

## **A CROSS-GENDERED ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN REFUSAL STRATEGIES AND THEIR REALIZATIONS BY THE IRAQI EFL UNIVERSITY LEARNERS**

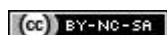
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**Abstract:** The current study was set out to scrutinize the EFL Iraqi learners' awareness of the different main strategies of refusal speech acts. Because of the crucial nature of this topic, the researchers tended to base it on gender approach to investigate the substantial differences between the male and female learners in this realm. To this end, a sample of EFL Iraqi university learners was chosen randomly, from the department of English to participate in the questionnaire the researchers built. The data of the study was attained via various suggestive situations the learners exposed to in order to provide their refusal responses. The findings of the analysis reveal that both groups mostly favor to employ the direct refusal strategies more than the indirect and adjuncts to refusal strategies with especial reference to the difference between the two gendered groups due to the unconscious ignorance of the toughness of the face-threatening acts.

**Keywords:** Refusal strategies, gendered groups, learners' awareness.

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## INTRODUCTION

Speech act theory was first proposed by the British philosopher Austin (1962) who was dissatisfied with the traditional philosophical attitude towards languages as a tool of constative assertion that are characterizable as either true or false. He asserted that beside the constative utterances, there is another category of utterances which cannot be subjected to true false scale. These utterances are called performatives. The peculiarity of these utterances is that the doing of an action is performed by uttering them, thus they are self-reflexive utterances (Van Dort, Online, 1997: 1-2).

Consequently, Austin (1962:95) viewed that an utterance can perform three acts simultaneously; Locution or the act of uttering words, illocution or the communicative intention of the speaker, and the perlocution or the physical and psychological effects on the hearer/listener. In addition, he laid down a classificatory system in which he sorted illocutionary acts into groups of verbs under five headings; verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behavitives, and expositive.

Later, the theory was improved and systemized by his American Student Searle (1969). He classified illocutionary acts into five categories namely;

- Representatives to commit the speaker to the expressed proposition.
- Directive: to make the listener perform something.
- Commissives the speaker commit himself or herself to perform the action.
- Expressives: to express the psychological state of the speaker about what is stated in the proposition content of the utterance.
- Declarations: the act in which the propositional content of the speech act corresponds to the world.

This is much more satisfactory comprehensive and agreed upon classification.

From the above discussion it becomes clear that the main core of this theory is the illocutionary act since it carries the communicative intention of the speaker.

## REFUSALITY AND ACTS OF SPEECH

According to the aforementioned data, refusal is a commissive speech act since the speaker commit himself/herself to reject the act directed to him (Brown and Levinson, 1987:160). In the same way, it is a face threatening act in the sense that the consequential effect might be truculent to the addressee. This is replenished when the addresser directly refuse the act. Never the less, the existence of a sundry strategies expedite the situation for the addresser to plump for the adequate strategy. When realizing the threat, the volition of the strategy will be clenched by social distance, age, level of education, relative power as well as gender (Brown and Levinson 1987, Fraser 1990, Chiappini & Kadar 2011).

In essence, refusal acts should also be analyzed culturally as culture plays a pivotal role in the process of choosing the adequate refusal strategies. The strategies which could be varied not only due to the different cultures use them, but also in the way of displaying a sort of politeness and tactfulness in rejecting. Doubtlessly, it is tough to utter 'no' particularly for the non-native language speakers, as it is an ill-mannered act to respond with direct refusals for the requests, offers, and suggestions of the interlocutor. In politeness theory, participants sedulously make a bid for saving other's face and mitigating any threats (Al-Kahtani, 2005). Above all, the speaker's usage of discrepant strategies is the outcome of his /her pragmatic competence wherefore, without being acquainted with these strategies, the resultant outcome might be the same for all situations.

Beebe et al. refusals taxonomy (1990) suggested that strategies of refusing could be conducted as direct, indirect and adjunct ones; the direct acts of refusing are intrinsically three which are:

### Direct Refusals

1. Performative refusals ('I refuse, reject, disapprove ...etc.')
2. Non-performative refusal (the direct 'No')
3. Negative willingness ability of refusals as ('I can't, I do not)

The indirect strategies of refusing were categorized into eleven ones showing the indirect way of refusing the others' appeal:

### Indirect Refusal

1. Regret Statement ('I'm sorry, regretful')
2. The use of "Wish" or even express the wish ('I wish I could lend you a hand to do, or' Oh, I would like to help you.)
3. Refusals via excusing, reasoning, or explaining as ('I am sick, out, busy ...etc.')
4. Statement of alternative. (I can do X instead of Y, as in ' I would prefer..., I'd rather...etc.
5. Future/past acceptance condition ('if you had asked me earlier,')
6. Future acceptance Promise ('I'll do that next time')
7. Principle Statement ('I never eat after sporting, I never do problems with neighbor').
8. Statement of philosophy as ('one can't be too careful')
9. Dissuading the interlocutor.
  - a. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (e.g., "I won't be any fun tonight" to reuse an invitation)
  - b. Guilt trip (e.g., waitress to customers who want to sit a while: "I can't make living off people who just order coffee.")
  - c. Criticize the request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or opinion);

insult/attack (e.g., "Who do you think you are?"; "That's a terrible idea!")

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

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

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

10. Acceptance that functions as a refusal.

- a. Unspecific or indefinite reply
- b. Lack of enthusiasm

### 11. Avoidance

1. Nonverbal avoidance
  - a. Being silent
  - b. Hesitation markers
  - c. Do nothing
  - d. Physical departure
2. Verbal avoidance
  - a. Changing the topic (Topic-Shifting)
  - b. Making jokes
  - c. Repeating of request, etc. (e.g., "Monday?")
  - d. Postponement (e.g., "I'll think about this.")
  - e. Hedging (e.g., "Oh, I don't know." "I'm not sure.")

### Adjunct

- a. Statement of positive feeling or agreement ("That's a good idea. . .I'd love to. . .")
- b. Statement of empathy (e.g., "I know you are in a difficult situation.")
- c. Pause fillers (e.g., "oh"; "uhh"; "well"; "uhm")
- d. Gratitude/Appreciation

### GENDER AND COMMUNICATION

Gender is typically regarded as something acquired and performed by people, but it is not something that people are born with. Sex, on the other hand, is that biological categorization of gender which is intrinsically based on potential reproduction. Thus, gender is social realization of the biological characteristics

of sex. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) suggested that "gender is based on biological sex...gender carries biological difference into domains in which it is completely irrelevant".

This study emphasizes the significance of gender as a social form or construction that has a great deal of influence on communication. In this respect, females tend to be more polite, tactful and modest in comparison with males who prefer to be laconic and message-oriented in their way of communication. Lakoff (1975) gave a fact that women tend to be soft in their speech-style, and they socially favored to be different in their way of speaking as they have been specialized as a "lady-like talkers". Conservatively, in communication and the various acts of speech, female participants proceed to be polite, indirect and refined than the males do. Furthermore, Jiayu (2004:30) adds that refusing is one of the acts of speech which involves the principle of politeness. The studies on refusal strategies in interpersonal communications and display that politeness is what people are strongly concerned about. In communication, refusal is the act of saying "No" to other's suggestion, offer request, or invitation which in turn depends on the context or situation the refusals are delivered or take place.

### THE ADOPTED MODEL

In this study, the researchers tend to make the communicative situations the learners encounter somewhat real to be cognizant of the main strategies of refusal they almost use. The model adopted is Beebe et al.'s (1990). The situations presented in Beebe et al. study suggested that the participants ordinarily have run across a string of communicative daily situations that demand refusals to the interlocutors, namely those who are at equal, higher or even lower status.

### METHODOLOGY

The procedure followed in this study was a test sheet of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) already applied by Beebe et al. (1990). The modified version of DCT the researchers utilized consisted of seven proposed situations. Noticeably, all the suggested situations were produced to be appropriate to a college-life situation and to evoke the potential refusal strategies and later was handed to the study community (100 EFL learners chosen randomly from the Department of English /College of Education for Humanities/ Diyala University, (50) males and (50) females). Each group asked to write down the refusal responses they would choose in such real conversational discourses (the seven situations). It should be noted, however, that their responses to the seven written situations 'scenarios' depended on the social variables of the - (+) distance, - (+) power the interlocutors (professors, colleagues and others) have. The situations involved were:

#### **Situations: +Power, +Distance (Professor's Request and Suggestion).**

**S (1):** Your professor asks you to present the incoming lecture in front of a considerable amount of colleagues. However, you are in your fourth year and you do not know anything about the required topic, so you do not want to present it. How would you respond to your professor's request? Write below a reply to your professor's request.

**S (2):** The supervisor on your graduation paper suggests you a topic in syntax which is not your favorite one. However, you do not want to write about syntax. How would you respond to this suggestion? Write below a reply to your professor's suggestion.

#### **Situations: - Power, - Distance (Friends'/Colleagues' Invitation and Request).**

**S (3):** Your friend /colleague invites you to a party to celebrate his/her graduation. However, you are in another department

and you do not know the other graduates. You want to respond with one of the refusal strategies. How would you respond? Write down your response.

**S (4):** Your colleague satisfactorily asks you to enter into a partnership with him/her in setting down in writing the graduation paper, and you do not want to participate the task with him/her. How would you respond to the request?

**Situations: - (+) Power, - (+) Distance (Monitor's Request and Department Personnel's Request)**

**S (5):** The class monitor asks you to voluntarily affiliate to the graduation preparation staff members. You do not like the idea and want to pull away from that. How would you refuse?

**Note: Monitor + power, - distance.**

**S (6):** The personnel of the department you are majoring at your college asks you to accumulate other students' IDs. However, you are not the monitor, and you do not want to do that. How would you respond to the request? Write down your refusal response.

**Note: Department personnel has- power and + distance.**

**S (7):** You make a thorough search in the library but you didn't find the book you're looking for. Henceforth, the librarian offers you his own book which is the one you want. However, you don't want an alternative. How would you refuse the librarian's offer?

**Note: librarian + power, + distance.**

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### Data Analysis

In this section, refusal strategies were analyzed within the framework of Beeb et al.(1990) which fulfills the study aim the researchers tend to achieve. So, with regard to this purpose, the researchers followed the descriptive statistics to analyze the data they collect.

The process of analysis covers the main important variety of sex revealing the manipulation of the main refusal strategies suggested by Beeb et al., shedding light on the percentages and frequencies of the these refusals preferred by the two selected groups of learners. In reference to the suggested situations the researchers proposed, the frequencies and the percentages of the individuals' awareness(males/females)are tabulated as follow:

The number of the used direct, indirect and adjunct refusal strategies distributed in table(2)revealing which of these types exceeds the highest level of use by the two understudy groups in reference to the other ones.

Table (1.1): The Frequency of the Individuals' refusal strategies utilized by males and females with reference to their percentages( the subtypes of each refusal strategy).

Strategies	Types	Males		Females		Total	
		Freq.No.	Percent	Freq. No.	Percent.	total	Percent
Direct	performative	113	%16.14	51	%7.28	164	%23.42
	Non-performative	27	%3.35	6	%0.85	33	%4.71
	Negative willingness	133	%19	142	%20.28	275	%39.28
Indirect	Wish statement	1	%0.14	5	%0.71	6	%0.85
	Excusing, Reasoning, and Explaining refusals	39	%5.57	63	%9	102	%14.57
	Future acceptance Promise	1	%0.14	5	%0.71	6	%0.85
	Verbal Avoidance (Hedges)	4	%0.57	20	%2.85	24	%3.42
	Regret And Alternatives	27	%2.42	47	%7.13	74	%9.55
	Positive feelings, gratitude	5	%0.71	11	%1.57	16	%2.28
Total		350	%49.46	350	%50.38	700	%99.94

Table(2) Direct, Indirect and adjunct. Refusal strategies manipulated by the groups understudy with reference to their percentages

Refusal Strategies	Males ' Use	Percents.	Females' Use	Percents	Total & %
Direct refusals	273	%78	199	%56.85	472 %67.42
Indirect Refusals	72	%20.57	140	%40	212 %30.28
Adjuncts	5	%1.42	11	%3.14	16 %2.28
Total	350		350		700 %99.98

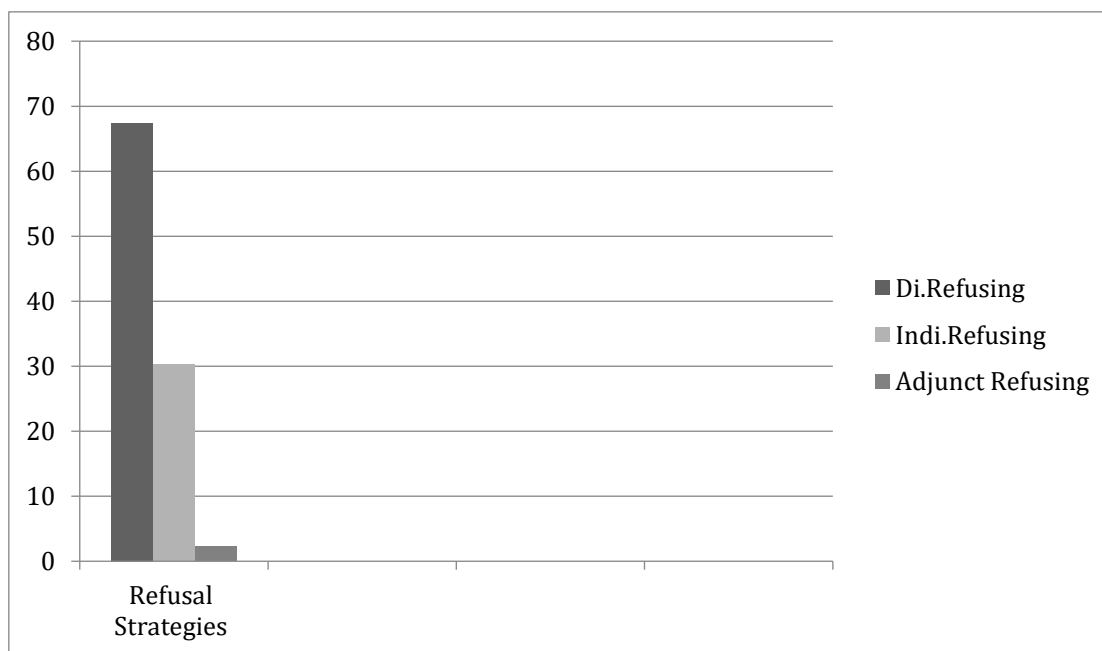


Figure (1) the levels of occurrence concerning the three refusal strategies used by the Iraqi sex-based groups (university learners).

**Analysis and Discussion**

Doubtlessly, the analysis process conducted in this paper is for finding out the Iraqi learners' awareness and use of the refusal strategies with effective reference to the gender influence on the preference of certain strategy than any other ones. After implementing the Beeb et al. model, the data was analyzed statistically as tabulated above in the preceding section. The results of the situations provided to the gender-based groups were precisely compared and examined. And to reach crucial and final judgment, all the subtypes of the refusal strategies were processed statistically.

The most important point of basing the researchers' work on the variable of "gender" is to show the decisive difference between both; male and female participants, and to confirm corroboratively the deficiency of the Iraqi university learners in perceiving the three types of refusality in respect to the situations they may be confronted. Need to say, there are many other situations are not included in this research because the situations determined are strongly connected to the academic real life.

The application of the model reveals that the direct refusal strategies are excessively used in comparison with the indirect and adjunct ones. The direct refusals get (%67.42) out of the total occurrence of strategies, the negative willingness represents the highest level of refusal replies (%39.28) of the direct refusals. Likewise, the illocutionary force of refusal act can be denoted by enunciating 'negative willingness', as in;

- (1) *I don't like this idea.*
- (2) *I am not fond of doing this.*
- (3) *Oh, I am a afraid I can't accept that.*

On average, it has been noticed that female learners slightly preferred to use the negative willingness than did the male ones, the statistic analysis reveals that the females used the negative willingness(142)whereas the males have (133)uses. Socially, females have proclivity to show little more politeness in comparison with the male participants who almost apply the direct performative and non-performative refusals to the interlocutors' acts of speech(Layoff,1990).The table shows that male participants refuse by the use of performative refusal verbs with(113)which

is higher than the female participants who used(51)performative verbs, they tend to be more laconic than female participants who are vigilant in avoiding directness and seem more taciturn . Regarding the social status of the interlocutors, people generally tend to be less direct in refusing the higher and equal social status as a result of politeness

and face-threatening act. Performativeness is typically illustrated in the participants' manipulation of the verbs refuse, deny, disapprove, decline, reject, etc. Male learners are so vigilant in conveying the message of refusing rather than the form of that refusal message as in a sample of responses of both genders:

**S(1)**Your professor asks you to present the incoming lecture in front of a considerable amount of colleagues. However, you are in your fourth year and you do not know anything about the required topic, so you do not want to present it. How would you respond to your professor's request? Write below a reply to your professor's request.

**Male:** I refuse (performative refusing).

**Female :** I think, I am a afraid I can't accept that ( negative willingness ).

The instance above is taken from the DCT showing that male learners are more message-directed than form-directed, as they are more laconic and direct. On the other hand ,female participant attempt to mitigate the impact of their refusal act through the avoidance of direct "No" responses. Additionally, the less direct refusal strategy applied is the 'non-performatives' ,in which the 'no' response has just (%4.71)of the total occurrence of the direct refusal strategies. Concerning the

communicative situations supported by the researchers in the DCT, it has been noticed that the male participants also were more direct and used the explicit and straight "No". They use this "No" followed by no explanation, justification, gratitude, or apology. On the other side, female learners tend to be more voluble and tactful than the male ones avoiding the straight "No". The example below illustrates a sample of the two genders responses:

**S(5):**The class monitor asks you to voluntarily affiliate to the graduation preparation staff members. You do not like the idea and want to pull away from that. How would you refuse?

**M Male:** No, I don't want.

**Female:** No, but I think I can't do that right now.

The above instance is taken over from the DCT questionnaire which reveals that female participant are indirect, sensitive and emotive. They tend to be more person-oriented and refusal form-directed ones. As a result, the use of explanation and justification is preferable in female refusal act.

Although the statistical facts rummage the copious use of direct strategies, yet indirect strategies recorded a considerable descriptive statistics that worth analyzing

elaborately. Based on the analysis of the data ,indirect refusal strategies come late with all it subtypes classified in Beeb's et al. model (1990),they occur(228)times with (%32.57)percent to occupy the second rank after the direct strategies. Distributing between the two understudy gender groups, the analysis divulges that female participants prefer such strategies in refusing the interlocutor's suggestion, offer and invitation to get (151/ %21.57),while



on the contrary, males' indirect refusal strategies have( 77/ %11).

**S (2):** The supervisor on your graduation paper suggests you a topic in syntax which is not your favorite one. However, you do not want to write about syntax. How would you respond to this suggestion? Write below a reply to your professor's suggestion.

**Male:** Oh, but I don't have much information about syntax.

**Female:** Oh, , but I don't think I will do my best in syntax, in fact, I have low achievement in this topic ; it is very complicated and needs more time for searching and preparing.

After examining all the main refusal strategies with their percentages ,the indirect subtypes of these strategies are going to be determined by laying down their frequencies and percentages respectively. As mentioned earlier this refusal strategy gets(%30.28)out of the total occurrence of the other strategies to be ranked secondly as tabulated in table (2) and fig.(1). The first indirect refusal strategy the participants excessively utilized is excusing, reasoning and explaining refusals. However, some differences were found between the two groups concerning the excusing and reasoning refusals. Naturally, female students are very aware of being tactful and modest in refusing others' suggestions, offers, or invitations, so, they used this strategy (63) times in comparison to male students who used it only (39) times. The example below illustrates the elaboration of excuses and justification the females tend to use in responding to any suggested situations:

**(1) I have already chosen a partner, sorry.**

As we can see, the two refusals above are explicitly the same, but the social influence is strongly different since female refusers tend to be more polite and concrete to keep the supervisor's face on the contrary to the males who prefer to give less clear and more concise excuses and reasons to their non acceptance.

Shedding specific light on the other indirect refusal strategy that both gender-based groups employed is refusals with regret and the tendency to providing other alternatives. The total use of this type is (74/ %9.55) distributed as (47/%7.13)for females and (27/%2.42)for males. For example, female participants almost tend to express more positive views, but unlike the males who didn't provide any alternative plans and if they did, they would sound less positive as in:

**S (2):** The supervisor on your graduation paper suggests you a topic in syntax which is not your favorite one. However, you do not want to write about syntax. How would you respond to this suggestion? Write below a reply to your professor's suggestion.

**Male:** Sorry, but I think it is difficult, would you mind suggest another topic for me?.

**Female:** I am really sorry, but if you agree, in fact, I prefer Romantic poetry since I find it easier to deal with and I have many poems to choose.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that verbal avoidance symbolized by *hedging* also has

its part in the data analyzed. Its entire occurrence is (24times) with (%3.42)percentage. Considerably, female participants apply hedges in their refusal responses (20/%2.85), whereas the male learners made use of such structures to refuse indirectly only(4)times with(%0.57). Notwithstanding these inconsiderable frequencies, but this structure has a noticeable polite influence on the utterance the learners prefer to use. Females,

basically, tend to show positive attitudes and politeness in communication though the questionnaire situations demand refusal acts. As Lakoff (1975)stated that hedge is more connected with women than with men Hedges, in this avenue, is restricted to the negative impact they may sometimes convey. The instance quoted below is a sample of refusals via hedging that a few learners used:

**S (7):** You make a thorough search in the library but you didn't find the book you're looking for. Henceforth, the librarian offers you his own book which is the one you want. However, you don't want an alternative. How would you refuse the librarian's offer?

**Male:** Oh, I don't know whether it is ok. or not.

**Female:** Oh, sir I am not sure for that sorry.

Accordingly, gender differences in the use of hedges show that hedges are intrinsically frequently preferred by females as a kind of positive politeness that signals solidarity with the interlocutor , rather than expressing uncertainty. She also asserts that successful panelists use hedges to make their addressees feel more at ease. Thus, female participants are successful panelists because of the supportiveness and politeness of their speech.

The last indirect strategies used by the sample were dangling either between insignificant frequency with one-percent occurrence or nullity in use with (0) occurrence . The examples of the other indirect refusals which having inconsiderable occurrence below are:

1. The 'Wish statements' strategy that has a little own share in this statistics, comes with (6)times of frequency, as in;

***I wish to come but I have a lot of work and I have to finish it.***

2. Also, the other refusal that is accompanied with 'future acceptance' occurs (6)times also , as in;

***Sir, I'm not confident enough to present this week. I will present next week I promise.***

Turning to the third main refusal strategy that is the use of "Adjunct", positive feeling, as the subtype or secondary type of the main ones ,is the only one of all other three types employed by the two-gendered groups. It comes (16)times having (%2.28)percentage and distributing as (11/%1.57)by females and (5/ %0.71 )by males as the example below :

**S (4):** Your colleague satisfactorily asks you to enter into a partnership with him/her in setting down in writing the graduation paper, and you do not want to participate the task with him/her. How would you respond to the request?

**Male:** I am so grateful but I can't participate.

**Female:** I really appreciate this request, but I already have a partner.

In closing, it should be stated again that Iraqi EFL learners apply the refusal strategies they learner through their

academic study at university, some strategies are mostly preferred and excessively used by each group, whereas

others are completely ignored. The ignorance of some refusal strategies derived intrinsically from their incompetent and out of realization. Notwithstanding such problems, but it has been noticed that female refusers have a higher range of making use of the indirect and adjunct refusal strategies in comparison with the males who preferred the most prevalent direct strategies since they are more direct, laconic and straight in their speech style.

## CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the collected data the following can be concluded:

1. The plenteous use of the direct strategies unfurls the fact that EFL students are incompetent (pragmatically) enough and are not really aware of the offensiveness that results from using these strategies.
2. Approximately one- third of the collected data were indirect and this is a positive point that unrolls that these students are not totally inefficient or at least, not all of them are so.
3. The use of the adjunct strategies was limited. Only one strategy gains a score while others are of null frequencies and this takes us to the result that Iraqi Learners ignore the various types of resfuaslity.
4. The variation in the use of the direct strategies leads us to conclude that EFL student are aware of all the direct strategies. The males more excessively used the direct strategies than did the female participants.
5. Male participants use a less range of refusal strategies(namely indirect and adjunct) compared with female ones who show a little wider variety in using these strategies.
6. Some strategies are not used at all as the pause fillers, gratitude's,

conditioned refusing, empathy statement, the nonverbal refusals. The reason why such subcategories are not implemented is the learners' lack of awareness concerning the various types of refusal.

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