The Perception of Status: The Refusal Strategies as Articulated by Tunisian EFL Teachers and British Speakers of English

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Abstract

The current research aims to find out if the perception of status is culture related. To this end, it compares the refusal strategies articulated by two groups of people namely, Tunisian EFL teachers who are currently working at the University of Jeddah and a group of British speakers when communicating with others with higher, equal, or lower status than theirs. Results indicated that the Tunisian group is much more sensitive to status than their British counterparts. The former group uses indirect refusal strategies with interlocutors of equal or higher positions but is more direct in expressing objection when talking to people with lower positions. By contrast, the British are found to be less sensitive to status as their answers were consistent irrespective of their interlocutors' status. As a matter of fact, social status for the British group has nothing to do with the educational level or occupation while the opposite is true for the Tunisian group. The findings of the present paper are congruent with other studies which compared the Western and the Arab perceptions of status and found that the latter's sensitivity to status originates from socio- cultural norms which underpins hierarchical social relationships.

Keywords: social status, culture, status perception, speech acts, direct and indirect refusal strategies

1. Introduction

Linguists have always researched different aspects of pragmatics with the aim to better comprehend how languages are used. This differs according to the culture, the social class the nterlocutors belong to. In the field of Intercultural Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication, Trosborg (2010) and Kecskes (2014), for example, dedicated their research to explore how communicative behaviors differ across cultures and found that in each community they explored, individuals speak differently. Around the world, language users convey speech acts such as appreciation or apology to name a few. Trosborg (2010) and Kecskes (2014) added that the differences in the ways of speaking are "profound and systematic". These differences reflect the different cultural and hierarchical values which, in turn, result in the use of different communicative strategies and tools across communities when articulating the same speech act. This explains why some L2 learners find difficulties in acquiring and using the target language as they lack communicative and pragmatic competence to comprehend it because it goes beyond the mere understanding of the semantic meaning of a given utterance. To put it in Ghazanfari et al. (2013) words "speaking a language means more than uttering a number of grammatically decent sentences" (p.51). When it comes to interaction and as claimed by Gould (2002), status inequality is foregrounded between the different interlocutors. Status, in this respect, is defined as the "prestige" enjoyed by some individuals according to their position in society. Such attribution of status is due to the individuals' features, portraits or deeds which are perceived as immitigable or valuable (Anderson et al., 2015).

Status is also regarded as the acknowledged position someone gets in a social group. This position is based on "esteem or respect". The main result of this acquired status is the degree of influence the person exercises on the others' behaviors and attitudes without any sort of reward or threat.

In another respect and in relation to power, it is conventionally agreed that the higher your status is, the more power and influence you have. Duboi et al. (2015) explored the relationship between social class and status and found that upper- class people evidently acquire both power and status. Across a series of sociolinguistic research, some authors asserted that individuals who perceive themselves having a higher power treat others less fairly when compared to those who perceive themselves less powerful. In terms of status, however, those who see themselves having a higher status deal with others quite fairly while their counterparts with lower status do the opposite. This implies that even though status and power seem to be two terms which are used interchangeably, they, in fact, have opposite meanings when answering the question how fair individuals are when dealing with others.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speech Acts

In linguistics, speech acts are described as the utterance performed by someone to serve a certain communicative function. Individuals perform speech acts when complimenting, greeting, complaining, apologizing. These speech acts present real- life interactions as they do not only show information knowledge but also perform an action. The use of these speech acts, however, is a bit intricate especially when

it comes to second language learners who are supposed to use these acts appropriately within a particular culture. SLL or FLL may find it difficult to use speech acts because of their ignorance of the idiomatic expression or the cultural aspects of the language being learnt.

2.2 Speech Acts of Refusal

When communicating with others, individuals make use of a bunch of speech acts which are of a broad seminal category as classified earlier by Searle (1962) as commissive, expressive, directive or representative. These acts may also be more particular or specific including requests, complaints, apologies, and refusals. Those classifications are suggested by Kasper and Rose (1999). The same authors define refusals as the negative answer to requests, offers and suggestions. Describing the act of refusing, Jorda, et al. (2009) commented that it " is a complex issue, as the speaker directly or indirectly says no to his/her interlocutor's request, invitation or suggestion" (P.140). Chen (1996) asserted that refusal is often articulated through indirect strategies. These strategies necessitate a high competency level in pragmatics. The same author insisted that if the refusing scenario is challenging to native speakers (NS), it is much more intricate for non-native speakers (NNS) when interacting with NS as this may lead to misunderstanding and thus to communication failure. This failure may be attributed to the limited level of pragmatic proficiency or to the lack of the socio- cultural knowledge of the second language. This, in turn, results in pragmatic inappropriateness and the wrong use of appropriate refusal strategies. To avoid such failure, authors as Safont (2005), argued that teaching pragmatic needs to be based on the findings of inter-language pragmatic research. He added that within an EFL context, learners should be equipped with a large "repertoire of routines" that enables them to interact effectively and proficiently with the different social situations they may encounter. A considerable part that consists of this repertoire is the refusal strategies.

In another vein, the importance of the speech acts of refusal stemmed from the frequent use of such acts in our daily life. This entails the need of a high level of competency in terms of pragmatics to appropriately use them. Beebe et al. (1990) classified refusals into two kinds namely, direct and indirect. As the name implies the former refers to any negative response that is articulated explicitly where a "no" answer is clearly stated by the speaker. These direct strategies are divided into two subtypes: performative verb "I refuse" and non- performative statements ("I can't"; "I don't think so").

The indirect strategies, on the other hand, refer to refusals articulated by justifying negative responses in order to maintain politeness. The table below illustrates the subcategories of direct and indirect refusals with examples:

Table 1. The subcategories of direct and indirect refusals with examples

Subtype	Example
Regret	I am sorry
Wish	I wish I could
Giving excuses, reasons, and explanations	I have another thing to
Giving alternatives	What about……
Setting conditions for past or future positive responses	Remember when I was available last week, I didn't refuse your request.
Promise	I promise to do it soon
Showing principles	This contrasts my principles
Presenting proper beliefs	I don't believe I this
Dissuading the interlocutor (through criticizing, self defense, threatening…etc)	Do you think this is appropriate?
Showing lack of motivation	Is this necessary now ?
Avoidance	Raising another issue
Postponement	I'll think of it

2.3 Cross- Cultural Dimensions of Refusals

According to Wolfson (1989), social norms vary across cultures and communities which explains the difference in performing speech acts across these communities. Thus, the ability to perform a certain speech act in a certain language is a reflection of the sociolinguistic competency level individuals have. This reflects their deep knowledge of the socio-cultural norms that govern language use. In the same respect, Xiao (2015) added that that the high proficiency level in the target language (TL) is not necessarily an accountable predictor of native-like performance.

Wierzbicka (2003) carried out a comparative study between the performance of refusals among American English, Hebrew and Japanese speakers. She found considerable differences in how refusals are performed. She noted that it is not a common feature of the American community to say "no" in order to express refusal as it is the case in Hebrew. She added that the Americans tend to say something more by giving explanations for example. The Japanese, on the other hand, resort to avoidance. They try not to use the word "no" altogether especially when turning down an offer or a request or expressing disagreement. In such situations, the Japanese opt to remain silent. Avoidance is owed to the fear of disturbing the harmony and agreement among the group.

Endraswara (2010) studied the Javanese refusal strategies performance. The author argued that this group is naturally indirect, and the performance of speech acts is full of symbols as they tend to express their ideas in an indirect way. To quote Waluyani (2017), "due to that in performing refusal in their first language, Javanese will tend to use indirect strategy, and to use different speech level, depending on the status of the [interlocutor]" (p.334).

Chen, Ye, and Zhang (1995) carried out an extensive study on the refusal strategies employed by the Chinese. The participants in this research were over 100 adults. These authors found that the Chinese participants mainly use two main types of refusals: substantive which is an intended refusal and ritual which shows the speaker's concern for the hearer who is offering or inviting. Results indicated that the main substantive refusal strategy used by the Chinese is 'giving reasons' which helps the refuser justify his/her refusal. Another refusal strategy used is 'giving alternatives' which saves the speaker without any kind of disruption.

Another contribution to the cross- cultural analysis of the refusal strategies was carried out by Félix-Brasdefer (2003) who compared between Americans speaking English, advanced American learners of Spanish and Latin Americans in order to investigate the politeness strategies used by each group when declining invitations. As a matter of fact, the researcher uses open- role plays with speakers of different kinds of status to elicit information. Interestingly, no major difference was spotted among the three groups of participants in terms of the level of directness. However, it was noticed that the first group was more direct when refusing, the second was in an intermediate position while the last group was not able to express a clear- cut 'no' which they consider a threatening situation.

The work of Al-Issa (1998) is an example from the eastern culture as he examined the refusal strategies articulated by the Jordanians and compared them to the Americans. He found that the former used more indirect refusal strategies with long explanations and regret statements. Simiarly, Al-Eryani (2007) conducted a contrastive study between Yemeni students and Native Americans and came to the same conclusion as Al- Issa (1998)'s. The Saudis, on the other hand, informed research carried out by Al-Shalawi (1997) who investigated their refusal strategies as compared to the Americans and confirmed that the Saudi participants tend to use more indirect strategies when turning down a request or an invitation especially when addressing a hearer of higher status than theirs.

It is worthy to note that all the above mentioned research corroborate previous findings that the high proficiency level in a language is not necessarily congruent with the same level of socio- cultural knowledge and values. Takahashi and Beebe's (1987), for instance, asserted the lack of any relation between pragmatic transfer and language proficiency. Jorda et al. (2009) contended that pragmatic inappropriateness is a frequent issue and suggested that developmental perspective should be adopted as well as more attention should be given to the individual and contextual factors that influence language use and acquisition in order to address such issue and reach pragmatic competence.

2.4 Social Status and the Use of Refusal Strategies

Distinguishing people according to their social group is undeniably human nature which explains the existence of different social statuses in almost all human societies (Gruenfeld&Tiedens, 2010). Some researchers go further to argue that detecting or recognizing one's status is particularly a social skill. As a matter of fact, those who are at the top of the status hierarchy reap many advantages which could be psychological, social and even physiological (Pettit &Sivanathan, 2012). In addition, some other researchers demonstrated that speech acts can be influenced by the interlocutor's status. An example of these speech acts are the refusal strategies whose frequency of use is said to be influenced by the interlocutor's status. Tuncer (2016), in this respect, claimed that "the higher the interlocutor's status is, the more refusal strategies the participants employ" (p.71).

2.5 Politeness Strategy of Speech Acts

The politeness strategies, in psycholinguistics and conversation analysis, are referred to as speech acts which reflect interest in others and decrease threats to self- esteem in social situations. In effect, these strategies are used to reduce an offensive feeling by behaving more friendly. Moreover, such strategies include using jokes, question tags, or giving compliments…etc. Brown and Levinson (1987), who introduced the politeness theory, contended that speakers should pay attention to such main factors when articulating polite utterances as power, distance, and ranking imposition.

Despite being a universal phenomenon, politeness has always been explained and understood according to the cultural norms adopted by the speakers of a certain language (Eelen, 2001). The same author went further to add that such norms do not only differ at the national level but differences may appear at a regional level as well. In the same line of thought, Duranti (2000) asserted that culture is a system of practice which perceives that each culture has its own politeness patterns. Accordingly, when speaking with others from different cultures, an individual should follow these politeness patterns of those cultures in order to avoid any kind of misunderstanding.In their book speech acts and politeness across languages and cultures, Zarobe and Zarobe (2012) contended that both variables; namely speech acts and politeness are two phenomena that attracted the attention of scholars as they are universal and language and culture- specific at the same time. Accordingly, different strategies of speech acts and politeness were employed by speakers from different origins.

Scollon et al. (2012) suggested three types to the politeness system namely, deference,

solidarity and hierarchical and presented two main factors that would help distinguish between these types: relationships and social distance. A typical example of deference is when two professionals are communicating with each other. Both have the same status but barely know each other in person, which explains their use of deferential terms such as "Ms. Or Mrs.". In the solidarity system, the interlocutors are of equal status and have close relationships. Thus, they employ politeness strategies of involvement that show the extent to which they are close. The hierarchical type of politeness, on the other hand, the participants perceive themselves as having different social statuses and make use of varied strategies to communicate. For example, the lower status interlocutors use independent strategies whereas the higher status counterparts employ involvement strategies. In general terms, deference and solidarity are symmetrical types of politeness where the same politeness strategies are used interchangeably between the interlocutors while the hierarchical type, as the name implies, is asymmetrical. The positions of the interlocutors are high and subordinate.

3. Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

          a.   Is the Tunisian and British informants' choice of refusal strategies influenced by the interlocutor's status?

  b.   How do both groups of informants make use of refusals?

          c.   Is the Tunisian informants' choice of refusal strategies influenced by their native language?

          d.   Is there any discrepancy between the Tunisian subjects' pragmatic and linguistic knowledge?

4. Method

4.1 Subjects

A total number of 80 informants contributed to the conduct of the current research by responding to the discourse completion test (DCT). 40 participants were Tunisian teachers of English currently working at the University of Jeddah while the other 40 subjects were British native speakers of English who are also university teachers in Birmingham. For the sake of consistency and convenience, most of the teachers chosen have the same teaching experience number of years and no particular age variation between them was spotted. The teaching profession was chosen in order to find out any discrepancy between the subjects' pragmatic and linguistic knowledge.

The graphs below indicate the slight difference spotted in the age distribution and gender between the two groups of informants:
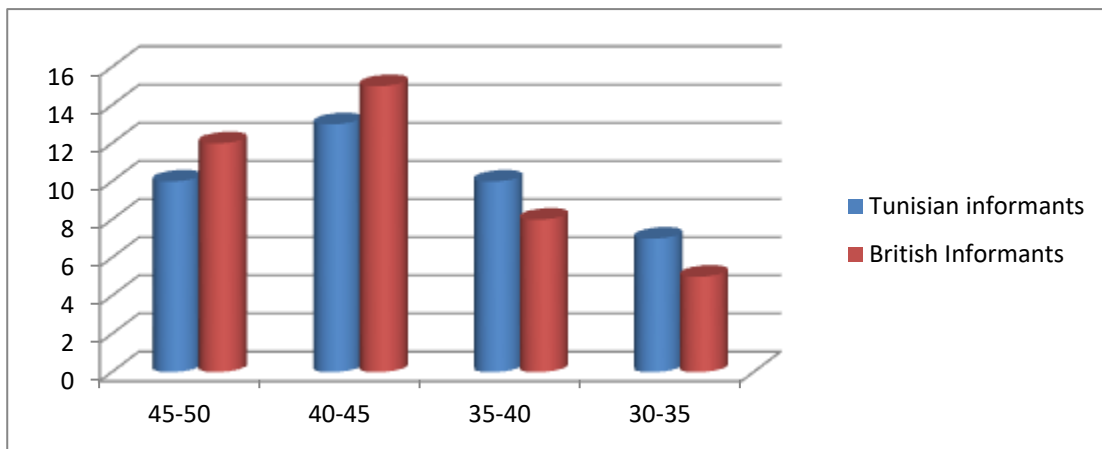

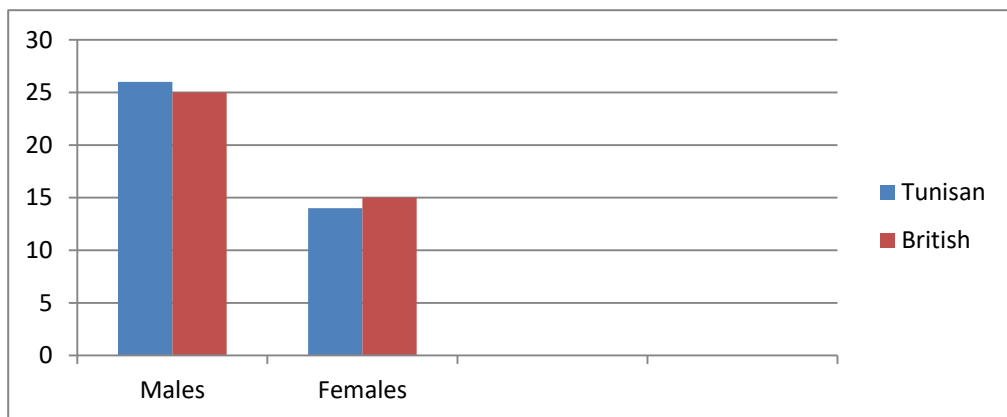Figure 1. The Tunisian and the British groups age distribution

Figure 2. The Tunisian and the British groups distribution by gender

4.2 Instruments

The one instrument for data collection used in this paper is the discourse completion test (DCT) whose advantages were enlisted by Nurani (2009). She argued that it helps researchers obtain a considerable amount of data in a short time. It also helps initiate "model responses" that are produced in spontaneous speeches. The same author also described the DCT as the "appropriate instrument for inter-language pragmatic research because it can be applied directly to participants coming from different cultural backgrounds" (p.667). The DCT in the current research consists of three requests, three suggestions, three offers and three invitations in which the subjects should turn down the given eliciting speech acts to one lower, one equal, and one higher interlocutor.

The 12 prompt situations included in the DCT here are specified in the following contexts:

1. **Request refusal:**

   - A maid request for a day-off (day-off)

   - A colleague's request for a remote control of the overhead projector (remote control)

   - A dean's request to attend an afternoon meeting (meeting)

2. **Invitations refusal:**

   - A student's graduation party (graduation party)

   - A friend's birthday party (birthday party)

   - A vice- dean's wedding party (wedding party)

3. **Offer refusal:**

   - A maid's offer to prepare more coffee (more coffee)

   - A friend's offer to pay a meal (meal)

   - The dean's offer to get overtime (overtime)

4. **Suggestion refusal:**

   - A student's suggestion to change the timetable (timetable)

   - A friend's suggestion to join a running group (running group)

   - The dean's suggestion to teach a different subject (different subject)

The current research aims to investigate the informants' sensitivity to status. To this end, the NSs and NNSs' speech acts of refusal were examined in three situations namely; when addressing interlocutors of higher, equal or lower status. Brown and Levinson (1987), for instance, argued that the degree of politeness is very much influenced by the degree of social power between the speakers. They added that social power is culture- related. Furthermore, and in order to confirm the relation between status perception and one's own culture, the NNSs' (in our case the Tunisian informants) pragmatic failure was investigated. Indeed, this pragmatic failure is attributed to L1 interference. In this very respect, Kasper (1992) proposed that data should be set and then compared at three parallel levels; the learners' L1 data, the same learners' IL data, and the data elicited from the NSs of the target language (pp. 223-224). As a matter of fact, comparing L1 and L2/FL baselines confers more reliability on the research and helps find answers to the research questions.

4.3 Statistical Description and Analysis

In order to measure the main propensity and distribution of all the informants' total use of the refusal strategies, both direct and indirect, descriptive statistics were employed. To ensure the level of significance of the obtained results, a two-tailed test was used, namely; an independent t- test and the one-way ANOVA procedure. If the two means are different from one another in terms of homogeneity and distribution, Nonparametric tests, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H, will substitute the original two tests. For normality and homogeneity, the Kolmogrov-Simirnov and Levene's tests were used respectively. For a better illustration of any difference or similarities between the British and the Tunisian refusal behaviors graphic representations were also used. An overall alpha level for statistical procedures is set at $p<.05$.

5. Results

5.1 The Refusal Strategy Used According to the Interlocutor Status

The present section depicts the impact of interlocutor status on the choice of a certain refusal strategy used by the informants in this paper. It also tries to answer the first research question that is whether both the Tunisian and British participants' option for refusal strategies is influenced by the interlocutor status. Table 1 below shows the average frequency of both direct and indirect refusal strategies produced by each group with the three different types of status namely; high, equal, and low status.

Table 1. The average frequency of both direct and indirect refusal strategies produced by TG and BG with interlocutors of high, equal, and low status

		Indirect strategies			Direct strategies		
Subjects	Statistics	High status	Equal Status	Low Status	High status	Equal status	Low Status
Both groups	Mean	11.01	9.41	9.53	1.26	1.92	3.54
	SD	1.66	1.86	1.79	.83	.98	1.44
Tunisian group	Mean	8.73	7.24	7.23	.79	2.06	3.59
	SD	2.17	1.82	1.73	.89	1.03	1.16
British group	Mean	10.89	8.83	9.29	1.13	1.24	1.28
	SD	1.67	1.62	2.21	1.02	1.08	.97

5.2 Direct Strategies

Table 1 above indicates that the differences between the frequency average of the Tunisian group direct refusal strategies with interlocutors of high, equal, and low status are statistically significant. Indeed, a big deal of direct refusal strategies are produced when addressing interlocutors of low ($X=3.59$) and equal status ($X= 2.06$). However, such direct strategies are reduced when it comes to communicating with interlocutors of high-status ($X=.83$). As far as the British group is concerned, no significant change was spotted in the use of the direct strategies when communicating with others irrespective of their status. This is evidently shown in the same table where the average performances with interlocutors of high ($X= 1.13$), equal ($X= 1.24$), and low ($X= 1.28$) status are almost the same.

In order to confer more reliability on the obtained results and check if the differences between status types are significant, the Kruskal-Wallis test was employed. The test results confirmed the significant differences in the performances of the Tunisian group ($\chi2= 147.34$, df 2, p=.000) while no difference was observed in the performance of the British counterpart ($\chi2= 1.88$, df 2, p=.576). These results entail that the choice of a refusal strategy for the Tunisian group is conditioned by the interlocutor status which implies that this group is sensitive to status. By contrast, the British group is spontaneous in terms of the use of direct strategies irrespective of the interlocutor's status.

5.3 Indirect Strategies

In order to study indirect strategies, the current research makes use of 7 types of indirect refusal strategies namely; regret, reason, positive opinion, pause-filler, off-the-hook, gratitude, and criticism. The rest of the strategies were statistically insignificant and are labeled as "others" as shown in the figure below. As table 1 shows, both groups make use of more indirect strategies when addressing interlocutors of higher status. This explains the slight difference between the two groups in terms of the individual's deviation from typical refusal strategies used in the different status types. As a matter of fact, the results on the table indicate a homogeneous performance from the part of both groups. The same results were confirmed when the Kruskal-Wallis test was employed as it showed a statistical significance between both the Tunisian and the British groups in relation to the addressee's status. This implies that both groups are sensitive to the interlocutor's status when using indirect strategies. Similarly, the Kruskal-Wallis test conduct confirms a statistically significant difference between the average performances of the informants in this research in terms of refusal strategies when addressing interlocutors with different status TG ($\chi2= 14.817$, df 2, p=.000) and BG ($\chi2= 29.957$, df 2, p=.000). In other words, both groups are sensitive to status when using indirect refusal strategies. When the individual strategies (regret, reason, positive opinion, pause-filler, off-the-hook, gratitude, and criticism) are considered, only regret, gratitude, pause-filler, and criticism were found to show status-sensitive differences.

5.3.1 Strategy 1: Regret

The findings in the current research indicated that the British informants used regret with the three status types more frequently than the Tunisian counterpart did. More particularly, the British group was inclined to employ regret strategy more often with unequal status interlocutors (low and high) than with equal status interlocutors. The Tunisian group, on the other hand, was inclined to use regret more frequently with interlocutors of higher status than theirs and less frequently with equal or lower status addressees. This entails that the British group is more sensitive to unequal status than the Tunisian one when using regret strategy. Below are two situations that show the responses of both groups to unequal status interlocutors:

- **The British group:**

  (1)　Response to low status interlocutor:
- **A maid request for a day-off (day-off):** "I am sorry, but you can't get a day-off today because we have a party and I need your help to clean the house."

  (2) Response to high status interlocutor:
- **A dean's request to attend an afternoon meeting (meeting):** "I am sorry, but I have an appointment this afternoon."
- **The Tunisian group:**

  (1) Response to low status interlocutor:
- **A maid request for a day-off (day-off):** "No, today is impossible."

  (2) Response to high status interlocutor:
- **A dean's request to attend an afternoon meeting (meeting):** "Oh, I am sorry sir, I wish I could, but I have a doctor's appointment this afternoon, it is urgent"

While the British group was using regret in both situations where they expressed regret followed by explanation, the Tunisian group employed regret only with high status interlocutors while "a clear cut no" was used with people of lower status.

5.3.2 Strategy 2: Gratitude

In terms of frequency of occurrence, the Tunisian group was found to use the gratitude strategy most notably with the interlocutors of higher status while the British group used it with both high and low status addressees. This also shows the sensitivity of the British informants to unequal status interlocutors be they, high or low.

5.3.3 Strategy 3: Pause-fillers

Here again, the British informants were found to use the pause-filler strategy more frequently than their Tunisian counterparts in both equal and low-status situations, while the latter used this strategy much more frequently when addressing people of higher status. As the descriptive statistics showed, the Tunisian group employed pause- fillers five times more frequently in high-status situations than in low and equal-status situations. It is evident, here, that the Tunisian group is much more sensitive to high status than the British one. The following example shows how the Tunisian informer started his discourse with pause filler when refusing a dean's request:

- **A dean's request to attend an afternoon meeting (meeting):** "Oh, I am sorry sir, I wish I could, but I have a doctor's appointment this afternoon, it is urgent"

5.3.4 Strategy 4: Criticism

The results of this research indicated that the British informants did not use criticism at all along the twelve items on the DCT while the Tunisian group makes use of this strategy. The exclusive use of strategy entails this group's sensitivity to status. Indeed, descriptive statistics showed that 93% of the criticism strategies were employed when addressing low status interlocutors.
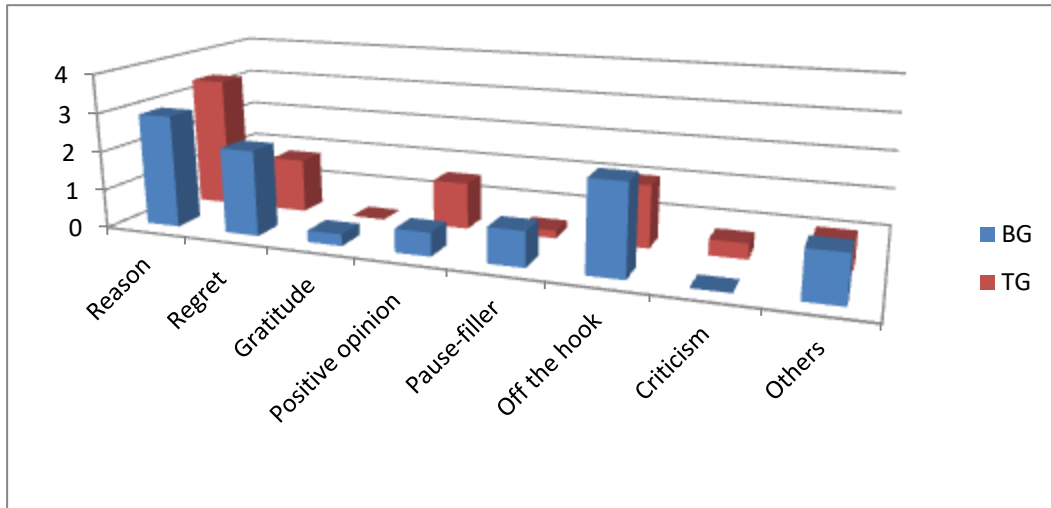

Figure 3. The Tunisian and the British groups indirect refusal strategies used with low- status interlocutors
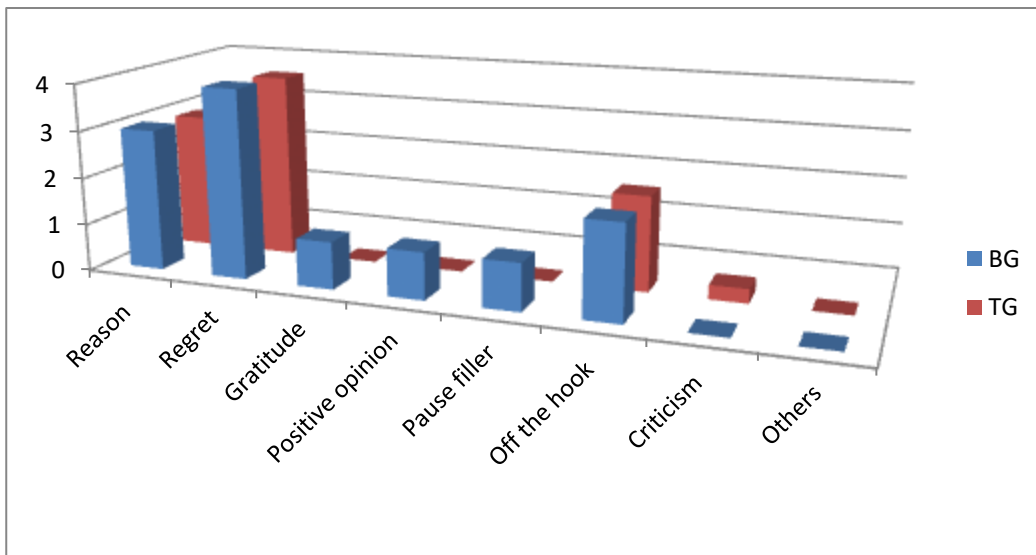

Figure 4. The Tunisian and the British groups indirect refusal strategies used with equal- status interlocutors
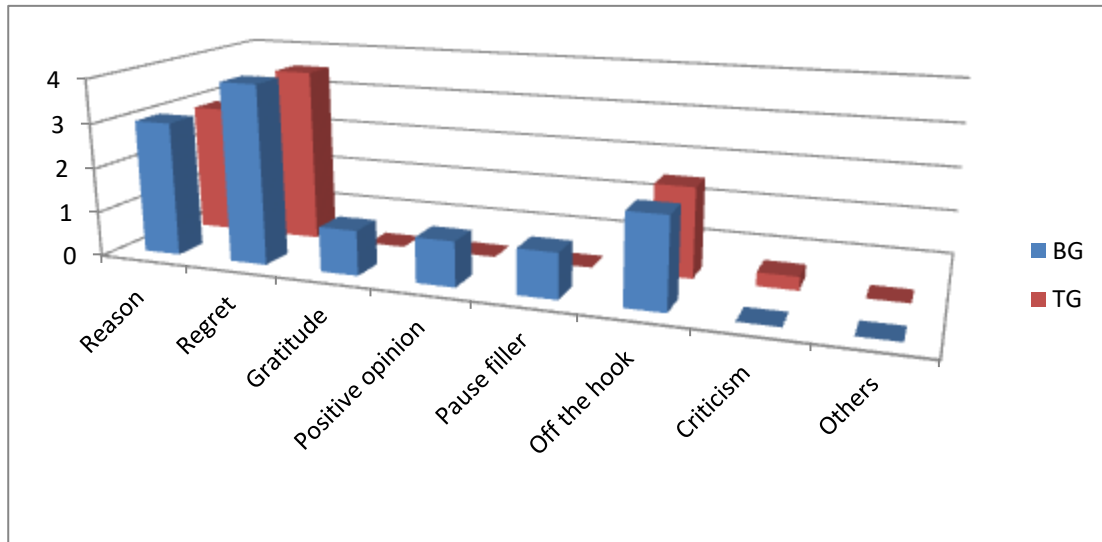
Figure 5. The Tunisian and the British groups indirect refusal strategies used with high- status interlocutors

6. Discussion

The current research aimed to establish a comparison between a group of Tunisian and a group of British speakers performing refusal strategies and found a statistically significant difference in the frequency of direct and indirect strategies used by these two groups. A statistical difference was also found in terms of the average number of strategies used in equal and unequal social status situations. Such factors as the cultural differences between the two groups as well as the resort to their mother tongue from the part of the Tunisian group give a possible explanation to such significant difference in the frequency of the refusal strategy choice. In effect, when it comes to the direct strategies, the Tunisian participants employed significantly more indirect strategies both in the equal and the higher status scenarios which entails that maintaining face was equally important in both situations. The British participants, however, tended to utilize the same refusal strategies irrespective of the interlocutor's status. This behavior reflects their egalitarian views towards people with whom they communicate as argued by Hofstede, 1997. Furthermore, and in more particular terms, the British informants make use of individual strategies as regret and gratitude when addressing their interlocutors irrespective of their social status. Tunisians, on the other hand, use such strategies only with people of higher status than theirs. The consistent difference found indicates the difference between the two groups which gives support to the argument that multilingual speakers' pragmatic choices are affected by the transfer to their L1 where the Tunisian teachers showed a tendency to use more indirect strategies especially with people of higher status in order to soften their negative responses. This goes in line with the assumption of Hofstede (1997) about status consciousness.

Overall, the results of the current research indicate that native cultural and linguistic backgrounds may influence the employment of a certain speech act as refusal. The second or the third language individual acquire minimally affect their pragmatic choices. It is still the effect of the mother tongue that seems to be sizable. This implies the limited pragmatic knowledge bilinguals, i.e., the Tunisians, in this research, have. Stavans and Webman (2018) added some more factors that would be influential in the accurate choice of a refusal strategy such as the learning goals, the extent to which the learners expose to the foreign language as well as their attitudes towards the language being learnt.

7. Study Limitations

Despite the important results found after the conduct of this research which may add to the existing literature on speech acts and refusal strategies in particular, it is important to mention some of the limitations it suffers from. The first limitation has to do with exclusive reliance on the DCT as an instrument for data collection. While this test allows the collection of a considerable amount of speech acts, it may reflect totally different data if the subjects were in more natural and spontaneous situations. Accordingly, and in order for future research to avoid such drawback the DCT, should be combined with other instruments such as role- play. Besides, the qualitative analysis of the content and the interpretations of the refusal strategies were not deeply undertaken. If done, more similarities and differences between the performances of the two groups under study could have been revealed. Another limitation has to do with the number of participants which cannot in anyway be representative of the British or the Tunisian societies. Thus, a replication of this research is highly recommended.

8. Conclusion

The current work made contrastive research between speech acts of refusal articulated by a Tunisian group and a British group. Results indicated that the Tunisian group is much more sensitive to status than their British counterparts. The former group uses indirect refusal strategies with interlocutors of equal or higher positions but is more direct in expressing objection when talking to people with lower position. By contrast, the British are found to be less sensitive to status as their answers were consistent irrespective of their interlocutors'

status.

As clarified by Rubin (1983), speech acts mirror the cultural values of a certain speech community; this study is an attempt to foreshadow the cross- linguistic and cross- cultural differences in the articulation of refusal strategies when addressing people of different types of status. This may contribute to the better understanding of both cultures namely the British and Tunisian. The same author recommended that teachers teach the appropriate use of refusal strategies so that EFL learners avoid breakdowns in cross-cultural communication. Within similar lines of thought and given the importance of the pragmatic competence that EFL learners should acquire, teaching refusal strategies and mastering the different speech acts become a necessity if a successful communication in the target language is the aim. Pedagogically speaking, Martinez - Flor and Beltran-Palanques (2013) suggested a four- phase deductive/inductive approach to help students learn and develop the refusal strategies. They added that this approach includes four phases namely, pragma-linguistic awareness, socio-pragmatic awareness, pragmatic production, and feedback on pragmatic production. In more particular terms, this approach entails that the students should be exposed to contextualized refusal speech acts and be aware of the socio- pragmatic issues of the language. Further research is needed in order to build up on the suggested approach and give more suggestions in the same respect in order to avoid pragmatic inappropriateness in the target language.

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