other categories to discover the impact of variables that are beyond the scope of the present study.

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