Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Comparing Refusal Patterns between Native speakers of British English (NS) And Non-native speaker Saudi’s (NNS) who study in the UK

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Abstract
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1 Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

The focus of this work is refusal strategies as speech acts. The work discusses the theory of speech acts (Austin 1962) and Brown and Levinson’s (B&L; 1987) politeness theory in the context of data collected from native speakers of British English (NS) and non-native-speaking (NNS) Saudis studying in the UK. Currently, there are around 10,000 Saudi students in the UK (UKCISA, 2013), who will be dealing on a day to day basis with the speech act of refusal.

1.2 Research Questions

The specific research questions for the work are:

1. What are the similarities and differences between refusal patterns in the English language between native speakers of British English (NS) and Non-native Saudis (NNS) who study in the UK?
2. How are Saudis and British people different in their usage of indirect refusals?
3. Given that indirect refusal patterns are usually associated with politeness, how does the interlocutor status affect this?

The aim with these research questions is to deliver a study which is an inclusive pragma-linguistic analysis into the refusal patterns of English language between NS of British English and NNS Saudis studying in the UK. In particular, the paper will seek to identify the differences and similarities between these two refusal patterns, their refusal strategies, and the effect of interlocutor status on indirect refusal patterns.

1.3 Study Structure

The paper is constructed with five major chapters:
Chapter 1: Provision of an introduction, overview of the research, and the overall structure and rationale behind the work.

Chapter 2: Provision of background information on the topic of refusal strategies as speech acts and demonstration of relevant theories and studies. This chapter also the theoretical framework embedded in this study.

Chapter 3: Provision and justification of the methodological processes utilized for the work. The purpose of the chapter is to describe the research instruments and their uses, along with details of the target sample.

Chapter 4: Presentation of results and analysis of the data elicited from responses. Data is presented in graphical and narrative form and where appropriate evaluated in relation to the background information and existing works in the study area.

Chapter 5: Development of conclusions and review of achievement of answers to research questions. In addition, there is discussion of the study findings, including any limitations faced during conduct or analysis of data.

1.4 Definitions and terminology

In order to be clear regarding the use of terminology throughout the paper it is important to define some of the key definitions that will be applied throughout the work. Cross-cultural pragmatics is the study of a particular linguistic action performed by language users from diverse ethno-linguistic backgrounds (Hauptseminar 1998). Any particular language aims at establishing or, rather, achieving and even maintaining a human relationship. Therefore in carrying out any particular interaction, the assumptions and expectations of partakers regarding people and places play a major role in the presentation and eventual interpretation of their linguistic utterances. In this context there are three meanings of the term “utterance”. (i) the literal meaning of utterance, which is prepositional content, for example when an word is said with the intent of communicating precisely and literally what is meant. However, on some occasions what speakers utter does not have the meaning or exact intention they wanted to communicate, leading to different meanings and subsequent misunderstandings (also known as miscommunication). (ii) the second meaning of utterance is is the function of speech used in a social context; this is called “illusionary meaning”
and is entwined with pragmatic and cultural understandings, finally (iii) The third meaning is the perlocutionary meaning, which refers to the effects of an utterance in context (Al-Kahtani 2005). In essence, utterances, allow two individuals to share their views (Al-Kahtani 2005).

Reviewing these three functions of the term utterance, it is clear that choice of a linguistic phrase used to express particular communicative functions derives from a person’s assessment of the situation and social conventions (Nureddeen 2008). Moreover, speakers use a wide range of speech acts to realize their communicative intentions. These include the seminal broad categories of Searle’s (1975) categorization, co-missives, assertions, orders, and representatives, in addition to apologetic acts, refusals, requests, and even complaints (Kasper and Rose 2001).

J.L. Austin (1962), a British philosopher, was the first to define the linguistic term “speech act,” which he saw as a functional unit in communication. According to his Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962), there are three types of speech acts: refusals, compliments, and requests. In the context of this work the focus is on illocutionary, or “performance of a particular language function by what is said” (Ellis 2008) of refusal. Refusals imply directive speech acts because they cause the hearer to take a particular action (Searle 1969). Thus, in terms of terminology for this work a speech act is a linguistic utterance performed when offering an apology, complaining, greeting, requesting, or refusal of a request and as such normally serves a given purpose in communication (Carla 2009).

1.5 Rationale for the study
There are a number of reasons for undertaking the work. Primarily understanding of refusal performance has benefits for second language teachers and learners since refusals occur only in second pair parts-occurrence (i.e., two interlocutors where one is refusing) of discourse interaction. Furthermore, the ability to understand and use speech acts and refusals shows high levels of language proficiency, otherwise known as pragmatic competence (Eslami-Rasekh 2005, p. 200). According to Kasper (1997), pragmatic competence is "one's knowledge about the social distance, social status between the speakers involved, the cultural knowledge such as politeness, and the
linguistic knowledge explicit and implicit." As such, for NNS Saudi speakers studying in England, understanding the strategies and underlying reasons for the use of certain types of refusal can support their development of communicative competence and pragmatic abilities when speaking English (Peterwagner, 2005).

Furthermore, on a personal level, as a native Arabic speaker and an English language teacher, understanding the differences and similarities in making refusals will not only contribute to improve my teaching skills but also help my colleagues understand the ways this is used and understand by NNS. Lack of understanding of the pragmatic competence embodied in speech acts can cause a two-way damage for the native speaker of any given language and a learner who is not aware, for example, that such feelings of awkwardness or rudeness can be interpreted as an invasion of privacy (Gass, 2006)

Furthermore, while NS expect and may accept grammatical errors, they are less tolerant pragmatic errors (Hassani et al, 2011). Abed (2011) noticed that NNS use the conversational rules of their native language in their second language, which are also inappropriate for the conversations. Thus, learners must first recognize the cultural constraints and the context of when they are speaking and then use appropriate speech acts. This to avoid violating any socio-cultural norm—also known as socio-cultural knowledge which is defined as the the ability of speakers to determine the acceptability of a speech act in the given situation (Al-Eryani 2007; Meier, 2010).

These rationales for undertaking the study are also connected to an understanding of the Brown and Levinson (1987) model of politeness when expressing oneself in a non-native language. The suggestion is that there are underlying modes of communication that are universal for all human interactions. which are reflected in the speech act by showing the inferences and postulations made in planning the speech. The importance of politeness reduces negativity in the listener’s face which reduces the potential for FTA (face-threatening acts) (Gilks, 2009). When a NNS speaker uses an inappropriate utterance that can be considered impolite, the negative facial responses of the listener are cues to the error being made. This area will be covered in greater detail in the literature review but it supports the rationale and benefit of undertaking the study to support NNS in avoiding this difficult situation during a speech act of refusal.
1.6 Summary

This preliminary chapter has outlined the scope and rationale for the study and set out the structure for the work. The following chapter considers the theoretical areas of refusal as a speech act and its role and usage in NNS speakers including review of literature and related studies within the sector.
Chapter Two: Theories and Empirical Studies

2.1 Introduction

The role of refusal within human communication has been of great interest to researchers who have examined the area in relation to different social and cultural backgrounds of individuals. However, despite the extensive work of comparison in this area of speech, remarkably little documented information exists on the comparison of refusal patterns between native English speakers and non-native English speakers, particularly Saudi Arabs living in the United Kingdom. Given the aim of this work to investigate refusal patterns between NS and NNS Saudis studying in the UK, a foundation of these studies was felt pertinent to provide a level of depth and validity to the current work.

Cross-cultural studies that investigated contrasting or similar refusal strategies, some of them discussing the issue of directness and indirectness, particularly in inter-language pragmatics of refusals, include the following: Beebe et al. (1990), Saeki and O’Keefe (1994), Nelson et al. (2002), Liao and Bresnahan (1996), Stevens (1993), Hussein (1995), Al-Isaa (1998) and these are individually reviewed and related to the current work in this chapter. However, prior to this a greater exploration of the speech act of refusal is pertinent.

2.2 Refusals

A refusal is an act of rejecting or an opportunity to reject something that another person offers (Collins 2003). It can be a face-threatening act (FTA), occurring in receptive situations in the communication process with either a positive or negative outcome (Kondo, 2008). A positive affect occurs when the speaker handles the refusal situation with sensitivity, whereas a negative situation occurs when a speaker responds directly without proper regard to one’s non-native pragmatic aptitude (Nelson et al. 2002). FTAs can disrupt pre-existing harmony in any relationship in any given society, resulting in both listener and speaker losing face (Brown and Levinson 1987) and creating disharmony. According to B&L (1987), individuals are concerned about their self-image or the “face” they present to others, and they recognize that other people are also concerned with...
protecting and maintaining their “face.” Based on the ideas put forth by Goffman (1967) on the notion of face, the B&L model asserts that face is something that is emotionally managed and, hence, cannot only be lost but also enhanced through effective communication (Geiss, 2006). From this perspective, it can be stated that the face-saving view is influenced by features that can threaten the face of the speaker and/or the addressee. For this reason understanding the appropriate way to utter refusals is an important skill for NNS to develop when dealing with NS.

Various strategies can be used to mitigate negative effects of refusal and thus save the relationship that exists between the communicating parties (Bella, 2011). These particular strategies are subject to many socio-cultural factors, the key one being misunderstanding by the language’s native speakers of the speaker’s responses (Allami and Naiemi, 2011). Specifically, it is the way in which the speaker refuses or rejects any situation that causes communication issues. In language learning, it is important to be aware of pragmatic features, which most NS acquire naturally in order to be able to communicate effectively and successfully in certain situations (Bara, 2011). In many cases, NNS may unintentionally make pragmatic mistakes while using a second language and fail to use the appropriate language when performing a speech act such as a refusal (Eslami, 2010). This error is referred to as a pragma-linguistic error, illustrated by Nelson with the following example: a dinner guest inquires, “How much does your house cost?” The example is a perfectly correct sentence; however, it represents a socio-pragmatic error in an American context; i.e., it is socially inappropriate to ask such a question on such an occasion.

When a person refuses someone directly, it makes the other person feel awkward because it may appear to be an insult (Sahragard and Javanmardi, 2011). Studies have shown that refusal strategies of different cultures can be diverse (Al-Kahtani 2005) and as Hinkel (2012) notes, even in a more connected global world these differences can cause complications and misunderstandings. However, there are universal ways of refusing that can reduce this potential and minimize the threat of FTA on the part of the listener but as Chang (2009) highlights, these are heavily influenced by national or cultural values of socially acceptable levels of politeness. This is an area that has received extensive attention, but many have focused on the variations between American English and oriental NNS (Saeki and O’Keefe, 1994; Liao and Bresnahan, 1996) and whilst these provide some initial information in relation to this study and the existence of cultural
variations in refusal approaches, as the focus for this work is Saudi NNS the cultural influences are recognized to be different to these and will be explored as part of the primary data collection.

What is clear from these studies on refusal and relevant to this work is that there is a variation in refusal patterns within second-language learners. As a result conflicts occur when two different cultures communicate without prior knowledge of the appropriate refusal strategies or even common pragmatic indicators due to the fact that conversation changes from one culture to another (Gass and Neu, 2006). For example, refusal patterns between English and English, English and Chinese, English and Japanese, English and American, English and Russian, English and Arabic, and English and Indian vary according to the cultural orientation of the speaker (Eslami, 2010). Therefore, for a speaker, it is important to be aware of how to use cross-cultural communication techniques to avoid common mistakes in refusal speech acts (Al-Kahtani 2005).

What this suggests therefore is understanding of refusal strategies is grounded in appreciation of what cultural similarities or differences cause the disparities in refusal techniques. If this is achieved, then the awkward emotions felt by the speaker who is doing the refusing can be minimized and the impression given to the listener that the speaker is aware of the potential disappointment the refusal may cause and is apologetic about this. This view comes from cross-cultural methods of achieving successful communication and avoidance of confrontational FTA outcomes as Song (2012) highlights... However, in practice many speech acts fail because of the gap between request and refusal techniques (Nelson et al. 2002). As such understanding theories of speech acts and more specifically the speech act of refusal is relevant to this work as it can underpin the processes that NNS go through when using this form of communication with NS.

2.3 Speech Act and Politeness Theories

J.L. Austin (1962) developed the Speech Act Theory which has become the foundation of the field of study. He postulated that people do not really communicate through utterances but, rather, that utterances are equal to actions. Austin (1962) put speech acts into main categories: verdictives, exercisitives, and behabiatives. Subsequently, Searle (1969) modified the theory, claiming that there should be rules governing speech acts for them to be meaningful. Moreover, Searle (1969) noted that the execution of speech acts occurs through an illocutionary force-indicating devices.
created by constitutive rules. A locutionary act is the equivalent notion of illocution. Both are acutely unsupportive and forced to adopt different distinctions between propositional acts and illocutionary acts (Tsohatzidis, 2003). This difference is more than a taxonomical issue and includes high philosophical issues. The philosophical issues include the truth and falsehood of statements, the meaning of statements, and their scenario (Searle, 1985). There is thus a close relationship between an utterance and the meaning of sentences. Originally, the distinction was thought to be between an utterance and the description or meaning of a sentence but as Lumsden (2010) highlights, this can also be impacted by semantic referents. Thus in the case of NNS speakers utterances are affected by a number of variables and these will need consideration in the evaluation of refusal strategies. Overall however, an utterance is thought to be an apologetic act, warning, promise, or bet (Renkema, 2004). In essence therefore, and with particular salience for this work, there can be said to be a difference between what an utterance says and what it does (Ferguson 1973). In the case of refusals by NNS as Recanati (2002) and Cohen (1996) highlight, there is an impact from inference rather than direct understanding of intent. Recognising this means there is a potential for the development of strategies for NNS in delivering effective refusal speech acts.

The knowledge of these particular rules constituted understanding of linguistic competence manifests. Searle then proposed that particular speech acts, such as “requests” and “apologies” were under the control of felicity conditions which were of four types: preparatory, sincerity, prepositional content and essential conditions. Again, understanding these can support development of effective delivery of refusal, whilst the notion of indirect speech is aligned to the desire of a speaker to achieve a level of politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987), although Leech (2007) suggest that there are cultural variations in this respect, which also has potential salience for this work.

In the specific area of refusals, there has been a variety of studies undertaken (Al-Eryani 2007, Al-Kahtani 2005, Al-Isaa 1998, AlShawali 1997, Beebe et al. 1990, Chen 1996, Saeki and O’Keefe 1994, Nelson et al. 2002, Liao and Bresnahan 1996, Stevens 1993, Hussein 1995). These have suggested that the delivery and receipt of a refusal utterance is closely aligned with levels of desired politeness and thus consideration of work and definitions in this area can provide some indications for the present study.
The notion of politeness is a complicated issue in any given language owing to its vague meaning and the great criticism received by linguists (Eelen 2001). Specifically that there are major cultural variations in what is deemed as “polite” and thus socially acceptable in terms of speech acts (Watts, 2003). It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that understanding the notion of politeness involves not only the language but also the social norms and cultural values of any given community (Watts 2003) or even two individual speakers if one is NS and one is NNS as is the case for this work. The politeness theory was postulated by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1978), which describes the speakers’ intentions to alleviate imminent threats to face carried out by particular FTAs. Specifically, it explains that humans maintain a positive and a negative face that is threatened when making a request. B&L (1987) produced the deepest and most comprehensive accounts of politeness perspectives in conversation analysis, and a sample of their framework is shown in the figure below.

**Figure 1 Brown and Levinson's Politeness Model**

![Brown and Levinson's Politeness Model](image)

Source: Brown and Levinson, (1987)

The model shows how their construct of politeness phenomena depicts an utterance as an act that a person uses to communicate in a dissimilar language. It has a foundation the belief that there are underlying modes of communication which are universal for all human interactions and are thus reflected in the speech act by the inferences and assumptions made in the planning of speech.
Politeness in conversations, particularly those involving a refusal speech act, can manage the expression of facets that help in the prevention of the FTA (Gilks 2009).

According to B&L (1987), an individual’s face plays a critical role in motivating strategies of politeness, such as conflict avoidance, solidarity, and restraint. A positive facial expression may mean a yearning for acknowledgement and approval, whereas a negative face, on the other hand, may imply a desire for an excuse from an obligation. B&L, moreover, noted that actions such as requests, criticism, commands, and threats could have the potential to undermine the interlocutor. B&L consider all requests to be FTA that potentially impinge on the requester’s claim to freedom from the action and imposition. There is, therefore, a need to manipulate the existing imposition present in the request act to exemplify some degree of politeness. This is achievable by syntactic and lexical means (Wilson et al, 1991). Whilst numerous linguists have attempted to characterize aspects of politeness using language rules in contexts, this has been problematic and challenging due to social and cultural variations in what is deemed polite or impolite speech acts. The challenge is increased when it is further recognized that politeness pragmatics is not easy to separate and disassociate from any social relationship between the individuals in the conversation, as this has a further impact on how speech acts are received, and becomes context dependent as Holtgraves (2005) highlights. Therefore when considering refusal speech acts between NNS and NS for this work, there is a need to recognize that pre-existing social relationships may impact on whether the responses are considered as polite or impolite, i.e. recognition of the context of the refusal. Taking all of these factors into account, an evaluation of refusal literature was undertaken to develop a holistic understanding of the sector before undertaking the primary data collection.

2.4 Related literature evaluation

The refusal strategies of NNS has been noted to depend on the manner of their communication. Lauper (1997) conducted a survey by interviewing Spanish- and English-speaking students. The findings of the research indicated that the Spanish speakers made the same refusal in both English and Spanish, but the refusal statements differed from those of the English-speaking students. This suggests the potential that the same may be true of Saudi NNS who may adopt a similar strategy and is an area that will be explored during the primary data collection of this work.
However, despite the identification of different refusal strategies by people of diverse cultural backgrounds, some researchers have argued that there are communities from different cultural backgrounds that give similar refusal statements. For example, Guo (2012) found that there are more similarities than differences between Chinese and North American English speakers. Both groups opted to use direct strategies over an indirect approach, although the contexts were different. Just as Americans used a more direct approach, whilst the Chinese used the same approach when turning down invitations and requests. Another similarity between the two groups lies in how they both react when refusing their partners’ suggestions. While the Chinese concentrated on alternative statements and the refusal reasons, Americans put more emphasis on the interlocutor’s feelings and regret. This variation between Western and Eastern approaches has potential salience in the case of Saudi NNS versus English NS as the English may exhibit similar behaviours to the American’s, whilst the Saudi NNS may focus on similar strategies to the Chinese, wanting to explain the reason for refusal, rather than an emphasis on regret.

Ogiermann (2009) conducted a study using the DCT in a variety of scenarios to investigate refusal techniques across four European languages: English, Russian, Polish, and German. The relationship between the scenario and the interlocutors was negligible social distance and equivalent social power, implying minimal face threats. The English data were collected from three universities in Cardiff, Swansea, and London, with the German and Polish data collected from the University of Oldenburg and the University of Wroclaw, respectively. Eighty percent of the DCTs used in the study ended up in the data analysis stage. The findings indicated that German, Russian, and Polish speakers used a more direct strategy compared to English speakers. The difficulty with this study is that whilst in indicates cultural variation in refusal strategies, the focus on European languages does not take account of the potential variation that may exist for Saudi NNS, this underlines the need for this work. However, the general conclusion of the study showed that all four languages involved could have their responses categorized at different directness levels which is something which can be potentially evaluated for Saudi NNS.

All of these highlighted studies (Guo, 2012, Ogiermann 2009, Nelson et al. 2002) revealed that there are different refusal outcomes in relation to directness and use of strategies. This suggests that refusals are not just based in language knowledge and competence but are overlaid by cultural factors (King, 1993) and thus it is likely that this may emerge as a similar pattern for Saudi NNS.
In respect to more in-depth studies, as previously noted there is a limited number of published studies focusing on Arabic and Saudi speaker refusal strategies, with the focus for research having been predominantly on differences between English and East Asian languages. However, there has been a small number of works which have focused on Arabic speakers, some comparing to English and some on Saudi speakers only. In order to provide an indication of current thinking in the field these studies are thus considered in the light of the current work.

2.5 Empirical studies

Consideration is first given to English and East Asian languages and the strategies utilised for refusal, identifying the methods used and overall outcomes as well as relevance to the current work. Following this a brief overview of studies examining refusals in English and Arabic is provided.

2.5.1 English and East Asian languages

Farnia and Wu (2012) using a structured interview and DCT in a cohort of Chinese and Malaysian students, found that Chinese students thought about the reason while preparing their refusal statements, as well as how the statement would be structured and present. An important variable was not hurting the listener’s feelings. For the Malaysians this was lower in precedence than ensuring the reason for refusal was given and understood, although these students were exceptionally cautious in their choice of words and went further in seeking their friend’s approval of their refusal. However, both groups reported basing their thinking in their native languages before switching to English for verbal communication. This strategy is common in NNS and is likely to be present in the Saudi NNS cohort in this group and may account for some of the areas of error or potential FTA that result from refusals. In sum, the findings indicated that respondents displayed expressions of excuses, reasons, expressions of regret, and unwillingness in communicating their refusal statements.

Also focusing on Malaysian students but in the context of establishing an ideal semantic formula, Abdul-Sattar, 2011) evaluated refusal statements given to lower-, equal-, and higher-status person, a format this being utilized by the current study. The study again employed the DCT format and the results illustrated the traditional Malaysian indirect speaking in choosing the semantic formula of their responses (Abdul Sattar 2011). Regrets and excuses were highly conspicuous in the students’ responses speaking in English highlighting that their communication had some aspects
of cultural influence. Rather than just offering an apology, the participants gave explanations for their refusal and went on to suggest alternatives. This is influenced by their cultural upbringing, which emphasizes respect, especially for elders (Sattar et al, 2011).

In yet another Asian context, Liao and Breshanan (1996) conducted a study to compare Mandarin Chinese and American English. The study was conducted in English, and it involved the translation of Mandarin Chinese into English. Their study illustrated the use of more strategies by Americans than by Chinese, and these variations were in accordance with the requester’s status. The study suggested that the Chinese began most of their refusals by offering an apology, an indirect strategy, followed by a reason. The Americans, on the other hand, expressed gratitude followed by self-defense. This is in line with the previously highlighted works that the focus of different cultures in a refusal situation can differ, even if the overall strategy is the same. This suggests that looking at these areas for Saudi NNS will be important for this work.

In a similar vein, Saeki and O’Keefe (1994) studied American and Japanese refusals utilizing an experimental design. The study was conducted in English and needed no interpretation and used DCT. The independent variables in this study related to the qualifications and nationality of the candidate. The dependent variables originated from the analysis of the response in accordance with idea units. The scenario involved refusing to hire a given candidate looking for a job. The findings indicated that the Americans and Japanese were similar in their refusals in that they both offered more detail when the candidate was unqualified, and both utilized more literal and even direct strategies in their refusals. The Japanese expressed gratitude in their first position of the semantic formula, followed closely by an explanation, while the American native speakers of English expressed gratitude followed by a self-defense. This again highlights the variation in cultural approaches that is anticipated in Saudi NNS.

This is further underlined when considering the work of Chen (1996), who conducted a study on the pragmatic appropriateness of refusal statements. The comparisons were in English only, and no translators were involved. Specifically, 24 written statements were collected from both NS and the NNS, with the NNS themselves being given the opportunity to rate the appropriateness of the statements. This study included Chinese and English speakers of English. The findings showed that the English speakers’ statements were even more appropriate in English than those statements
made by the NNS. It was noted that, while using semantic formulas to analyze differing speech acts of refusal, the two groups of subjects never employed a direct refusal strategy of saying, “No,” regardless of their background. Moreover, the expressions of regret—such as, “Sorry”—used by most American English speakers in refusals was not common among the Chinese English speakers. Whilst this appears to contradict the findings of Farnia and Wu (2012) regarding Chinese speakers desire not to hurt their listener’s feelings, it does highlight the Chinese approach of considering structure before speaking.

Similar to Saeki and O’Keefe’s work, Beebe et al. (1990) conducted a study that compared native Japanese speakers to native English speakers. Translation was involved to enable comparisons in the English code. The findings indicated the likelihood of Americans to employ indirect refusal strategies when a person of higher status was involved; they expressed gratitude followed by self-defense. The same strategies, however, applied in cases involving people of lower status. Conversely, the Japanese used indirect strategies with people of higher status, with any gratitude following an explanation. They used direct strategies with people of lower status, which involved direct use of, “No.”. This again highlights a potential universal of changing refusal strategies based on the status of the person to whom the refusal is being.

In the East Asian context therefore it appears that refusal is frequently combined with an expression of gratitude and a cautious refusal, which is in contrast to Anglophones who were more focused on self-defense. What does appear evident from these works however, is that direct refusals were used universally. Whilst these studies generally compared English in the American context it is likely that similar outcomes will occur for NS in this study. , but that there may be other variation which are specific to the Arabic languages and thus consideration of studies in this area is necessary.

2.5.2 English and various Arabic speakers
Nelson et al (2002), undertook a study testing the perceptions of Egyptians and Americans regarding refusals and the level of strategies employed to evaluate whether there was an effect from status, particularly in relation to gender and marital status. The Egyptians were interviewed in Arabic, while their American counterparts were interviewed in English. In the study, the interviewer read a situation aloud, and the participants responded through an audio tape. The results showed that both Americans and Egyptians used the same “most common” refusal
strategies, such as direct or indirect strategies. However, also of note was that the Egyptians were more conscious than the Americans were since negative willingness preceded the most common refusal strategy and Egyptian males deployed more direct refusal strategies in every situation than their American counterparts. What should be noted however is the fact that the studies were undertaken in the speaker’s native language may have impacted on their refusal approach and that when speaking in a second language, other factors may impact. Again, the difficulty here is that English speakers were American, and whilst very similar to UK English speakers, there are recognised cultural differences between the communication approaches of the two countries (Eisenstein and Bodman, 1993).

Pragmatic transfer was also considered by Al-Issa (1998, cited in Nelson et al, 2002) In her study, the situations consisted of two different variables. They employed the specificity of the relationship between speaker and hearer, social status, social distance. Other reference groups included Jordanian native Arabic speakers and American native speakers of English. The findings indicated that semantic formulas reflected many Arabic cultural norms and that Arabs were more rank-conscious than their American counterparts were. For example, they began their refusals by acknowledging the act of their seniors with “sir,” while the Americans did not (Nelson et al. 2002). This again highlights the impact of status on refusal strategies and utterances. Stevens (1993) used a discourse completion test designed by Beebe et al. to study Arabic and English refusals. The study was in English; therefore, translation was involved. The findings from the study indicated that the same strategies—explanations and white lies—worked for both cultures (cited in Nelson et al. 2002), although this study did not incorporate information about status of the speaker/ respondent. As an early study comparing Arabic and English refusal, utilizing fifteen scenarios, (eight requests and seven offers) the study highlighted for the first time multiple strategies and also highlighted that there was evidence that interlocutors rarely refused entirely. This suggests the potential that Arabic NNS do employ similar strategies to English NS but that their delivery is situation dependent.

In the context of direct refusal, Al Eryani (2007) investigated native Yemeni Arabic learners of English responding to six refusal situations in English. The comparison was done in English with
translations whenever it involved NNS. The study involved Yemeni native Arabic speakers, Yemeni learners of English, and American NS. The responses were cross-matched, and the results indicated that the Arabic English speakers were, in fact, less direct in their particular refusals by giving reasons or, rather, explanations, which is in line with the earlier studies already cited. NS, on the other hand, employed semantic orders, which were different in that they offered even more refusals that were direct and heralding regrets. What was surprising was that the NNS depicted pragmatic confidence by only frequently displaying native speech social norms. This suggests that as communicative competence in another language increases, there is a reduction in cultural impacts on refusal strategies and responses aligned to status of the interlocutor. In particular, when refusing requests from a person of a higher status, the Yemeni native Arabic speakers used excuses in the first and second consecutive positions of the semantic formulas and did not express regrets. The English learners of Yemeni origin utilized excuses in all positions of their semantic formulas. Moreover, they used a direct refusal, “can’t,” in the second position of the semantic formula and expressed regrets, “sorry,” in the first, second, and third positions of their formula which the native speakers did not. Finally, the NS began their refusal by expressing statements of regrets, “sorry,” followed by a direct refusal, “can’t,” in the second and third positions of their formula; they also used excuses in the third position.

Similar studies on semantic formulas have been undertaken by Al Shawali (1997), Al-Kahtani (2005) and Al Shawali (1997) with cohorts of NS American English and NNS Saudi male graduates using only English and no translators. These studies found that the NS and the NNS Saudis used similar refusal formulas, but that their strategies of direct refusal were not that similar, illustrated by their unspecified answers. The major difference was the use of the direct “no”, as well as the number of semantic formulas employed in each particular situation and in the explanation of their content. The refusal strategies employed by the Saudis depicted a collectivistic culture, while that of the Americans depicted an individualistic culture in line with identified knowledge of the two regions (Wyer et al, 2013). Moreover, this study showed that both Saudis and Americans employed fewer semantic formulas when refusing requests and that Saudis employed different semantic formulas—that is, a “wish” philosophy—and even postponed formulas when refusing an advisor’s request. Additionally, they employed alternatives, future
acceptance, and even explanations in their request refusals which is further evidence of the universal role of politeness in refusal acts as indicated above.

Al-Kahtani (2005) conducted a study of speech refusal acts using the same linguistic code, which was in English; no translators were involved. The study subjects were Americans, Arabs, and Japanese, who were compared based on their refusal acts. The results indicated that the American and Japanese refusal acts, when it came to people of higher status, were very much alike; more specifically, the expressed gratitude preceded self-defense for Americans, while the Japanese gave an explanation, which further underlines the potential role of status in the formulation of a refusal speech act. Arabs, on the other hand, never expressed gratitude in their refusal, and whilst it is not clear from the work what level of communicative competence they had in English this is in line with other studies about social norms in Arabic. Moreover, when it came to the order of the semantic formula, the Americans started with gratitude followed by a statement of principle, the Japanese used agreement followed by a statement of principle, and the Arabs expressed only reason when refusing a person of a higher status and Japanese participants, again reinforcing the role of status in construction of refusal speech acts. When it came to equal status, Arabs and Americans were more direct in their refusals. They used a direct “no” or expressed negative willingness. The Japanese used indirect strategies by giving explanations.

The studies on American-English NS, Asian NNS and Arabic NNS have generally highlighted a level of universality in regards to refusal strategies but also identified that there are cultural variations in the semantic and pragmatic formulas and over-riding intent of the speech act. For the Arabic speakers which is the focus of interest for this work, there does appear to be an influence from native speech norms, although this can be superceded where high pragmatic confidence in English exists. There is also a generally universal impact from status of the interlocutor regarding how the refusal is given (direct, indirect, focus on regret or gratitude, for example) which was noted in a number of studies and also identified by Taguchi (2009). What this therefore means is that in the context of a refusal speech act there are both similarities and differences and these are summarised in the table below.

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**Figure 2 Similarities and Differences in Refusal Speech Acts**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Similarities</strong></th>
<th><strong>Differences</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher status individuals use more direct refusal strategies and occurs with both American English speakers and Saudi speakers</td>
<td>Saudis employed various semantics such as a wish, future acceptance, or even philosophy formulas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher status individuals are less likely to explain a refusal, and where explanation is given it is brief and distinct</td>
<td>Saudi’s are more concerned with saving face and avoiding FTA than native English speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher status individuals exhibited low levels of politeness</td>
<td>American English speakers tended to utilise self-defense strategies to ease tension and avoid FTA before expressions of regret/gratitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi NNS were brief and less tactful in relation to refusing a higher status person</td>
<td>Saudi’s, as a result of cultural requirements to avoid self-humiliation, expressed only reasons, which were not accompanied by any particular adjuncts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficiency in a NNS can increase the level of directness of their refusal leading to erroneous perceptions of rudeness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National culture and native language norms impact until full pragmatic competence is achieved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What the table above indicates is that there are some universals in relation to politeness in undertaking a refusal speech act, but this is impacted on by language competence and pragmatic ability when refusing in a non-native language. In addition, there are distinct differences in how individuals respond which is status dependent. In nationality terms, the differences are in expressions of gratitude or regret.

2.6 **Summary**

This chapter has discussed refusal patterns and how they differ from and resemble each other. Moreover, it has explained the refusal strategies used by both NS and NNS and even explained how the patterns vary across status. It is worth mentioning that different cultures have perceptions that are different with respect to the meanings and interpretations of appropriateness and politeness. This chapter contributes to the level of cross-cultural understanding by identifying and explaining the cross-cultural and even linguistic differences between NS of British English and NNS who study in the UK.

The difficulty with many of the comparative studies is that they have focused on the American English refusal approach, and there are minimal works evaluating the UK context. This is a gap to be addressed by this work, the methodology for which is set out in the following chapter.
3 Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

For any study to be effective, valid and robust, a clear statement of the methodological processes employed is required (Cresswell, 2003). This chapter therefore sets out the research design and development of the survey instrument used to elicit the refusal patterns used in the work. Consideration is given to the data collection, sampling and analysis of the data.

3.2 Research Approach

The approach adopted for the work is that of interpretivism (Saunders et al, 2007), which relies on understanding the roles and approaches taken by individuals.

3.3 Data Collection and Sampling Approaches

Empirical data was felt vital to be able to meet the research objectives. For this a quantitative approach utilising the Discourse Completion Test was adopted.

The DCT is especially designed to understand speech acts. It is one of the reliable and valid methods to study refusal strategies of two different cultures or more. (Reference). The DCT was originally designed and applied by Blum-Kulka (1982) and since then it is widely used in many studies. (Saeki and O’Keefe 1994, Al Issa 1998, Beebe et al. 1990, Nelson et al. 2002). The respondents of both groups are asked to fill out the DCT. The situations are based on real-life discourse. It states the situation or scenarios that any individual might encounter in his/her daily routine (See Appendices A and B).

Nelson’s DCT is adopted in order to identify the refusal strategies of the NS and NNS. Two DCT’s are designed for this research. One questionnaire is for the NS (Appendix A) and the other is for NNS (Appendix B). This aimed to manifest the similarities and differences in the refusal strategies of both the speakers.

In terms of sampling the respondents were NS of English and Saudi NNS studying in the UK, as such the approach taken was one of purposive sampling. Full demographic profiles are provided in the results section of this work.

3.4 Research Design

Thyer (2012) identified research design as the framework that supports the achievement of a study from development of the area of investigation to analysis of data collected. As this work is focused on understanding the refusal strategies of NS and NNS Saudi speakers in the UK, the design followed an exploratory pathway.
3.5  **Survey Instrument and Process**

The DCT included 10 different prompts followed by blanks. The participants had to provide the appropriate responses to fill in the blanks. The word “directives” was not used to specify situational descriptions to avoid biasing the participants' choices of responses (Beebe and Takahashi 1989).

The instrument, the DCT, has open-ended questions based on 10 prompts. These situations are based on four major speech acts: requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions. Two questions are based on request, three are based on invitations, three are based on offers, and two are based on suggestions. A request is defined as a demand for something that is made by an individual in a polite manner. It is based on a favor that a requester asks of another person (e.g., to borrow notes, a pen, or a book). An invitation is a type of request in which the individual, instead of asking for a favor, invites a person to do something. It is usually an attempt to be kind and thoughtful (e.g., inviting a friend to dinner or to a party). An offer refers is made when an individual asks for or wants something. The individual offers other person something in this condition (e.g., offering a friend a chocolate or a piece of cake). A suggestion is a situation in which one person gives advice to another person so that he/she can work in an effective manner to gain some benefit. It is an idea that a person puts forward to the other person (e.g., to try a new color of dress or to try the cuisine of a particular restaurant).

In this study, the DCT presents situations based on the level of the interlocutors’ status. There are two situation types, offer and invitation, that included a refusal by the interlocutor of a person of higher status; a person of equal status, and a person of lower status. Two situation types, invitation and offer, include the refusal of a person of higher status and of equal status. The purpose of studying the different status levels is to understand refusal situations at different levels. These situations have open-ended answers in which the respondent proposes his or her refusal strategy. This will help in knowing how they will respond to a given situation and what strategy they will adopt so that the person who has been refused does not feel awkward.

Each situation involves the refusal of a particular group or person. For example, in situation one, a group discusses their classmates, the second situation is based on a president and salespersons; the third situation involves an executive person and a boss, and so on. These situations, however,
revolve around friends, bosses, the office, home, or university. Each situation involves two or more people that the respondents have to refuse in a suitable manner. Few situations are designed to evaluate the level of formality in a parallel relationship. Some are based on informal relationships that are closely related. Some are unparallel and formal relationships, and some are parallel and informal relationships. However, it depends on the situation and the status of each individual.

There are three reasons that I chose this instrument. First, the respondents in various studies like this one vary their refusals based on the status of the interlocutors. The situations developed for the DCT are based on the embedded status. Second, by using this method for both groups of respondents, Saudis and Britons, NS and NNS, it was easier to compare how methods were adopted for the refusal strategies. This will help in determining the differences and similarities in the refusal strategies of Arabic and English. It will also help in determining the direct and indirect strategies and the strategic relationship used for the status of interlocutors. Third, it yields a larger number of refusals as opposed in the natural-occurring data, enabling the use of the DTC for data collection (Nelson et al. 2002).

Despite the fact that DCT is one a frequently used method in pragmatics to extract respondent utterance and that the data for this study were collected via an open-ended DCT questionnaire (syntax) (Ogiermann 2009), the validity of the written DCT questionnaire is debated, and there are certain drawbacks. There is a lack of contextual variation and complex interaction because the situations are either strange or familiar to the respondent. Moreover, the hypothetical situations are based on assumptions. There is a lack of authenticity and arbitration because it is insufficient and conflicting to collect oral responses in a written questionnaire and to imitate the real speech act. Several studies have noted that the response of participants in the DCT are shorter in length, less face-maintaining, easier in wording, and interactive (Beebe and Cummings 1996, Turnbull 1997, Bodman and Eisenstein 1988).

With DCT several benefits, the respondents usually mentioned that whatever they said in a hypothetical situation cannot be applied or predicted in actual situations. The response may vary based on the situation. Moreover, it is also argued that, in the DCT, as the study is based on cross-cultural refusal strategies, there are issues in comparing respondents of different cultures (Nelson et al. 2002).
However, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) indicated that, to conduct cross-cultural studies in speech acts, it is required to use stereotypical language. This helps in reducing the level of complexity and assures that the response is authentic.

3.6 Procedure
The two DCTs, the NS and NNS tests, were posted online:

NS (Appendix A): [http://freeonlinesurveys.com/s.asp?sid=2g3piiz2hnoz1jm81798](http://freeonlinesurveys.com/s.asp?sid=2g3piiz2hnoz1jm81798)


Each link includes three parts: the informed consent, the demographic details, and the DCT. The links were distributed via email and posted on Facebook. The website allows the user to identify the time/date and location of participation. The subjects filled out the survey and clicked the Finish button. Once submitted, the researcher was able to see the results.

3.7 Pilot testing
Pilot testing was done in an attempt to rule out potential complexity and ambiguity. The instrument, found in Appendices A and B, was piloted on three NNS and one NS. Some instructions were added, and the demographic information was changed several times. One of the problems encountered while adopting Nelson et al.’s (2002) method of performing the DCT was that he employed a written form, whereas this was more of an interview. The questions were read aloud, and then the participants were asked to fill out the DCT in Nelson et al.’s method. In the current study, however, data were collected as a test. Nelson’s et al. (2002) DCT did not include instructions after the situation, and this drawback was found when piloting the test. Therefore, instructions such as, “How would you refuse” were added to all ten situations.

Data Analysis.
With regard to data analysis the approach taken was to collate the results and then using excel evaluate patterns and correlations within the work. In addition a chi-square analysis was conducted to review which variables had the greatest impact on the refusal strategies and approaches taken by the two cohorts.

### 3.8 Reliability and Validity

Sekaran and Bougie (2010) highlight the importance of reliability and validity in any study to demonstrate coherence in analysis and authentication of data. For this work a combination of narrative analysis and graphical representation of the data demonstrates how conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

In order to conform with required standards of ethics and confidentiality, no personal information other than gender, age and length of time within the UK were taken from respondents, in accordance with standard ethics policies for the university. In addition, the use of online questionnaires supported the protection of anonymity and confidentiality for respondents.

### 3.10 Summary

This chapter has outlined the design and approaches utilised for the work and the rationales for choosing them. Given the nature of the study and its intent to fill a gap in relation to Saudi NNS and UK English speakers the processes selected were considered the best fit for the work. With the foundation for the study laid and pilot testing completing, the data analysis and results could be produced and these are presented in the following chapter.
4 Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Introduction

This section includes the data analysis and results. The data were analyzed according to frequency of strategy use, frequency of direct and indirect strategies, and effect of interlocutor status, replicating the processes utilized by Nelson et al. (2002)

4.2 Demographics of Cohort

As previously indicated there were two sets of participants, split as per the figure below and showing a bias to non-native speakers.

Figure 3 NNS and NS in Cohort

In terms of age and gender, the figures below illustrate the gender breakdown across the two groups.

Figure 4 Gender of cohort
In terms of age across the two groups, the NS speakers were aged between 22 and 71, although the majority were in the 22 to 31 age group (83%), whilst the average age for NNS was 32, putting the two groups roughly at parity in terms of any generational effects.

Both sets of respondents were also asked to provide information relating to their education level and the outcomes for these are indicated in the figure below.

**Figure 5 Education Level of cohort**
As the table indicates the NNS group had a higher level of education, however this bias may be due to the focus on Saudi students, whilst the NS group were simply required to be native UK English speakers.

In addition to these questions asked to both groups, the NNS were asked for some additional information in relation to their exposure to English and level of proficiency in the language and these contributed to additional profile information.

The figure below indicates the frequency with which the NNS were communicating with UK English people, as the table indicates the majority interacted every day (63.2%). This suggests that the majority of the NNS participants were able to increase their communication practice on a regular basis and thus would be likely to face a refusal situation several times a week.

**Figure 6 Duration of English Use with British People**

![Duration of English use with British People](image)

Given the indication from the literature review that communicative ability and pragmatic understanding were factors that affected refusal, the NNS cohort were also asked how long they had been in the UK as it was felt that this may impact on their strategies and use of refusal speech acts. The figure below provides the length of time in the UK information for the NNS cohort.

**Figure 7 Length of time in the UK (NNS)**
As the figure indicates, the average was 2-3 years, which when considered in conjunction with the answers to the previous question regarding opportunities for speaking English with UK British speakers suggests that for the majority there has been ample time to develop refusal strategies.

Having defined the demographic profile of the cohort, the specific responses to the DCT can be considered. The full DCT instrument can be found in the Appendices and the outcomes are summarised here.

4.3 Descriptive data analysis

The research was based on three questions that compared the Non-native Saudi speakers and the native speakers of British English. Based on the first research question, “What are the similarities and differences in refusal patterns of English language between native speakers of British English (NS) and Non-native Saudi speakers (NNS) who study in the UK?”, several similarities emerged between the two groups with both using direct and indirect strategies for answering the questions with the frequency of usage being shown in the figure below.

Figure 8 NNS use of direct and indirect refusal
Whilst both groups used direct and indirect refusal there was a significant difference in frequency of use between the NS and NNS speakers as the figures above illustrate. The NNS were much more likely to use a direct refusal than the NS speakers, which is in line with the studies highlighted in the literature review. The exact number of refusals by group is shown in the figure below.

Figure 9 NS use of direct and indirect refusal

Figure 10 Comparison of NS and NNS direct and indirect refusals
It was also surprising given the findings of previous studies of Saudi refusal strategies which suggested that “sorry” would not be used was that both groups used the utterances “sorry”, “I am sorry”, “I am so sorry”, “Thanks”, and “No, but thanks” however this may be due to the previously highlighted variations in UK English and American English as UK English makes greater use of these phrases than American. As such, given the average time in the UK of 2/3 years for the NNS it is likely that there has been an adaptation to achieve cultural acclimatization and avoid FTA with UK English speakers. These responses also indicate the high levels of politeness that is being attempted by both groups in refusal speech acts.

This focus on politeness was also evaluated in relation to interlocutor status, as indications were that status can affect both the strategies and types of refusal speech acts that are utilized (Sattar et al, 2011, Beebe et al, 1990). In this respect neither group showed criticism, although it was noted that when speaking with an interlocutor of higher social status, more utterances of polite words were utilized. Figure 1

Both groups employed mixed statements of regret, with consideration of the interlocutor’s feelings. The statements were meant to justify the reason for the refusal and show feelings to the interlocutor. None of the group showed criticism when speaking to someone of higher status, in contrast to the situation when refusing those of equal or lower status when there was criticism. The NNS used harsh words such as “Don’t be silly” and “Don’t be stupid” when refusing in answer to question 6, where a lady expressed her
feelings after breaking the cutlery. It appears that the speakers did not mean to be rude, but the relayed message seemed offensive owing to the words used. There respondents never used any harsh words with those of higher status.

Most of the NNS used English with British people every day. This could have resulted in the similarities in the refusal strategies, as it suggests that NNS have adapted to the socio-cultural roles of the British people, as illustrated by the frequency of reason giving for each scenario for NNS speakers.

**Figure 11 Refusal with reasons (NNS)**

When this is compared to the reason giving behaviour of NS speakers, as shown in the figure below, it can be seen that there are broad similarities over when a reason is given which suggests that the Saudi speakers are adopting a UK culture approach to giving reasons for refusal when speaking English.

**Figure 12 Refusal with reason (NS)**
This is in line with the work of Beebe et al. (1990) and Saller et al. (2011) who indicate that increased exposure to a non-native language encourages adoption of similar refusal and politeness processes to avoid FTA. However, despite some general similarities a deeper evaluation of the data revealed that NS refuse by giving a reason when they refuse a request. Whereas NNS tend to give a reason in close relationship and avoid giving reason to professional relationships (See DCT in Appendices).
Having identified that both NS and NNS use direct and indirect refusals and that there is some variation in when reason giving is used as a strategy, given the indications that exposure to a non-native language can increase pragmatic ability and adoption of the second language customs in relation to refusal, some inferential data analysis was also conducted.

### 4.4 Inferential data analysis

The chi-square test of association of the time spent in the UK by the Non-native Saudi speaker’s shows that the responses of the NNS are comparable to the responses of the NS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TimeInUK</th>
<th>17.235^a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>17.235^a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Df</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig.</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above tables show the significance of the results. (Figure 8).

It shows the significance of the results when compared.
What the test statistics indicate is that there is a significant correlation between time spent in the UK and the frequency at which NNS engage in communication with native speakers of British English and the refusal strategies they employ.

The actual result of the chi-square goodness-of-fit test shows that our result is statistically significant: $\chi^2(2) = 17.235, p < .0005$. This rejects the null hypothesis and proves that there are significant differences in the time in months spent in the UK. The time spent in the UK is a major factor affecting the speech acts of NNS and the refusal pattern. It appears therefore, that the longer the stay was, the more adaptation to the socio-cultural norms of the British occurred.

We can, therefore, reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there are statistically significant. The months that had the least NNS are 7 months ($N = 7$) and a majority had stayed for 30 months ($N = 30$).

4.5 Summary

The results presented here have identified that whilst both NS and NNS use direct and indirect strategies for refusal there is a variation in the frequency of their use. However, it has also been highlighted that there is a statistically significant correlation between length of stay in the UK and exposure to NS speakers of UK English and the adoption of pragmatically competent and socially acceptable norms of refusal for NNS Saudi speakers when speaking with NS. There is also an indication of variation in relation to social status of the interlocutor which appears to conform to the findings of studies using Asian, Arabic, American English and UK English speakers in terms of the speech act of refusal. The implications of these will be considered in the final chapter.
5 Chapter Five: Discussion and Limitations

5.1 Discussion

The aim of this work was to evaluate the refusal patterns of the native speakers of British English (NS) and Non-native Saudi speakers (NNS). Using as a foundation Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory and the work of Nelson (2002) which considered the diminishment of FTA through effective refusal strategies. The suggestion in the literature review as that politeness and thus the use of direct or indirect refusal strategies are universal but frequency of usage can be dependent on culture. It was also noted in the literature review that social status of the interlocutor also impacted on the types of refusal strategies deployed and that this can also be variable in terms of cultural effects.

5.2 Key Findings

By asking 12 NS of British English and 18 NNS Saudi speakers to give a refusal based on how they perceived the question, it was found that both cohorts used direct and indirect strategies. However the NS used a greater number of direct refusals (81%) against only 58% of the NS speakers. This is however potentially due to information transfer for the NNS.

In the context of politeness there was evidence of attempts by both groups to reduce FTA through the use of mixed statements and the supply of a reason for their refusal. There were very few instance where a single statement of refusal was given, but this was also accompanied by a word of regret further underlining the desire to save face and reduce the impact of the FTA caused by the refusal.

A key indication was that interlocutor status impacted significantly on the way a refusal was framed. The NS speakers used conventional forms with a mixture of a reason, a statement of regret and a suggestion in different order. The Saudi speakers used conventional forms with five subjects giving a reason followed by a statement of regret. (E.g. “I’m sorry but I busy”..). The similarity here is in the use of directness. This result supports the finding of (AlShawali 1997) in terms of directness for the Saudi speakers and also reinforces Al-Kahtani’s (2005) study which suggests Saudi speakers tend to use reason when refusing a request for person of a higher status. Most significantly, it emphasizes the findings of Hussein (1995) which signposted that the Arab speakers used indirect refusals with acquaintances of equal status and with very close friends of unequal status.
It was also identified that there was a significant correlation between length of stay in the UK for NNS and use of similar patterns of refusal acts to NS, which suggests that there whilst there are cultural impacts on refusal strategies, consistent and prolonged exposure to NS can allow for adaption to meet social and cultural norms.

5.3 Implications of the Findings

One of the additional findings of the work is that none of the respondents gave a suggestion in response to the interlocutor’s requests, suggesting a desire to avoid causing FTA and a demonstration of consideration for the feelings of the interlocutor. However, there was some variation in what was considered “polite”, echoing the concerns about politeness theory and its vague nature (Eelen, 2001). Whilst face is a universal concept integral to the formation of positive values that defines interaction, it is dependent on certain social attributes of the individual in relation to others (Erving 1967). Furthermore as Watts (2003) highlights, this behaviour shaped by the boundaries of cultural and linguistic, behaviours which was evident in the outcomes of this work. The implication of this in relation to teaching NNS the appropriate refusal strategies is that there needs to be an associated learning of cultural norms of politeness for the language being taught.

From the findings, it is evident that most of the NNS used British English every week except for one speaker. The frequency of use shows that use of the language creates adaptation to the socio-cultural norms held by the British speakers, which it is tentatively suggested is the reason for the similarities in response patterns. Despite only 5 NNS having used English with a British friend, most of the NNS admitted to using the university and amenity centers, post office, shops, and restaurants. The use of the English with people besides friends suggests a great social distance which can impede the development of pragmatic competency because the interlocutor may fail to correct the English in the way a friend or close acquaintance may do.

In all cases, there were more indirect responses by the Saudis than with the native English speakers. For the British speakers, the rate of indirect responses was 81%. This means that the Saudis had their interlocutor in mind and gave responses that would not offend or affect him/her. In contrast the NS transferred the message in truth without fear of offending the interlocutor. This shows that the NNS made a cautious choice of words to avoid using the
English vocabulary incorrectly. The implication here is that NNS are potentially more aware of causing offence than NS and thus this would need to be investigated further in future studies.

Another similarity between the NS and the NNS is that indirect responses were accompanied by long explanations, which are negotiation acts to prevent the listener from the face-threatening act that accompanies a refusal. It is the reason that most of the refusals were accompanied by regret or a statement explaining why. The use of the words “I am sorry,” “sorry,” and “thanks” accompanied most responses to reduce the impact of the FTA. This again reinforces the universality of aiming for politeness, but again does appear to be culture and context dependent.

NS did not show criticism in their refusal responses and had consideration for the interlocutor feelings. Some of the NNS refusal responses showed criticism. The NNS used more criticism when responding to requests. Despite showing criticism, the NNS managed to use the word “sorry” in their responses. This means that there may a chance that the speakers did not intend to show criticism because they were using the rules of their native language with English words to compose the sentences (Maryam 2012), although this is not fully clear and is highlighted as a potential limitation of the work.

In terms of pragmatic competence which was indicated as being a strong indicator of effective use of refusal strategies by NNS, there was an indication of a generally good level in this area. There was some indication of inappropriate phrasing but this may have been due to lack of language knowledge or an overlay of the educational levels being applied to the social status of the interlocutor who was of lower status in these case.

A major implication is the impact of length of stay in the UK on the use of refusal strategies and evidence of politeness that matches UK social norms. The NNS cohort, had on average been in the UK for more than two years which confirms the view that extended exposure to a non-native language and observance of socio-cultural norms can impact on the refusal strategies adopted. Pragmatic competence is learned from interaction with the culture and speakers of the foreign language rather than from learning the mechanics of the second language, as shown by the NNS in Britain who demonstrated high levels of pragmatic competence illustrated by their similarities to the refusal strategies of the NS.
5.4 Limitations of the study

It is recognised that the findings were based on the respondents’ responses to written questions. There is a chance that the responses could have been different if the same question were asked in a real-world scenario, depending on the practical mood of the respondent and the approach used by the interlocutor. The responses, however, indicated that both the NS and NNS respondents had the feelings of the interlocutor at heart in refusing. The only difference came in what each respondent considered polite. What the interlocutor may have considered impolite could have been intended by the user to be polite. What is also unclear is whether the NNS translated from their native language before answering, which as Farnia and Wu (2012) noted was a strategy adopted by Chinese and Malaysians and may have impacted on the choice of direct or indirect refusal. This is thus an area that would benefit from further investigation.

A further limitation is recognised in the data analysis. In the data collection, selecting speech acts from ten prompts does not really reflect real cultural linguistics differences. In addition, it should be pointed out these "speech acts" can be confused with individual variables. In other words, discourse analysis tests are not definite or unarguable results. According to Zohra Eslami-Rasekh (2005, p. 202), a “discourse analysis task does not exactly reflect the richness and complexity of natural data.” As such, a wider more naturalistic study would be beneficial to confirm the preliminary indications of this work.

5.5 Concluding remarks

The paper has analyzed the speech acts of two groups, focusing on the refusal strategies used by the respondents in various cases with both groups and individuals in response to the same questions. The responses were based more heavily on the impact of the native language of the speaker than on the second language learned. The findings have indicated that there is a clear correlation between length of stay in the UK and use of UK socio-cultural norms in relation to refusal speech acts. In addition, there is an indication of the existence of universal strategies for direct and indirect refusals and the incorporation of politeness to ensure that offence is not caused to the interlocutor. The other key finding is that of the impact of social status on how a refusal is presented, and whether criticism, apology and regret are utilized. The work which focused on Saudi NNS and UK English NS has confirmed other works using American English NS and either Asian or Arabic NNS and thus underlined the value of understanding the role of socio-cultural knowledge and pragmatic competence in the development of effective use of
refusal strategies for language learners. At the same time, there is indications of a need for further evaluation and investigation in the area.

Overall, the findings have suggested that potentially the designers of materials for foreign learners must give pragmatic competencies some weight in consideration of the socio-cultural aspects of the language being taught. Teaching of the second language should be a continuous learning process with tests at every stage of the way to ensure that the learner does not stop learning the language. The learners should be given enough content to help them develop their skills in both speaking and writing (Gilks 2009). The materials should enable the learner to acquire pragmatic competency skills in the language and provide activities which can help the learner to acquire the required pragmatic competency.

The purpose of this work was to investigate the approaches taken by Saudi NNS and UK English NS in the use of refusal speech acts and to identify differences and similarities. Whilst only small scale with identified limitations, insights have been achieved that can be developed further in future studies.

Word count (12017 words)
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Appendix A

A sample of a completed NS DCT

Appendix B

A sample of a completed NNS DCT
Appendix A

Refusal strategies for Native speakers (NS)

Consent Form

Aim of the project: This questionnaire aims at identifying similarities or differences between refusal patterns (saying: No) between native speakers of British English and non-native speakers of English (Saudi's who study in the UK). This questionnaire was adopted from Nelson's DCT and was used in the research conducted by Nelson et al., 2002 “Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Strategy use in Egyptian Arabic and American English Refusals”

What you will be asked to do: Refuse in all hypothetical situations

How the data collected will be used: The data will be analysed and used anonymously for an MA dissertation project.

You are asked to participate in a MA dissertation project. I will keep all personal information completely confidential and though I may describe and analyse the data, all data will be presented with complete anonymity. Additionally you are free to withdraw from participation at any time with no need for explanation.

Finally, if you would like a copy of a paper that presents preliminary results from this study (based on other participants’ data/responses), please email: @gmail.com and I will send that to you.

Thank you for your help!

1. Please tick

☐ I confirm that I have read and understand the information above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

☐ I agree to take part in the above-named survey.

2. GENDER

☐ Male

☐ Female
3. AGE:


4. Current Educational Level

☐ Bachelors
☐ Masters
☐ Ph.D
☐ Other (Please Specify):


5. Direction to answer: Please insert your answer in the empty box. Pretend you are the person in the situation. You must refuse all requests, offers, invitations, and offers. Respond as you would in actual conversation.

*1-You are in your third year of college. You attend classes and you take really good notes. Your classmate often misses a class and asks you for the lecture notes. On this occasion, your classmate says, ‘Oh no! We have an exam tomorrow but I don’t have the notes from the last week. I am sorry to ask you this, but could you please lend me your notes once again?’ How would refuse?

*2-You are the president of a printing company. A salesman from a company that sells paper invites you to an expensive dinner. The salesman says, ‘We have met several times to discuss your purchase of my company’s products. I was wondering if you would like to be my guest at the Royal Remington (expensive restaurant) in order to firm up the contract.’ How would refuse?

*3-You are a top executive at a very large accounting firm. One day the boss calls you into his office. He says, ‘Next Sunday my wife and I are having a little party. I know it’s short notice, but I’m hoping that all of my top executives will be there with their spouses. How would refuse?.
*4-You’re at a friend’s house watching TV. The friend offers you a snack. You turn it down saying that you’ve gained some weight and don’t feel comfortable in your new clothes. Your friend says, ‘Hey, why don’t you try this new diet I’ve been telling you about?’ .How would you refuse?.

*5-You’re at your desk trying to find a report that your boss just asked for. While you’re searching through the mess on your desk, your boss walks over and says, ‘You know, maybe you should try and organize yourself better. I always write myself little notes to remind me of the things. Perhaps you should give it a try.’.How would you refuse?.

*6-You arrive home and notice that your cleaning lady is extremely upset. She come rushing to you and says, ‘Oh God, I’m so sorry! I had an awful accident. While I was cleaning I bumped into the tables and your china vase fell and broke. I just feel terrible about it. I insist on paying for it.’ .How would you refuse?.

*7-You’re at a friend’s house for lunch. Your friend says, ‘How about another piece of cake?’.How would you refuse?.

*8-A friend invites you to dinner, but you really can’t stand this friend’s fiancé. Your friend says, ‘How about coming over for dinner Saturday night? We’re having a small dinner party.’.How would you refuse?.

*9-You have been working in an advertising agency for some time. The boss offers you a raise and a promotion, but it involves moving. You don’t want to go. Today the boss calls you into his office. He says, ‘I’d like to offer you an executive position in our new offices in Yolk town (smaller town). It’s a great town, only three hours from here by plane. And a nice raise comes with the position.’ How would you refuse?.

*10-You are at the office in a meeting with your boss. It is getting close to the end of the day and you want to leave work. But your boss says, ‘If you don’t mind, I’d like you to spend an extra hour or two tonight so that we can finish this.’.How would you refuse?.
Appendix B
Refusal strategies for Non-Native speakers (NNS)

Consent Form

**Aim of the project:** This questionnaire aims at identifying similarities or differences between refusal patterns (saying: No) between native speakers of British English and non-native speakers of English (Saudi’s who study in the UK). This questionnaire was adopted from Nelson's DCT and was used in the research conducted by Nelson et al., 2002 “Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Strategy use in Egyptian Arabic and American English Refusals”

**What you will be asked to do: Refuse in all hypothetical situations**

**How the data collected will be used:** The data will be analysed and used anonymously for an MA dissertation project. You are asked to participate in a MA dissertation project. I will keep all personal information completely confidential and though I may describe and analyse the data, all data will be presented with complete anonymity. Additionally you are free to withdraw from participation at any time with no need for explanation.

Finally, if you would like a copy of a paper that presents preliminary results from this study (based on other participants’ data/responses), please email @gmail.com and I will send that to you.

Thank you for your help!

1. Please tick

☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the information above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
☐ I agree to take part in the above-named survey.

2. Gender

☐ Male
☐ Female
3. Age:

4. Current Educational level

☐ Bachelors
☐ Masters
☐ Ph.D
☐ Other (Please Specify):

5. How long have you been in UK?

6. Have you taken the IELTS (International English Language Testing System)?

☐ Yes - move to the next questions
☐ No - move to question 9

7. What is your IELTS level?

8. When did you take the IELTS? Please specify month and year.

9. Do you speak English with British people?
10. How often do you speak English with British people?

- Everyday
- Once a week
- Twice a week
- More than twice a week

11. Where do you use your English with British people? You can choose more than one answer.

- At the restaurant/shop/post office
- In university with teachers and classmates
- I have a British friend
- Other (Please Specify):

12. Direction to answer: Please insert your answer in the empty box. Pretend you are the person in the situation. You must refuse all requests, offers, invitations, and offers. Respond as you would in actual conversation.

*1 - You are in your third year of college. You attend classes and you take really good notes. Your classmate often misses a class and asks you for the lecture notes. On this occasion, your classmate says, ‘Oh no! We have an exam tomorrow but I don’t have the notes from the last week. I am sorry to ask you this, but could you please lend me your notes once again?’ How would you refuse?

*2 - You are the president of a printing company. A salesman from a company that sells paper invites you to an expensive dinner. The salesman says, ‘We have met several times to discuss your purchase of my company’s products. I was wondering if you would like to be my guest at the Royal Remington (expensive restaurant) in order to firm up the contract.’ How would you refuse?
*3-You are a top executive at a very large accounting firm. One day the boss calls you into his office. He says, ‘Next Sunday my wife and I are having a little party. I know it’s short notice, but I’m hoping that all of my top executives will be there with their spouses. How would you refuse?.

*4-You’re at a friend’s house watching TV. The friend offers you a snack. You turn it down saying that you’ve gained some weight and don’t feel comfortable in your new clothes. Your friend says, ‘Hey, why don’t you try this new diet I’ve been telling you about?’ How would you refuse?

*5-You’re at your desk trying to find a report that your boss just asked for. While you’re searching through the mess on your desk, your boss walks over and says, ‘You know, maybe you should try and organize yourself better. I always write myself little notes to remind me of the things. Perhaps you should give it a try.’ How would you refuse?

*6-You arrive home and notice that your cleaning lady is extremely upset. She come rushing to you and says, ‘Oh God, I’m so sorry! I had an awful accident. While I was cleaning I bumped into the tables and your china vase fell and broke. I just feel terrible about it. I insist on paying for it.’ How would you refuse?

*7-You’re at a friend’s house for lunch. Your friend says, ‘How about another piece of cake?’ How would you refuse?

*8-A friend invites you to dinner, but you really can’t stand this friend’s fiancé. Your friend says, ‘How about coming over for dinner Saturday night? We’re having a small dinner party.’ How would you refuse?

*9-You have been working in an advertising agency for some time. The boss offers you a raise and a promotion, but it involves moving. You don’t want to go. Today the boss calls you into his office. He says, ‘I’d like to offer you an executive position in our new offices in Yolk town (smaller town). It’s a great town, only three hours from here by plane. And a nice raise comes with the position.’ How would you refuse?

*10-You are at the office in a meeting with your boss. It is getting close to the end of the day and you want to leave work. But your boss says, ‘If you don’t mind, I’d like you to spend an extra hour or two tonight so
that we can finish this.’ How would you refuse?