An Intercultural Study of Refusal Strategies in English between Jordanian EFL and Malay ESL Postgraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

This intercultural communication study investigates the similarities and differences of the speech act of refusals in English between Jordanian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Malay English as a Second Language (ESL) postgraduate students. Data were collected using a modified version of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) initially developed by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990). To obtain responses as natural as real-life communication, an interviewer audiotaped and read the situations aloud to both groups in English to enable the participants to respond verbally to situations. Next, the audiotaped responses obtained from both groups of participants were transcribed with broad transcription convention. Data were analysed in terms of semantic formulaic sequences and were categorized by four trained coders based on the classification of refusal strategies established by Beebe et al. (1990). Results revealed that both groups used almost similar strategies with similar frequency in performing refusals. For example, the most frequently used refusal strategies by the Jordanian and Malay participants were excuse, reason, explanation, and expressing statement of regret. However, they differed in the use and frequency count of indirect strategies with the Malays using less indirect strategies than the Jordanians. In addition, the results indicate that the Jordanian participants expressed 'gratitude' less frequently than the Malay participants when refusing invitations by equal and lower status person. Similar results were found when performing refusal in all request situations. The results are expected to be useful in studies in intercultural comparisons.

Keywords: speech acts; refusals; semantic formulas; intercultural communication; individualism vs. collectivism

INTRODUCTION

This study is based on the view that intercultural communication is a part of daily life. Exchanges and encounters among people of different cultures have increased rapidly since the last decade due to factors such as globalization, tourism and academic exchanges. Such encounters are obvious especially in multicultural societies where the population is made up of different ethnic groups, as is the case with Malaysia. With increasing intercultural encounters in English, it is essential that communication in English should no longer be considered exceptional or incidental. Moreover, the fact that non-native users of English now outnumber native speakers illustrates that intercultural studies is most likely to have broader applications than commonly assumed (Graddol 1997).

In academic settings in Malaysia, for example, the opportunity for interaction between students from different cultural backgrounds with local students and staff is most likely to occur. With this in mind, two selected groups of Jordanian and Malay participants were approached to participate in this study. Both groups share similar communication style (indirect/high context), having similar religion (Islam) and collectivist cultural orientation.

The English language becomes important for most Jordanian EFL learners when they begin their career or further their education in an English-speaking country or in a country where there is a widespread use of English, as is the case with Malaysia. The learners then become users of English whereby the language becomes functional and the speakers' pragmatic competence is thus challenged. Malaysia has had the English language indelibly woven into its history, and the language has been a constant significant factor in shaping national policies, particularly educational policies (Wong Fook Fei, Lee King Siong, Lee Su Kim & Azizah Yaacob 2012). In other words, English is considered as a significant second language for instrumental purposes, a neutral language for social integration and a pragmatic one for professional growth and career advancement among Malaysians (Lee Su Kim, Lee King Siong, Wong Fook Fei & Azizah Ya'acob 2010). In this respect, English language becomes functional and the speakers' pragmatic competence is thus challenged.

With respect to internationalisation of education, and the increase in Middle East students, namely Jordanians to Malaysia more research is needed to investigate the different speech act realization strategies from the perspective of intercultural communication. Hence, the findings of the present study useful to provide knowledge and an understanding of the culture between the Jordanian and the Malay speech communities. It is observed that the English language is used as the lingua franca among these two selected groups and even amongst students from other nationalities. It would be important therefore, to pay attention to pragmatic competence of the Jordanian EFL learners rather than their grammatical competence.

THE SPEECH ACT OF REFUSAL

In interactions, learners should have a high level of pragmatic competence in some speech acts (e.g. complaints, requests, disapproval, disagreement, and refusal) more than others because such speech acts would likely risk the interpersonal relationship of the speakers as they are often referred to as face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson 1987, Chen 1996). The speech act of refusal, as a face-threatening act, has been identified as a "major cross-cultural stinking point for ESL students" (Takahashi & Beebe 1987, p. 133) which can lead to unintended offense and a breakdown in communication. Thus, language learners are most likely to offend their interlocutors when performing the act of refusal because the linguistic obstruction that already exists is further complicated by the face-threatening nature of the speech act. In performing a refusal, which is a preferred response, one contradicts the expectations of the interlocutors; therefore, a high level of pragmatic competence is necessary to carry out a refusal felicitously. However, such a competence is particularly difficult for the learners to achieve (Chen 1996; Al-Eryani 2007). Therefore this speech act of refusal is important to be studied. According to Al-Shalawi (1997), an act of refusal may provide an illuminating source of information on the socio-cultural values of a speech community and as significant insights into the social norms that are embedded in cultures. Thus, the speech act of refusal would be an excellent focus for the study of Jordanian and Malay participants where intercultural pragmatics is concerned. It will also help raise the awareness of intercultural pragmatics for both groups of participants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted on the speech act of refusal from different perspectives for example, cross-cultural comparative studies between Korean and English (Kwon 2003) and Arabic and English (Nelson, Al Batal & Bakary 2002). Recently, researches have been conducted to examine the pragmatic and socio-cultural transfer in the speech act of refusal (Beebe et al. 1990, Al Issa 2003). However, according to the researchers' best knowledge, no study has investigated the similarities and differences between Jordanian and Malay participants' performance on the speech act of refusal. Thus, such investigation would be useful to understand the cross-cultural features of both Jordan and Malay speech communities with regards to the speech act of refusal.

The major study on refusals was carried out by Beebe et al. (1990) who investigated the pragmatic transfer in the realization of the speech act of refusal by Japanese learners of English. Data were collected using DCT which consists of three requests, three invitations, three offers, and three suggestions. Each situation type includes one refusal to a person of higher status, one to a person of equal status, and one to a person of lower status. Next, the data were analyzed based on the frequency and order of the semantic formulas performed in each situation. The content of semantic formulas was also analyzed. Findings from the study revealed that there was evidence of pragmatic transfer from L1 particularly in the case of the order, frequency and content of the semantic formulas obtained.

Nelson et al. (2002) investigated American and Egyptian perceptions of how they believe they would make refusals in particular situations in terms of strategy, level of directness and the effect on the two variables of social status and gender. Data were collected using a modified version of DCT developed by Beebe et al. (1990). An interviewer read each situation aloud to the subjects and asked them to respond verbally on audiotape instead of asking the subjects to read the situation and to respond in writing. Thirty American, interviews resulted in 358 refusals and 25 Egyptian interviews resulted in 300 refusals. Generally, the results revealed that the most common strategies used by the Egyptian participants were similar to those used by the American participants. Reasons were the most common strategy used followed by negative willingness.

In the Jordanian context, a study was conducted by Al Issa (2003), in which he examined the realization patterns of refusal strategies by Jordanians and Americans. The main concern of this study was to investigate if there was evidence of pragmatic transfer from Arabic to English and the reasons causing this transfer. Data were collected using a written DCT followed by semi-structured interviews with the Jordanian EFL learners. These interviews were conducted in order to find out the motivating factors for pragmatic transfer from L1. The results showed evidence of pragmatic transfer in terms of frequency, type, number, and content of the semantic formulas used. Moreover, compared to the American use of refusals, the Jordanian participants tend to refuse in lengthy, elaborate ways and use less direct strategies, especially when the interlocutor was of a higher social status. However, Al-Issa's study only collected written data which did not resemble real-life communication. In addition, Al-Issa's study aims to locate evidence of pragmatic transfer from Arabic to English among native-nonnative speakers while the present study aims to investigate the similarities and the differences of intercultural communication of the speech act of refusals in English among non-native speakers of English (i.e. Jordanian and Malay participants in Malaysia), but for whom English is used as a lingua franca in their daily interaction.

In relation to speech acts in Malays, there is a lack of studies in this area. The studies which the researchers have come across are on complaints (Marlyna Maros, 2007) and on compliment (Nurizah Md Ngadiran 2009). Marlyna Maros (2007) examined the social functions of complaints and data were collected ethnographically from middle class Malay

speakers involving 125 recorded observations. The results revealed that complaints among Malay speakers occur in various situations, topics and relationships among the interlocutors, as part of everyday social functions. Among the functions are, a corrective statement, a response to greetings, declining invitations, and bargaining.

Nurizah Md Ngadiran (2009) compared the compliment responses in English between Malay and American speakers. Data were collected using DCT and interviews. The findings suggest that there were several similarities and differences of compliment responses performed by the American and Malay participants. In addition, compliment response patterns performed by the two selected groups based on their gender were discovered. However, in the framework of refusal speech act, to the researchers' best knowledge, there has been no investigation conducted on Malay learners. Therefore, it would be useful to examine how the speech act of refusal is performed by Jordanian and Malay participants that would contribute to insights in comparative intercultural communication.

THE STUDY

The present study is an investigation of the similarities and the differences of the speech act of refusals in English between Jordanian and Malay participants in Malaysia from an intercultural communication perspective. It is primarily based on Hall's (1976) intercultural communication theory. Specifically, it is based on a cultural dimension called indirect vs. direct or high vs. low context cultures. According to Hall (1976), people from indirect/high context culture tend to communicate with implicit messages in which "most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person" (p. 79). In contrast, people from direct/low context culture communicate with abundant information in the message. Jordan and Malaysia are typically classified as high context cultures (i.e. less direct) and the American as a low context culture (i.e. more direct). Thus, the study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. What are the similarities in refusal strategies between Jordanian and Malay participants?
2. What are the differences in refusal strategies between Jordanian and Malay participants?
3. Why are there similarities and differences between Jordanian and Malay participants?

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in the present study were six male Jordanian EFL learners (JEFL) and six male Malay ESL learners (MESL). The Jordanian participants' ages range from 25-30 years old, while the Malay participants' ages range from 30-40 years old. All of them were postgraduate students majoring Applied Linguistics in English at a university in the northern state of Malaysia and were registered in the same academic year. The study included only male participants because it was conducted abroad, in Malaysia, in a context with no Jordanian female students available at the time of data collection for the present study. In order to match the sex ratio, only male Malay participants were invited to participate in the present study because they are the largest ethnic group in Malaysia. In addition, they are the only available participants in the same department as the Jordanians, at the time of data collection for the present study. All of the Jordanian participants had never travelled to any English-speaking countries other than to and within Malaysia.

INSTRUMENT AND PROCEDURE

The issue of how data are collected is one of the major concerns in intercultural communication studies. Trosborg (1995) asserted that data collection in an ethnographic procedure (i.e. naturally occurring data) is the definitive objective in most cross-cultural studies. Observation of authentic speech involves collecting spontaneous data in naturally occurring settings. Wolfson (1986) stated that this data collection method is considered to be the most reliable data source in speech act research. This view is also shared by other researchers (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka 1985). This method is greatly reliable because it reflects what speakers actually say rather than what they think they will say in a given speech situation (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 1993). However, the contextual variables (e.g., gender, age, status) cannot be controlled and it is very time consuming. As a result, collecting ethnographic data seem to be an unlikely option for intercultural speech act researches. Another limitation is that the occurrence of some speech acts is not predictable and therefore this method might not yield enough instances of a particular speech act.

As a result, due to the limitations of those ethnographic procedures, the present study used a semi-ethnographic technique, i.e. a modified version of DCT developed by Beebe et al. (1990) as the data collection procedure. This instrument was chosen because it allowed for intercultural comparison as it can be administered to a large number of participants in a non elaborative time frame. Moreover, it allowed the researcher to have complete control over the different contextual variables (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989). Furthermore, the situations developed by Beebe et al. (1990) had already been piloted and checked for reliability. In the present study, an interviewer read the situation aloud and the participants responded verbally on audiotape instead of reading out the situation and responding in writing. Reading and responding verbally on audiotape were in accordance with the approach used by Nelson et al. (2002) in their study on speech act of refusal. According to them, spoken elicitation resembles more closely real-life communication compared to written role plays. This is also supported by Beebe and Cummings (1995) in their comparative study using two methods of eliciting telephone data: talk versus written questionnaire responses. They found that their subjects talked four times more than they wrote.

The instrument consisted of 12 situations that require a refusal: three requests, three invitations, three offers, and three suggestions. Each situation type includes one refusal to a person of higher status, one to a person of equal status, and one to a person of lower status. The researchers then met each participant individually at a meeting room assigned to the researchers by the chair of English Language Studies Department at University Utara Malaysia (UUM). Then, the detailed instructions of the task were provided to the participants by the researchers. Consequently, an interviewer read each situation aloud to the participants and asked them to respond verbally on audiotape. The average time taken to conduct the interviews was 20 minutes per participant. Data were collected for a period of more than three weeks. Next, the audiotaped responses obtained from both groups of participants were transcribed using the broad transcription convention. The interviews with the six Jordanians resulted in 143 English refusal strategies, while the interviews with the six Malays resulted in 149 English refusal strategies.

DATA ANALYSIS

In the present study, data were analysed in terms of semantic formulaic sequences and were categorized by four trained coders based on the classification of refusal strategies established by Beebe et al. (1990). 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" (Cohen 1996, p. 265). For example, if a participant had to refuse an invitation to a friend's house for dinner by saying "I'm sorry, I already have plans. Maybe next time," this was coded as: I'm sorry [statement of regret], I already have plans [excuse], May be next time [statement of alternative] (Beebe et al. 1990, p.57). Yet, some categories, used in Beebe et al., were not found in our data and were thus omitted.

Four trained coders coded the data to make sure that the semantic formulas matched the data in light of the classification established by Beebe et al. (1990). The coders were two Jordanian Arabic native speakers (one of the researchers and a graduate research assistant) and two Malay native speakers (both were research assistance for the project). All were graduate students majoring Applied linguistics in English. Whenever some differences were found in the coding schema, a discussion was held and adjustments were made, based on consensus.

When all the data were coded into semantic formulas and a high level of reliability was achieved, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The use of this type of descriptive statistics to analyse the DCT data is also shared by studies conducted by Al-Issa (2003) and Al Eryani (2007). Finally, frequencies/percentages, number of occurrences, and the ranks of the semantic formulas used by the two selected groups were calculated.

RESULTS

For the purpose of comparative analysis between the two selected groups, frequencies/percentages, number of occurrences, and the ranks of the semantic formulas used by Jordanian and Malay participants were calculated as illustrated in Table 1.

The interviews with the six Jordanians resulted in 143 English refusal strategies. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., "I have an appointment that day."; "I have planned to visit my sister this Friday.") were the most frequent strategy used by the participants in approximately 29% of the strategies (n=41). In situation four, for example, all Jordanian participants used this strategy in their refusal to an invitation made by a person of higher status. Statement of regret (e.g., I'm sorry....") was the second most frequent strategy mentioned by Jordanian participants in approximately 28% of the strategies (n=40). For instance, 5 out of 6 Jordanian participants used this strategy in their response to situations 3,4,11, and 12. Using denying vocabulary (e.g., 'No', I Can't.) was the third most frequent strategy mentioned by the participants in approximately 10.5% of the strategies (n=15). The remaining strategies: statements showing unwillingness or inability, statement of alternative, attempt to dissuade interlocutor, pause fillers, statement of principle /gratitude/appreciation, statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement, and promise of future acceptance account for 7.0%, 5.6%, 5.0%, 4.2%, 3.5%, 2.7%, and 1.4% respectively.

In contrast, the interviews with the six Malays resulted in 149 English refusal strategies. Similar to those used by the Jordanian participants, excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., "I have made plans for the evening."; "I already have an important appointment on next Friday.") was the most frequent strategy mentioned by the participants in approximately 25% of the strategies (n=37). For example, 5 out of 6 Malay participants used it in their response to situations 4 and 9. Statement of regret (e.g., I'm sorry...."), and using denying vocabulary (e.g., 'No', I Can't.) were the second most frequent strategies mentioned by the Malay participants in approximately 20% of the strategies (n=30) for each strategy type. For example, 5 out of 6 Malay participants used statement of regret in their responding to situations 1and 4. In addition, 4 out of 6 Malay participants used denying vocabulary in their response to situations 2, 3, 9, and 10. Gratitude/appreciation (e.g., Thanks) was the third most

frequent strategy mentioned by the Malay participants in approximately 10% of the strategies (n=15). The remaining strategies: statements showing unwillingness or inability, attempt to dissuade interlocutor, statement of alternative/ statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement, pause fillers, statement of principle, and statement of philosophy/set condition for future or past acceptance account for 7.4%, 5.0 %, 3.4%, 2.7%, 2.0%, and 0.7% respectively.

TABLE 1. Frequencies/Percentages, Number of Occurrences, and the Ranks of the Semantic Formulas Used

Semantic Formula	JEFL			MESL		
	No.	%	R.	No.	%	R.
Direct Refusal						
Using denying vocabulary	15	10.5%	3	30	20%	2
Statements showing unwillingness or inability	10	7%	4	11	7.4%	4
Indirect Refusal						
Statement of regret	40	28%	2	30	20%	2
Excuse, reason, explanation	41	29%	1	37	25%	1
Statement of alternative	8	5.6%	5	5	3.4%	6
Set condition for future or past acceptance	-	0.0%	-	1	0.7%	9
Promise of future acceptance	2	1.4%	10	-	0.0%	-
Statement of principle	5	3.5%	8	3	2%	8
Statement of philosophy	-	0.0%		1	0.7%	9
Attempt to dissuade interlocutor	7	5%	6	7	5%	5
Adjuncts						
Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement	4	2.7%	9	5	3.4%	6
Pause fillers	6	4.2%	7	4	2.7%	7
Gratitude/appreciation	5	3.5%	8	15	10%	3
Total	143	100%	-	149	100%	-

Key:
JEFL= Jordanian Native speakers of Arabic Responding in English
MESL= Malay Native speakers of Malays Responding in English
No= Number of Semantic formulas Used
R= Rank order of Semantic formula Used

DISCUSSION

The present study on intercultural communication investigates the similarities and the differences of the speech act of refusals in English between Jordanian and Malay participants. The developed DCT situations selected for this study required participants to produce refusal statements. Research question one was formulated in order to find out if there are similarities in refusal strategies employed by the Jordanian and Malay participants. Similar results where using refusal strategies are concerned were found when compared to studies done by Nelson et al. (2002), Al-Issa (2003) and Al-Eryani (2007). Examples of the frequent strategies used included providing *excuse, reason, explanation, statement of regret, making statements showing unwillingness or inability, and attempt to dissuade interlocutor*. From this list of refusal strategies, *excuse, reason, and explanation strategy* was the most common strategy used by both Jordanians (29%) and Malays (25%). The result concurs with the study on

Jordanian Arabic refusals by AL-Issa (2003) who found that both Jordanians and Americans employed explanations and reasons more than any other strategy. Statement of regret strategy was also the second most common strategy used by both groups of participants: Jordanian participants (28%) and Malay participants (20%). Five percent of the participants also used the strategy of attempting to dissuade interlocutor. Both the Jordanian and the Malay participants used statements showing unwillingness or inability, with each group scoring 7% and 7.4% respectively. However, both groups used similar strategies when making refusals although the Malay participants' refusals were longer than their Jordanian counterparts. Moreover, the Malay participants used denying vocabulary in the same frequency with statement of regret strategy at 20%, while the Jordanian participants used this strategy as the third most common strategy, at 10.5%.

The second research question asked if there are differences in refusal strategies used by Jordanian and Malay participants. The main differences in this study were that Jordanian participants at all social status (i.e. higher, equal, lower) were more likely to employ indirect strategies (e.g., I have an appointment that day) than the Malay participants who used direct refusal style in higher and equal status. Where expressions of gratitude are concerned, the Jordanians participants used it less, which was at 3.5%, while the Malay participants used it more (10%). The examples shown have illustrated the use of gratitude by Malay participants. In this situation, a boss offers employees a raise and promotion if they are willing to move to a small town. Many of the Malay refusals contained an expression of gratitude, often at the beginning.

a) *Thank you very much sir*, (Gratitude/appreciation)
b) But I have to take care of my sick mother. (Excuse, reason, explanation)

However, when given a similar situation, none of the Jordanian participants gave an expression of gratitude. Finally, the Jordanian participants differed from the Malay participants in their use of expressions of promise of future acceptance at 1.4% compared to none for their Malays counterparts. In contrast, the Malay participants scored 0.7% where the use of statements of philosophy was concerned, but none of the Jordanian participants used the strategy.

The third research question was formulated to investigate the reasons for the similarities and differences in the refusal strategies between Jordanian and Malay participants. Reasons for similarities are attributed to religious similarity and collectivist cultural orientation. For example, it was observed that when they had to refuse a person of higher status, the lower status speakers less use of direct refusal "no" or "can't" by both groups refers to the same perception of adopting politeness strategies. This also refers to the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism as one of the four cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1991). Jordan and Malaysia are typically classified as collectivistic cultures, and the U.S. and the Europe countries typically are classified as individualistic cultures (Hofstede 1991). This cultural dimension is the most broadly adopted one in investigating the differences and the similarities in cross-cultural communication and is defined as follows.

> ...individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups... (Hofstede 1991, p.51).

Hence, the consideration of the present study's participants of the status refers to the fact that they belong to collectivistic cultures.

In terms of the differences between the two selected groups, although Arab and Malaysian cultures have been classified as preferring indirect communication style (Feghali 1997; Lailawati Mohd Salleh 2005), the findings of this study revealed that Jordanian participants at all social status (i.e. higher, equal, lower) were more likely to employ indirect strategies (e.g., I have an appointment that day) than Malay participants who used direct refusal style when they are in higher and equal status. Such differences call for the significance of investigating small units of discourse such as speech acts. Additionally, it shows the risk of generalizing the concept of communication style of languages or cultures as if one style (e.g., direct vs. indirect) is used unilaterally regardless of situation, gender, age, and status (Nelson et al. 2002). The employment of indirect strategies by the Jordanian participants is also consistent with a study of Jordanian Arabic refusals by Al- Issa (2003) who found that Jordanians of higher and equal social status were more likely to employ indirect strategies such as providing excuse, reason, explanation (e.g. My notes are not good), and statement of regret (e.g. I'm sorry) than Americans.

Unlike previous studies on Malay speech acts such as Marlyna Maros (2006) who stated that Malays value indirectness in speaking in order to keep 'warm' relationships between interlocutors and within the entire society, the present study shows a different tendency. Malays were found to be direct in their refusal. This change marks a different attitude to life which could be due to exposure that the group has encountered that influence their ways of interaction. Although the data were not based on spontaneous interaction, this finding is worthy of further in depth study to make a stronger justification or explanation. Finally, the less use of 'gratitude' by the Jordanian participants when refusing invitations by equal and lower status persons and when refusing all situations of request might be the result of their cultural backgrounds. This is in accordance with other refusal studies conducted on native speakers of Arabic like Nelson et al. (2002), who found that the Egyptian participants differed from the American participants in that expressions of gratitude were used in only 14 or 1% of the refusals.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

While this study has generally answered the proposed research questions, further research on refusal realizations by Jordanian and Malay participants need to be investigated. The generalizability of findings may be constrained by the following considerations.

Firstly, the sample size only involved a small number of participants who were all graduate students from the same department, majoring in Applied Linguistics in English. Therefore, future studies should include more participants with different social background. Secondly, collecting data using one instrument is not enough to provide insights into every aspect of the Jordanian and Malay refusal strategies. Hence, it was appropriate that the participants responded orally to the DCT refusal situations (Nelson et. al 2002). To quote Rose and Ono (1995), ''we should not expect a single data source to provide all the necessary insights into speech act usage" (p. 207).

Studies conducted on the methods used in speech act research also reported the limitations of the DCT as compared to the data obtained from natural settings. It was observed that the DCT responses are shorter, simpler, less face-attentive and less emotional (Yuan 2001). Thus, collecting natural data would be more reliable, for what one claims one will do in a given situation is not necessarily what one actually does in a real life situation. Another methodological drawback of this study, like any similar study, is that the participants

can be affected by the order of the situations on the DCT. It is possible that the way the participants answered the first status situation influenced the way they responded to the following situations. Therefore, in a study where the DCT is used, different copies of the DCT with different ordering may limit the possible drawbacks which resulted from the ordering of the situations. Another limitation of this study was that some variables such as age and gender were not examined. Therefore, such variables need to be investigated to see their influences on speech behaviours in refusals. Researchers in the future should take into considerations the pragmatic and the grammatical appropriateness of the participants' utterances, since the present study neither examined the pragmatic nor the grammatical appropriateness of the participants' utterances.

Next, more research need to be carried out to compare and contrast the refusal strategies used by other cultures and ethnic groups for the purpose of prompting cultural understanding which would help reduce misunderstandings caused by the misuse of the speech act of refusal among people from different cultures and ethnic groups. Such ethnic groups could include learners from Chinese and Indian ethnic groups in Malaysia or even learners from other nationalities.

In conclusion, the present study has contributed to our understanding of how the speech act of refusal is performed in English in two culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Jordanians and Malays). It also has been shown that speech acts reflect the cultural norms and values that are possessed by speakers of different cultural backgrounds, as different cultures are very likely to realize speech acts quite differently. Such differences might cause misunderstanding or communication breakdowns when people from different cultural backgrounds come in contact with each other. Finally, the presents study has revealed important findings that would be useful in studied in intercultural comparisons.

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