International Journal of Research in English Education (IJREE)

Original Article **Published online: 9 July 2025**

Explorations in Refusal and Complaining Speech Acts of Iranian EFL Learners Across Language Proficiency, Mother Tongue, Gender, and Sociocultural Factors

Shiva Shahbazi Mojarrad[1], Reza Abdi[1], Vali Mohammadi[1], and Alireza Asltaleb Maghferat*[2]

* Correspondence:
asltalebmaghferat@tabrizu.ac.ir
1. Department of ELT, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran
2. Department of English, Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran

Received: 5 September 2024
Revision: 20 June 2025
Accepted: 28 June 2025
Published online: 9 July 2025

Abstract

Pragmatic competence, a fundamental component of language ability, involves understanding a speaker's intended meaning through various communicative functions. Among these functions, speech acts such as refusals and complaints play a crucial role in everyday interactions, allowing interlocutors to convey information and perform social actions. This study examines the production of refusal and complaint speech acts by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, addressing a gap in previous research that has often overlooked the potential influence of learners' language proficiency, social status, gender, and mother tongue. Through purposive sampling, 120 participants were selected to respond to 10 role-play scenarios designed to elicit refusals and complaints. The data were analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns in speech act production. The findings reveal that most participants favored indirect strategies when expressing refusals and complaints. Moreover, the study found no significant effects of language proficiency, sociocultural background, mother tongue, or gender on how EFL learners produce these speech acts. These results contribute to a better understanding of pragmatic competence in EFL contexts and suggest that these sociolinguistic factors may have less impact on refusal and complaint strategies than previously assumed.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, speech act of complaint, speech act of refusal

© The Author(s).
Publisher: Science Academy Publications.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

1. Introduction

As a fundamental component of language ability, pragmatic competence encompasses understanding another speaker's intended meaning in performing functions and the acquisition process of this ability. Regarding communicative competence, individuals employ numerous speech acts to convey the intended meaning successfully. According to Austin (1975), speech acts are considered a set of statements by an individual that not only contain information but also include performance. Searle (1969) defined speech acts as minimal units of discourse frequently occurring in real-life interactions in many different contexts. Real-life speech acts usually encompass relations established between counterparts of a community. Speech acts consist of multiple acts performed at once that are occasionally differentiated by the intention of a certain speaker. They are regarded as the act of saying and performing something, like requesting or promising, and the way of affecting the audience. Speech acts play a role as they are applied in the speech community of interlocutors. According to Shu and Bao (2022), these roles include apologizing, promising, ordering, answering, requesting, complaining, warning, inviting, refusing, and congratulating. The present study explores refusal and complaint speech acts concerning some features in their proper production.

Chen (1996) explained that the speech act of refusal is used by the speakers to reject offers, requests, or invitations from non-native speakers (NNSs) due to face-threatening acts (FTAs). The selection of a refusal strategy is shaped by factors such as the level of familiarity between individuals, their relative social status, and the gravity of the face-threatening act. As Brown and Levinson (1987) mentioned, choosing a strategy depends on different social distances and the listener's status. Han and Burgucu-Tazegül (2016) stated that refusal speech acts can also be communicated through facial expressions, which are signs or gestures similar to speech. However, the effects of specific cultures should be considered when interpreting speech acts in different languages. Felix-Brasdefer (2008) noted that the refusal strategies used by speakers of any language differ based on factors such as age, gender, power dynamics, social status, and educational attainment. Thus, in order to moderate the opposing effects of direct refusals, interlocutors should have adequate knowledge of the backgrounds of other speakers.

In addition, another speech act that is commonly used is complaining. A complaint, according to Zhang (2001), is a speech act through which the speaker expresses dissatisfaction, irritation, or frustration about the hearer's current actions. It is possible to make complaints directly or indirectly, and the directness of a complaint may depend on contextual factors like social power and social distance. Among the speech acts investigated, Laforest (2002) argued that complaints have been found to be rather complex to produce because they result in FTAs. In this case, the speaker may lose his friend or cause embarrassment and sometimes anger that forces the hearer to do a repair. According to Trosborg (1995), various adjustments need to be made both internally and externally in order to lessen the effect that speech acts have on the hearer. There are two main categories of internal modifications: interlocutors of complaint speech acts should consider social status, cultural norms, and all other factors related to performing these kinds of speech acts. External modifications should be regarded as providing evidence to justify the accusation and make the complaint stronger and convincing.

Based on the above-mentioned points, it becomes evident that although refusal and complaint speech acts are essential components of pragmatic competence, the problem lies in the fact that current research has not adequately addressed how language proficiency, mother tongue, gender, and social variables affect EFL learners' production of these speech acts. Several national and international studies, such as those by Shakki et al. (2023), Mokhtari (2015), Askari Foorg and Faroughi Hendevalan (2020), Eshraghi and Shahrokhi (2016), Kreishan (2018), Al Huneety et al. (2024), and others have investigated various aspects of refusal and complaint speech acts across different cultural and linguistic contexts. However, these studies have largely failed to comprehensively examine the combined influence of learners' proficiency level, sociocultural background, gender, and mother tongue on the pragmatic realization of refusals and complaints in EFL settings. This lack of comprehensive research limits understanding of how these intersecting factors shape learners' pragmatic competence, which in turn affects the effectiveness of communication in target language contexts. The existing body of literature presents inconsistent or fragmented insights regarding the relationship between proficiency and pragmatic performance, as well as the sociocultural dynamics involved. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by systematically exploring whether language proficiency, mother tongue, gender, and sociocultural variables are linked to learners' production of refusal and complaint speech acts. By comprehensively investigating these intersecting variables, the study is expected to provide deeper insights into the complexities of pragmatic competence, which in turn informs the development of more effective, culturally sensitive, and learner-centered pedagogical strategies that enhance pragmatic instruction, and better support the diverse learner profiles in real-world communication contexts.

Accordingly, the following research questions guided the research process:

RQ1: Does learners' proficiency level have a role in producing refusals and complaints?

RQ2: Does the mother tongue have a role in producing refusals and complaints?

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

RQ3: Does gender have a role in producing refusals and complaints?

RQ4: Is there a considerable difference between Turkish and Persian native speakers using refusals and complaints about the face-threatening properties of these speech acts?

RQ5: Do sociocultural factors have a role in producing refusals and complaints?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speech Acts

Speech acts are functional units in communication (Austin, 1962, p. 169). Bach and Harnish (1979) described speech acts as a way of communicating. Searle (1979) holds that the unit of linguistic communication is not limited to word or sentence representation but rather producing the word or sentence in performing speech acts. Skinner (1970) demonstrated that speech acts come from two words: speech and acts; speech refers to utterances, and act refers to action. Yuan and Lyu (2022) argued that speech acts are performed while making utterances by L2 learners. In linguistics, speech acts are utterances defined as the speaker's intention and their effect on the intended listener. Every language has its own unique way of performing speech acts. It is necessary to have not only high linguistic proficiency but also to perceive speech acts pragmatically. Bayat (2013) illustrated that performing speech acts properly in L2 is very challenging due to linguistic and cultural variations between the languages. Speech acts include things like offering and responding to compliments, asking questions, offering refusals, and apologies.

2.2 Speech Act Theory

In the late 1950s, John Austin put forth the speech act theory, which separates speech actions into three forms: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is forcefully stating something, such a warning to the listener not to act. The perlocutionary act is the actual effect a speech act has on the listener—that of influence, persuasion, terrifying, or motivating effect. At the core of speech act theory lies the illocutionary act, which is its fundamental component. Austin's theory was further developed by Searle in (1969) when he introduced the idea of indirect speech or illocutionary acts in his categories. There are five different categories of illocutionary speech acts: assertives, commissives, expressives, declarations, and directives. One common commissive speech act is the refusal speech act. In summary, speech act theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals communicate and how they communicate effectively.

2.3 The Speech Act of Refusal

According to Nunan (2001), refusing is a complex speech act where speakers say "no" to someone's request or offer, often challenging for NNSs. Refusal is defined as a negative response to suggestions, and Chen (1996) argued that it creates FTAs and limits the listener's needs. Implementing refusal requires pragmatic competence, and speakers of English refusals need strategic competence to communicate the negative response, such as facial expressions. A meta-analysis of 57 studies evaluating the proficiency of EFL learners in acquiring refusal, apology, and request speech acts was carried out by Shakki et al. (2023). The results showed that directly teaching pragmatic competence greatly improves learners' ability to use these speech acts correctly. Barron (2003) argued that inappropriate refusal strategies can damage the relationship between interlocutors due to potential rudeness and disrespectfulness. Owing to face-threatening features, refusal usually necessitates indirect strategies. The hearer's face is more exposed to damage than the speaker's (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Direct refusal exposes the interlocutor's face to risk, so indirectness is often presented. Since refusing an offer does not satisfy the listener's expectation, NNSs avoid offensive or impolite utterances and often overuse indirect strategies, which could be misinterpreted.

On the other hand, Halenko and Jones (2011) discussed that although speech acts are ordinary in all languages, they vary across different cultures. Ahn (2007) argued that in the realization and interpretation of speech acts in different languages, the effects of specific cultures should be considered. In many societies, knowing how to say "no" is more significant than the response itself. Thus, the speaker needs to be aware of the interlocutor's cultural and linguistic values in order to know when the proper form and its purpose should be used. However, Gass and Selinker (2001) contended that the sociocultural appropriateness of these strategies varies between different languages and cultures. Language learners with limitations in the linguistic and sociocultural norms of the target language require a higher level of pragmatic competence when performing refusals than other speech acts. Delen and Tavil (2010) suggested that, as a consequence, pragmatic transfer from the first language to the target language results in the production of a complicated and face-threatening speech act, such as refusal. The face-threatening nature of refusal speech acts in Persian and English was studied by Mokhtari (2015). The study found that both groups preferred indirect strategies to mitigate face threats, with Persian speakers showing a stronger tendency toward face-preserving forms.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

2.4 The Speech Act of Complaint

Boxer (1996) noted that cross-cultural pragmatic research has primarily concentrated on the complaint speech act and the strategies used to align with social norms. Deveci (2015) mentioned that complaints can lead to social interactions where one person feels dissatisfied and negatively evaluates another. Arafah and Kaharuddin (2019) argue that the behavior of a complainer goes against social norms and falls short of the complainee's expectations. For example, a student expressing dissatisfaction with a professor's behavior may result in a complaint where the student does not accept the teacher's behavior.

The complaint speech act is divided into direct and indirect complaints. Direct complaints appear in situations in which a complainee expresses displeasure or annoyance in response to a previous or current action (Boxer, 1993). On the other hand, indirect complaints are directed against those who are not accountable for the perceived offense (Olshtain & Weinbech, 1987). Askari Foorg and Faroughi Hendevalan (2020) investigated the effect of gender and age on the use of the complaint speech act and its analysis within Persian language society. To this end, 21 Persian films from the family genre were selected. Discourses containing complaint speech acts were transcribed from these films, and the variables of age and gender were examined. The Trosborg model (1995) was used for data analysis. He divided the complaint speech act into five categories (hint, disapproval, accusation, blame, and threat) and seven subcategories (annoyance, ill consequence, direct accusation, indirect accusation, modified blame, blame (person), blame (behavior)). Complaining, often seen as a form of FTA, is viewed through a lens of "face" consisting of two types: the negative face, which demands freedom of action, and the positive face, which requires recognition and appreciation of one's self-image. Making complaints can be threatening for the hearer's positive and negative faces, and in cross-cultural interactions, efforts are made to reduce face-threatening costs and enhance politeness and tactfulness (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Lastly, attention should be given to how complaint speech acts are categorized. According to Chen et al. (2011), there are six major types of combined strategies: dissatisfaction and request for repair, accusation and request for repair, dissatisfaction, interrogation, and dissatisfaction, request for repair and threat, and interrogation. Trosborg (1995) delineated strategies of complaining in four categories: no explicit reproach, expression of disapproval, accusation, and blame.

2.5 Empirical Studies

Eshraghi and Shahrokhi (2016) investigated the complaint strategies used by female native English speakers and Iranian EFL learners, focusing on how contextual elements such as social power and social distance influenced the choice of strategies in each group. As for data collection, the researchers employed the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), involving a total of 30 participants. The results revealed a significant difference in the complaint strategies of the two groups: female native English speakers tended to use more direct complaints, whereas Iranian female learners favored indirect forms. Significant contextual factors impacted the participants' choice of complaint strategies. Kreishan (2018) looked at Jordanian undergraduate EFL students' complaint speech acts and refusal strategies. The findings showed that the participants employed refusal tactics such as explanations and excuses along with indirect semantic formulas. Complaints were made in the form of requests, hints, and annoyance. The study highlighted the significance of comprehending English-speaking social contexts by finding similarities in terms of the strategies used by EFL learners and native English speakers.

Shahi (2022) examined the speech acts and corresponding responses of advanced Iranian EFL learners. The results showed that while male students used direct strategies, female students used indirect ones. While female learners tended to accept micro functions more frequently, male learners used reinforced micro functions. In Thailand, Khamkhien (2022) investigated Thai students' understanding of refusals in speech, focusing on the status of the interlocutor. 157 university students responded to 12 scenarios using the refusal taxonomy. The results showed differences in linguistic forms used in refusals, with indirectness and a combination of indirectness and directness being the most common. In particular, the strategies that were commonly employed in refusals were reasons, excuses, and explanations. According to the study, refusals ought to be viewed more like sets of speech acts with components than like separate acts.

Al-Shareef (2023) looked at how Iraqi EFL students used the semantic components of complaint speech acts versus native English speakers. Additionally, the impact of social factors like distance and power was investigated. Data were gathered via interviews and DCTs. It was discovered that the Iraqi EFL students most frequently employed strategies like demand, complaint, and criticism. Requests and justifications were also employed frequently. The use of apologies and warnings was somewhat common. The strategy that was employed the least was purpose explanation. Lastly, the study found that there were significant variations between Iraqi EFL students and native English speakers' mean scores of semantic components. Quite recently, Al Huneety et al. (2024) looked at the refusal strategies employed by EFL students and Jordanian Arabic speakers. The findings revealed three primary categories: adjuncts to refusals, indirect refusals, and direct refusals. Arabic speakers in Jordan utilized

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

36% adjuncts to refusals, 57% indirect refusals, and 7% direct refusals. As for EFL learners, 13% of direct refusals, 62% of indirect refusals, and 25% of adjuncts to refusals were employed. While EFL learners used more direct and indirect strategies but fewer adjuncts to refusals, both groups preferred indirect refusal strategies. Both groups' refusals were significantly influenced by their respective cultural backgrounds.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

In this study, to investigate whether language proficiency, mother tongue, gender, and sociocultural variables are linked to learners' production of refusal and complaint speech acts, the researchers opted for a qualitative, cross-sectional design using role-play scenarios. Specifically, participants responded to written role-play scenarios designed to elicit refusal and complaint speech acts. Their responses were then analyzed using established coding frameworks to examine the impact of language proficiency, mother tongue, gender, and sociocultural variables on pragmatic performance.

3.2 Participants

A total of 150 volunteers took part in the research. The OPT was used to compare their English language performance and classify them into intermediate and advanced English learners, the learners with 30 to 35 correct answers were ranked as intermediate learners and those with 45 to 50 correct answers as advanced. To this end, 120 participants (60 males and 60 females), including native Persian and Turkish speakers, were selected based on the purposive sampling method. It is worth mentioning that the participants' ages ranged from 20 to 40. Afterward, the participants were partitioned to include 15 advanced Persian males (APM), 15 advanced Persian females (APF), 15 advanced Turkish males (ATM), and 15 advanced Turkish females (ATF), and 15 intermediate Persian males (IPM), intermediate Persian females (IPF), 15 intermediate Turkish males (ITM), and 15 intermediate Turkish females (ITF). It was expected of all the participants to learn various communicative functions and strategies in order to use appropriate English in various contexts.

3.3 Data Collection Tool

The respondents were asked to complete 10 researcher-designed role-play scenarios in which they had to provide refusal and complaint speech acts (see Appendix). These scenarios were subsequently reviewed and validated by a competent TESOL professor to ensure their appropriateness (including clarity, naturalness, and alignment with pragmatic norms in English-speaking contexts). Based on the TESOL expert's feedback, necessary adjustments were incorporated to enhance the scenarios' realism and suitability. The role of learners' language proficiency, mother tongue, gender, and social variables was examined. The following two examples used in the study are shown below:

1) An offer from an equal status with an equal social distance interlocutor:

Role-play: You are visiting a friend of yours who you have not seen for almost a year. Your friend is originally from another town and is so delighted that you are visiting. He/She prepared a big meal. At the end of the meal, you feel so full, but your friend offers you more dessert and insists that you should eat it. But you actually cannot.

In (1), the interlocutors are friends and have equal status. The responder has to answer (refuse) the offered situation (having more dessert). Also, they are not very close to each other, which means there is a high social distance between the two interlocutors.

2) A complaint from an equal status with a high social distance interlocutor:

Role-play: A co-worker always comes back from lunch late. What's more, he or she always leaves work early. You think it's unfair that you always have to make excuses for your co-worker and finish his or her work.

In (2), the interlocutors are co-workers and have equal status. In this case, the respondent must complain about problems at a workplace. Also, they are not very close to each other, which means there is a high social distance between the two interlocutors. Each situation was based on two social variables: relative power and social distance between the interlocutors. Table 1 provides a general description of all the role-play scenarios:

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

Table 1. Refusal and complaint situations regarding interlocutors' social power and social distance

Situation	Social power	Social distance
1	Equal	Small
2	Low	Small
3	High	Large
4	Low	Small
5	Equal	Large
6	High	Large
7	Equal	Small
8	Equal	Small
9	High	Large
10	High	Large

3.4 Procedure

By emailing the respondents, comprehensive and clear instructions on how to complete the role-play scenarios were provided to ensure clarity and consistency in responses. Ten prompts representing speech acts of refusal and complaint were given to the respondents, and they were asked to write their answers in as much detail as they could during the designated limitation of 30 minutes, respectively. This time constraint was established to promote impromptu and natural reactions while preserving controllable data gathering.

The participants were instructed not to use dictionaries or other resources while taking the test to capture their immediate pragmatic competence without external aid. The responses were written and sent through email. Instead of face-to-face interviewing, this method was used to avoid any participant sensitivity or stress, as well as because the study did not consider facial expressions or body language as communicating factors. This remote, written data collection also allowed participants to respond in a comfortable environment, potentially enhancing the authenticity of their speech acts. Finally, upon receipt, all responses were compiled and prepared for further analyses. It is worth noting that in this study, the role of L2 proficiency, politeness, social classes as sociocultural factors, mother tongue, and gender on EFL learners' production of complaints and refusals through communication was calculated.

3.5 Data Analysis

The classification scheme that was employed in the analysis of refusal data was primarily derived from Ren (2012), who incorporated the commonly utilized taxonomy of Beebe et al. (1990). Certain elements from Beebe et al. that Ren did not utilize were included back into the study, including avoidance and pause fillers. Within the scheme, refusal strategies were divided into direct and indirect refusals as well as adjuncts to refusals. Table 2 displays the classification categories of refusal speech acts.

Table 2. Taxonomy of the speech acts of refusals

Category	Strategy	Example (s)
I . Direct refusal	1. No	No.
	2. Negative willingness/ability	I can't make it.
II. Indirect refusal	1. Reason/Explanation	I need it, too.
	2. Postponement	Is it possible I do it next time?
	3. Apology/Regret	I am sorry.
	4. Alternative	You could ask someone else.
	5. Request for additional information	Which movie?
	6. Attempt to dissuade the interlocutor:	
	a. Negative consequence	a. I thought I will ruin your plan with my presentation with little preparation.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

	b. Criticize	b. Last time I tried to borrow your notebook, why didn't you lend it to me?
	c. Let interlocutor off the hook	c. Don't worry; That's OK.
	d. Request for empathy	d. I hope you can understand.
	7. Conditional acceptance	If you really need it, I can go.
	8. Indefinite reply	I don't know if I can come to your party.
	9. Repetition of part of previous discourse	Tomorrow?
	10. Promise	I will help you if I can.
	11. Wish	I wish I could help.
	12. Avoidance	a. Silence, hesitation and departure
	a. Non-verbal	b. Topic switch and postponement
	b. Verbal	
III. Adjuncts to refusals	1. Statement of positive opinion	That's a good idea.
	2. Willingness	I'd love to go.
	3. Agreement	Yes/OK.
	4. Statement of empathy	I know it's quite important for you to prepare for exam.
	5. Preparator	I'll be honest with you.
	6. Gratitude	Thank you for your invitation.
	7. Pause fillers	Well.

After classifying and coding the data, the frequency of each strategy was ascertained in order to qualitatively analyze the data and identify any significant differences in the realization of refusals in Turkish and Persian speech. A face-preserving factor was also considered in participants' production of refusal strategies; this factor's frequency in each situation was calculated and tabulated as well.

Regarding the analysis of complaint data, the works of Olshtain and Weinbach (1987), Trosborg (1995), and Laforest (2002) were referenced while analyzing the complaints that the participants produced. The strategies that were listed in the coding framework included:

1. Below the Level of Reproach: The speaker's choice not to complain to the hearer, e.g., *don't mention it. I have no other meanings.*

2. Expression of Annoyance and Disapproval: Vague and indirect realizations of the complaint

- **Hint:** The speaker knows about the offense and holds the hearer indirectly responsible, e.g., *what happened to my CD?*
- **Consequence:** The speaker talks about the outcome, e.g., *now it won't play my favorite songs.*
- **Open Annoyance or Disapproval:** The speaker expresses annoyance and implies the hearer's responsibility by expressing the result or consequence, e.g., *I'm very sad to have this grade.*

3. Explicit Complaint: A complaint is made by directly referring to the hearer.

- **Request for Explanation:** e.g., *why are you late?*
- **Statement of the Problem:** e.g., *excuse me, we ordered our food 20 minutes ago, and we haven't received it yet.*
- **Request for Repair:** e.g., *can you turn down the music?*
- **Request for Forbearance:** e.g., *next time, please try to call me or at least answer your phone to let me know what happened.*

4. Accusation and Warning: The speaker explicitly expresses moral condemnation, implying sanctions against the hearer.

- **Negative Assessment and the Accused Action:** e.g., *you should take care of other people's belongings.*
- **Negative Assessment of the Accused as a Person:** e.g., *you are irresponsible.*

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

5. Immediate Threat: The speaker chooses to openly attack the hearer by stating the ultimatum with immediate consequences, e.g., *if you do not listen to me, I will go tell mom!*

Furthermore, the degree to which politeness was employed in the complaints was determined using Brown and Levinson's (1987) taxonomy of politeness strategies in order to address the second study question. Five categories of politeness strategies were identified by Brown and Levinson: bald on-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, off-record, and not doing FTA. After analyzing these strategies, they recommended 10 for negative politeness, 15 for positive politeness, and 15 for off-record. Table 3 presents these strategies.

Table 3. Realization of politeness strategies in refusal situations

Positive politeness theories	Negative politeness theories	Off-record theories
1. Notice/Attend to hearer	1. Be conventionally indirect	1. Give hints/clues
2. Exaggerate	2. Question, hedge	2. Give association clues
3. Intensify interest to hearer	3. Be pessimistic	3. Presuppose
4. Use in-group identity marker	4. Minimize imposition	4. Understate
5. Seek agreement	5. Give deference	5. Overstate
6. Avoid disagreement	6. Apologize	6. Use tautologies
7. Presuppose/Assert common ground	7. Impersonalize	7. Use contradiction
8. Joke	8. State the imposition as a general rule	8. Be ironic
9. Show concern for hearer's wants	9. Nominalize	9. Use metaphors
10. Offer, promise	10. Go on record as incurring a debt	10. Use rhetorical questions
11. Be optimistic		11. Be ambiguous
12. Include both speaker and hearer in the activity		12. Be vague
13. Give reasons		13. Over-generalize
14. Assume/Assert reciprocity		14. Displace hearer
15. Give gift to hearer (goods, sympathy, understanding)		15. Be incomplete, use ellipsis

The aforementioned coding frameworks were used to determine the frequency of all the factors. The collected data was tabulated and analyzed to see if the production of Persian and Turkish EFL learners differed from one another and what aspects of their production set the two learner groups apart. As for rating reliability, in order to improve the rater's (a colleague's) understanding and agreement on the rating scales, a brief rater training course explaining the rating purpose and criteria was held. This was followed by an examination of sample complaints. Furthermore, the rater discovered that if the responses were understandable, grammatical errors could be disregarded. Subsequently, the raters worked independently to score the data gleaned from the role-plays and provide succinct comments. Only minor differences were found between the two samples.

4. Results and Discussion

The present study examined whether there is a link between learners' language proficiency, social status, mother tongue, gender, and the production of refusal and complaining speech acts. The frequencies of the speech act refusal strategies in the role-plays are displayed in Table 4.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

Table 4. Frequencies and percentages of refusal strategies

Categories	Refusal strategies	IPM	APM	IPF	APF	ITM	ATM	ITF	ATF	Total	Grand total
Direct refusal	Saying 'no'	2 (13.33)	0 (0)	1 (6.66)	1 (6.66)	2 (13.33)	1 (6.66)	2 (13.33)	1 (6.66)	10 (8.33)	212 (35.45)
	Negative willingness/ability	15 (100)	13 (86.66)	15 (100)	12 (80)	15 (100)	14 (93.33)	15 (100)	13 (86.66)	112 (93.33)	
Indirect refusal	Reason/Explanation	13 (86.66)	15 (100)	14 (93.33)	15 (100)	12 (80)	15 (100)	14 (93.33)	15 (100)	113 (94.16)	225 (37.62)
	Postponement	11 (73.33)	9 (60%)	11 (73.33)	14 (93.33)	11 (73.33)	8 (53.33)	12 (80)	9 (60)	85 (70.83)	
	Apology/Regret	11 (73.33)	13 (86.66)	13 (86.66)	12 (80)	13 (86.66)	14 (93.33)	12 (80)	14 (93.33)	102 (85)	
	Alternative	8 (53.33)	5 (33.33)	3 (20)	3 (20)	4 (26.66)	6 (40)	6 (40)	4 (26.66)	39 (32.5)	
	Request for additional information	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0)	
	Negative consequence	0	0	0	1 (6.66)	0	0	0	1 (6.66)	2 (1.66)	
	Criticize	1 (6.66)	1 (6.66)	0	0	1 (6.66)	2 (13.33)	0	1 (6.66)	6 (5)	
	Let interlocutor off the hook	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0)	
	Request for empathy	2 (13.33)	3 (20)	1 (6.66)	2 (13.33)	2 (13.33)	2 (13.33)	1 (6.66)	3 (20)	16 (13.33)	
	Conditional acceptance	3	1 (6.66)	0	0	0	0	1 (6.66)	0	5 (4.16)	
	Indefinite reply	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0)	
	Repetition of part of previous discourse	0	0	1 (6.66)	0	0	0	0	0	1 (0.83)	
	Promise	1 (6.66)	3	2 (13.33)	2 (13.33)	0	2 (13.33)	1 (6.66)	1 (6.66)	12 (10)	
	Wish	2 (13.33)	3 (20)	1 (6.66)	5 (33.33)	8 (53.33)	3 (20)	1 (6.66)	4 (26.66)	27 (22.5)	
	Verbal avoidance	0	2 (13.33)	1 (6.66)	0	1 (6.66)	0	0	0	2 (1.66)	
Adjuncts	Statement of positive opinion	0	0	0	0	0	2 (13.33)	1 (6.66)	1 (6.66)	4 (3.33)	161 (26.92)

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

Willingness	5 (33.33)	5 (33.33)	10 (66.66)	8 (53.33)	5 (33.33)	9 (60)	9 (60)	8 (53.33)	59 (49.16)
Agreement	1 (6.66%)	0	0	1 (6.66)	0	0	0	0	2 (1.66)
Statement of empathy	1 (6.66)	0	0	1 (6.66)	2 (13.33)	0	0	0	4 (3.33)
Preparator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 (20)	3 (2.5)
Gratitude	5 (33.33)	13 (86.66)	13 (86.66)	13 (86.66)	11 (73.33)	13 (86.66)	8 (53.33)	13 (86.66)	89 (74.16)
Total									598 (99.99)

Note. For each strategy, the first raw presents the frequencies and the second one shows the percentages in parentheses.

A = advanced; F = female; I = intermediate; M = male; P = Persian; T = Turkish.

Table 4 illustrates that the participants mostly tended to refuse indirectly. The most preferable refusal semantic formulas were indirect strategies (37.62%) rather than direct strategies (34.45%) and adjuncts (26.92%). As the respondents mostly tended not to say direct "no" toward their interlocutors (8.33%), the most preferred direct refusal strategy was negative willingness with 112 times of occurrence (93.33%). The results revealed that the most common type of refusal formula in all eight groups was giving a reason or explanation with 113 times of occurrence (94.16%), and the least common applied strategies were requests for additional information, let interlocutor off the hook and indefinite reply (0%). Apology, gratitude, and postponement strategies were the three ranks of refusal strategies that the participants employed; they occurred 102 (85%), 89 (74.16%), and 85 (70.83%) times, respectively. It is also worth mentioning that adjuncts to refusals, expressions of gratitude and willingness, were deemed more polite. Therefore, the participants avoided refusing directly by saying "no" and enhanced more indirect and polite ways to refuse by showing their willingness to help or gratitude.

According to Table 4, the respondents preferred showing gratitude (74.16%) more than other adjuncts while refusing. The findings of the current study corroborate the ideas of Kreishan (2018), who believed that the most frequently used refusal strategies entailed an explanation or excuse, apology, negative ability, postponement, or adjuncts to refusals. Postponement was another refusal strategy used by the participants in the current study, similar to Ghazanfari et al. (2013), in which the Persian respondents used postponement to refuse invitations, suggestions, or offers more often than the NSs did. In the third situation in the questionnaire, most respondents postponed the request because they were busy. The results of this study cannot be compared to those of Al-Shorman (2016), who discussed how Saudi respondents used more direct strategies than Jordanian respondents.

As for the role of proficiency level, the results indicated that advanced learners generally employed semantic formulas at the same rate as intermediate subjects when performing refusals. These findings do not correspond to those of Al-Issa (2003), who showed that EFL learners tend to use more semantic formulas than native English speakers do when performing refusals. However, intermediate respondents refused more directly (f = 76) than advanced respondents (f = 55). Advanced EFL learners, in many cases, performed in a native-like manner. The results of this study align with those reported by Lee (2013), who observed that learners with lower language proficiency levels struggled to produce suitable refusals. Thus, the findings imply that the performance of EFL learners in English refusal is not significantly impacted by L2 proficiency level.

As for the role of mother tongue, it was found that Turkish subjects preferred more direct refusals (f = 63) than Persian ones (f = 59); the Turkish sample generally used overall refusal semantic formulas equally as the Persian sample. The results demonstrated that the Turkish sample used more saying no (f = 6) and negative willingness refusal strategies (f = 57) than the Persian sample. Accordingly, Persian participants (f = 207) more than Turkish participants (f = 206) refused indirectly except for apology (f = 49), alternative (f = 19), criticize (f = 21), and wish (f = 11). Moreover, Turkish participants (f = 85) more than Persian participants (f = 76) used adjuncts except for agreement (f = 0). The analysis of Turkish and Persian participants' face-preserving factor revealed that it was

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

most significant among Persian subjects. The study revealed that Persian EFL learners tended to refuse more indirectly than Turkish learners, which can be compared to Al-Shorman's (2016) findings, commenting that in contrast to Jordanian respondents, Saudi respondents employed more direct techniques. This study contradicts Asmali's (2013) findings, which found no significant difference in refusal strategies among respondents from Latvia, Poland, and Turkey, despite differing cultural norms, and that participants, in their answers, employed almost the same quantity of refusal speech acts.

Concerning the role of gender, it was found that the rate of refusal strategies that was employed by both male and female participants was generally almost the same. Also, male subjects (f = 67) used more direct refusal semantic formulas than female ones (f = 60); the male sample used more negative willingness refusal strategies (f = 57) than the female one (f = 55). Accordingly, male subjects tended to refuse more indirectly (f = 211) than female subjects (f = 206) except for explanation (f = 55), postponement (f = 39), and negative consequence (f = 0). Furthermore, the female sample (25.07%) tended to use more adjuncts (f = 89) than the male sample (f = 72), except for the statement of empathy (f = 1). The results correspond to Shokouhi and Khalili's (2008) findings, the refusals produced by male and female students did not significantly differ from one another. In contrast, these findings differ from those of Abed (2011), who reported that Iraqi female learners employed fewer refusal strategies compared to their male counterparts.

The overall results showed that the most common type of refusal formulas were indirect refusals, with explanation being the most commonly used indirect refusal in both groups when it came to native speakers of Persian and Turkish using refusals regarding the face-threatening nature of this speech act. The findings showed that advanced participants generally tended to refuse more indirectly and politely than intermediate participants. The findings are compatible with those of Sattar et al. (2011) and Valipour and Jadidi (2015), in which all participants favored explanations and excuses as semantic formulas at the time of refusing. Additionally, all participants tend to soften their refusals because doing so is a face-threatening act. It is suggested that this is a polite way and does not refuse requests without any insignificant reasons because someone who has a high status deserves respect. It is pointed out that Persian participants tend to refuse more politely than Turkish participants. These findings support the results of Siebold and Busch (2014). The current study's findings represent that the male sample treats more politely than the female sample, which contradicts Tamimi Sa'd and Mohammadi's (2014) research, which suggested that similar politeness strategies are used by men and women when engaging in speech acts of refusal. Table 5 shows the differences in the semantic formulas learners use with interlocutors of equal, lower, or higher social status.

Table 5. Frequencies and percentages for the use of semantic formulas by learners' status

Role-play	Social status	Semantic formulas	IPM	APM	IPF	APF	ITM	ATM	ITF	ATF
		Direct "no"	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
#1	Equal		(6.66)					(6.66)		(6.66)
		Explanation	6	4	3	1	5	2	4	3
			(40)	(40)	(13.33)	(6.66)	(33.33)	(13.33)	(40)	(13.33)
		Direct "no"	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
#3	Low					(6.66)				
		Explanation	5	4	6	3	4	2	3	1
			(33.33)	(40)	(40)	(13.33)	(40)	(13.33)	(13.33)	(6.66)
		Direct "no"	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#4	High									
		Explanation	7	8	5	6	6	7	8	9
			(46.66)	(53.33)	(33.33)	(40)	(40)	(46.66)	(53.33)	(60)

Note. For each semantic formula, the first raw presents the frequencies and the second one shows the percentages in parentheses.

A = advanced; F = female; I = intermediate; M = male; P = Persian; T = Turkish.

According to Table 5, the results showed that a) all respondents generally tended to treat interlocutors of higher social status more indirectly. Also, advanced subjects in all eight sample groups frequently preferred indirect strategies for refusing interlocutors with learners of higher social status. However, they preferred more direct refusals with lower and equal social status hearers. The same results were achieved in the case of intermediate

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

subjects of all eight groups; b) Persian subjects of all eight groups frequently preferred more polite and short refusals for hearers of higher social status, whereas they behaved relatively equally towards hearers with lower and equal status. In the case of Turkish participants, the same treatment had been provided to interlocutors of all social statuses; c) male and female participants of all eight groups of the sample were also treated politely by hearers of higher status, but they did not shift their strategies toward interlocutors who had lower and equal social status.

Concerning the role of sociocultural factors, the results align with Huwari and Al-Shboul's (2015) argument that social hierarchy and group harmony are essential. Nonetheless, the study discovered that when a friend or relative was the one asking the question, respondents were more direct in their refusals. The study aligns with Allami and Naeimi's (2011) research, which found that advanced learners often shift semantic formulas in higher-status contexts. They use more indirect refusals with high-status individuals and prefer direct refusals with low or equal social status hearers. The results can be compared with Lee's (2013) study on Korean EFL learners' ability to make refusals, revealing that learners with lower proficiency levels struggle with appropriate refusals and interlocutors of lower status. Furthermore, the results indicated that highly proficient participants tended to refuse interlocutors from lower social status directly. They also used positive feelings less toward hearers with lower social status. This runs counter to Beebe et al.'s (1990) findings. Furthermore, the findings partially support Vaezi's (2011) research, which found that social distance and power have an impact on native Persian speakers' refusals. In this study, while conversing with higher-status interlocutors, the Persian sample tended to be more indirect in their refusals. Wijayanto et al.'s (2013) findings align with the current study, suggesting that the sample exhibited different behaviors towards addressees of varying social statuses. In addition to the results of refusal speech acts, Table 6 displays the frequency of complaint semantic formulas used by the sample of EFL learners.

Table 6. Frequencies and percentages of complaint strategies

Categories	Complaint strategies	IPM	APM	IPF	APF	ITM	ATM	ITF	ATF	Total	Grand total
Indirect complaint	Below the level of reproach	1 (3.33)	5 (33.33)	1 (3.33)	4 (26.66)	2 (13.33)	5 (33.33)	1 (3.33)	4 (33.33)	23 (19.16)	91 (12.19)
	Hint	8 (53.33)	10 (66.66)	7 (46.66)	11 (73.33)	5 (33.33)	12 (80)	6 (40)	9 (60)	68 (56.66)	
Direct complaint	Consequence	7 (46.66)	9 (60)	6 (40)	10 (66.66)	4 (26.66)	11 (73.33)	5 (33.33)	8 (53.33)	60 (50)	655 (87.8)
	Open annoyance	14 (93.33)	14 (93.33)	12 (80)	11 (73.33)	15 (100)	15 (100)	10 (66.66)	9 (60)	100 (83.33)	
	Request for explanation	12 (80)	11 (73.33)	14 (93.33)	15 (100)	10 (66.66)	9 (60)	14 (93.33)	15 (100)	100 (83.33)	
	Statement of the problem	14 (93.33)	15 (100)	14 (93.33)	15 (100)	11 (73.33)	9 (60)	7 (46.66)	10 (66.66)	95 (79.16)	
	Request for repair	13 (86.66)	12 (80)	11 (73.33)	10 (66.66)	13 (86.66)	11 (73.33)	12 (80)	9 (60)	91 (75.83)	
	Request for forbearance	10 (66.66)	8 (53.33)	11 (73.33)	7 (46.66)	12 (80)	5 (33.33)	9 (60)	6 (40)	68 (56.66)	
	Warn	9 (60)	7 (46.66)	10 (66.66)	6 (40)	11 (73.33)	4 (33.33)	8 (53.33)	5 (33.33)	60 (50)	
	Immediate threat	10 (66.66)	8 (53.33)	11 (73.33)	7 (46.66)	13 (86.66)	11 (73.33)	12 (80)	9 (60)	81 (67.5)	
	Total										746 (99.99)

Note. For each complaint strategy, the first raw presents the frequencies and the second one shows the percentages in parentheses.

A = advanced; F = female; I = intermediate; M = male; P = Persian; T = Turkish.

According to Table 6, the sample generally tended to complain directly (87.8%); all of the respondents' most preferable complaint strategies were open annoyance (83.33%), request for explanation (83.33%), and statement

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

of the problem (79.16%) as direct complaint strategies. The least common formulas entailed below the level of reproach (19.16%), categorized as indirect complaint strategies. The results lend support to the findings of Olshtain and Weinbach (1987).

Concerning the role of proficiency level, it was found that advanced respondents' performance was similar to that of intermediate respondents while complaining. Furthermore, advanced subjects (f = 60) tended to complain indirectly more than intermediate subjects (f = 31), but intermediate subjects (f = 344) complained directly more than advanced subjects (f = 311) except for consequence (f = 38) and statement of the problem (f = 49).

Complaint findings suggest a relationship between learners' complaint production and their L2 proficiency level, with more proficient learners producing more native-like and appropriate complaints. This supports Hong's (2015) study suggesting that linguistic knowledge and skills are linked to complaint realization. The study suggests that L2 proficiency may influence EFL learners' complaints, as lower-level learners may not be able to understand the pragmatic intent of the language. This is compatible with Yuan (2007), who argued that high-proficiency respondents used "I wonder" more than medium proficiency respondents, indicating a greater use of this mitigating device. The study found that because high-proficiency L2 learners have a tendency to overgeneralize pragmatic features, they overuse indirect complaint strategies, which suggests that it takes time for L2 learners to fit pragmatic features on different occasions, as reported by Hong and Shih (2013).

Furthermore, the findings make sense in light of the connection between L2 proficiency and L1 negative pragma tic transfer, which occurs when L1 speech norms are applied incorrectly in L2. In this study, it was found that while lower-level learners are more likely to transfer their own social and cultural norms into the target language, producing inappropriate linguistic forms, higher-level learners produce more preparators similar to native English speakers. The findings align with Allami and Naeimi's (2011) study, which found that Iranian language learners transfer pragmatic norms from their L1 when using refusal strategies. The study found that EFL learners with varying proficiency levels used similar strategies with varying frequency patterns, but even highly proficient learners approximated low proficient learners' norms in strategy choice, probably due to the possibility of linguistic norms being transferred from the target language to the native one.

Concerning the role of mother tongue, the results demonstrated that Persian subjects, like Turkish ones, performed equally by using complaint strategies. The data analysis also revealed that Persian subjects (f = 47) employed indirect complaint strategies more than Turkish participants (f = 44). In addition, Persian subjects (f = 343) complained more directly than Turkish subjects (f = 312) except for immediate threat (f = 45), a direct complaint strategy.

Finally, with respect to the role of gender, the results suggested that males developed complaint strategies almost the same as females. The findings indicated that male subjects (f = 48) employed indirect complaint strategies more than female subjects (f = 43). The results also indicated that male participants (f = 328) tended to complain more directly than females (f = 318). The results suggest that male respondents are more indirect than female respondents when complaining. These findings are in line with Akinci's (1999) study, which examined complaint speech acts in terms of Turkish politeness. According to Akinci, when complaining, female Turkish respondents did not employ any politeness strategies.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) taxonomy of politeness strategies was consulted in order to ascertain the manner in which politeness was employed in the complaints made by native speakers of Persian and Turkish regarding the face-threatening nature of this speech act. The respondents' methods of politeness are depicted in Figure 1. According to the chart, respondents most commonly employed the negative politeness strategy (42.77%). The strategy of positive politeness is displayed as the second rank of frequency (37.5%). Also, it is shown in the figure that the least used strategies are off-record and not imposing FTAs.

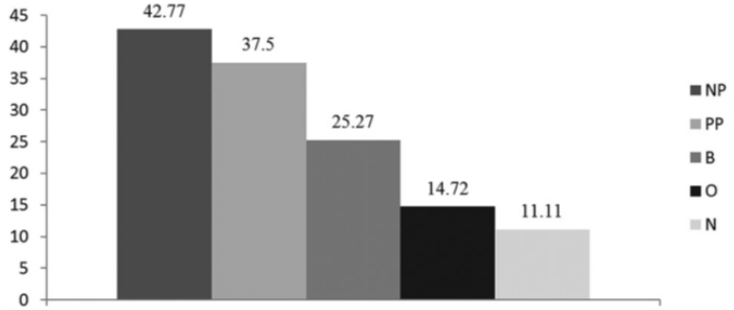


Figure 1. Frequency of use of politeness strategies

Note. Negative politeness, positive politeness, bald on record, off-record, and not doing FTA are abbreviated, and the letters NP, PP, B, O, and N have been substituted for them, respectively.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

Table 7 illustrates the frequency of politeness strategies among sample groups. It shows that advanced participants use politeness strategies more than intermediate participants. This could be due to the fact that they perceive indirect complaints as more polite utterances. Also, male respondents employed politeness strategies more than female respondents, and Turkish subjects followed politeness strategies more than Persian subjects. Surprisingly, men's use of politeness strategies more than female respondents runs counter to Holmes and Wilson's (2022) statement that men are linguistically less polite than women. One possible interpretation for such an occurrence in this study is that Iranian female EFL students may view a complaining situation differently and have different attitudes toward it. As a result, they favored using various strategies so as to deal with that particular context (Eshraghi & Shahrokhi, 2016).

Table 7. Frequency of politeness strategies

Groups	Politeness Strategies
Advanced	55%
Intermediate	45%
Male	61%
Female	39%
Persian	41%
Turkish	59%

Also, the study revealed a tie between learners' polite complaints and their L2 proficiency level, aligning with Hong and Shih's (2013) conclusion that language learners become more indirect and polite as their proficiency increases. All in all, it can be discussed that, unfortunately, EFL learners often rely on their native language's cultural norms and neglect cultural-specific strategies, which can hinder communication between people of different languages. This can result in pragmatic failure in the target community, because when performing a speech act in the target language, individuals may employ politeness strategies from their native tongue, disregarding the distinctions between the target and native languages.

Regarding the influence of sociocultural factors, advanced participants in each group of the sample typically favored indirect strategies, complaining to speakers of a higher social standing; however, they favored more direct complaints with listeners of a lower and equal social standing. Then again, intermediate subjects of all eight groups behaved similarly toward interlocutors of all social status while complaining. The findings also indicated that Persian subjects of all eight groups frequently preferred more polite and short complaints for hearers of higher social status. The subjects behaved relatively equally towards hearers with lower and equal status. In the case of Turkish participants, the same treatment was provided to interlocutors of all social statuses. It is essential to point out that male and female participants in all eight groups of the sample also treated hearers of higher status politely, but they did not shift their complaining strategies toward interlocutors of lower and equal social status. It can be inferred from the complaint data that advanced subjects prefer indirect complaints to higher social status interlocutors, while they prefer more direct complaints with lower and equal social status hearers. This aligns with Zhang's (2001) study, which claims that in situations where the hearer is a service person, a preparator can act as an icebreaker to get attention or initiate the intended speech.

5. Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the refusal and complaint speech act strategies employed by EFL learners and to highlight the factors that govern their choice of language. Strategy preferences are subject to the cultural norms associated with different societies, and the content of these speech acts is always influenced by the social and cultural norms of the speaker's L1 and L2. This study showed that L2 proficiency, mother tongue, and gender do not have a significant role in the realization of refusals and complaints in general; moreover, social distance and social power might also be other factors affecting the significant difference among participants. The results demonstrated that the interlocutor's social status had no bearing on the participants' strategy selection. However, as Lee (2013) and Yuan (2007) contended that high-proficiency students were occasionally more polite, the results indicated that the participants tended to refuse and voice their complaints in an indirect manner.

Accordingly, some fruitful implications about the aforementioned findings can be drawn. According to the study, it can be suggested that educators should focus especially on teaching strategies that are impacted by cultural and contextual factors, such as refusing and complaining strategies. Misusing the wrong strategy can lead to

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

misunderstandings and communication clashes. Teachers should raise their awareness of various learning strategies and their effectiveness, as this will help them use them more effectively and avoid inappropriately using them. The study also highlights how intermediate and advanced EFL learners employ speech acts differently, suggesting that teachers should emphasize the importance of using these strategies in different situations. Additionally, it highlights how teaching refusals and complaints requires comprehension of several pragmatic meanings as well as audiovisual pragmatic input. This might assist students in concentrating on other conversational skills, such as negotiation strategies, which are sometimes disregarded in pragmatic instruction.

The study also emphasizes how crucial it is to teach refusal and complaint strategies while taking into account variables like age, sex, nationality, motivation, personality traits, language proficiency, learning context, and learning style. Curriculum developers should provide EFL learners with additional linguistic content, especially in different mother tongues or genders, and supply Persian and Turkish EFL learners with other content. Language and culture are interrelated, and understanding messages through speech acts should be investigated both linguistically and culturally. For example, in international business meetings, both sides should be aware of the sociocultural differences of other contractors. The findings of this study can be utilized to provide appropriate and pertinent data for ESP materials during the curriculum development process, especially in business situations.

Finally, some suggestions for further research are worth mentioning. Due to possible differences in situations and circumstances, the study's findings cannot be generalized to a wider population. Therefore, the researchers recommend repeating the study with more participants, more role-play scenarios, and controlling variables such as mother tongues. Further research with different experimental designs is also recommended. The study's focus on small participants may have limited data quality risks, but researchers used convenient techniques to eliminate potential risks. There is room for improvement in data authenticity, with refusal and complaint strategies by students or people of different social statuses potentially impacting results. Additionally, in order to further understand the communication abilities of EFL learners, more speech acts should be examined.

References

Ahn, S. J. (2007). *Korean ESL learners' pragmatic competence: Motivation, amount of contact, and length of residence* (Publication No. 3296305) [Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Akinci, S. (1999). An analysis of complaints in terms of politeness in Turkish [Unpublished master's thesis]. Hacettepe University.

Alemi, M., & Tajeddin, Z. (2013). Pragmatic rating of L2 refusal: Criteria of native and non-native English teachers [Special issue]. *TESL Canada Journal*, *30*(7), 63-81. https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v30i7.1152

Al Huneety, A., Alshdaifat, A., al-Faqeeh, E., Al Mashaqba, B., & Rababah, L. (2024). Refusal strategies by young Jordanian speakers in Arabic and English. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *14*(6), 1916-1926. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1406.33

Allami, H., & Naeimi, A. (2011). A cross-linguistic study of refusals: An analysis of pragmatic competence development in Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *43*(1), 385-406. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.07.010

Al-Shareef, S. (2023). Interlanguage pragmatics: A study of Iraqi EFL learners' realization of complaint speech Acts. *Indonesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *4*(3), 839-848. https://doi.org/10.33367/ijhass.v4i3.4312

Al-Shorman, R. E. (2016). Saudi and Jordanian undergraduates' complaining strategies: A comparative intralanguage educational linguistic study. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, *7*(1), 203-228. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2804007

Arafah, B., & Kaharuddin, A. (2019). The representation of complaints in English and Indonesian discourses. *Opción*, *35*(24), 501-517.

Askari Foorg, S., & Faroughi Hendevalan, J. (2020). A study of age and gender variables in complaint speech act in Persian. *Journal of Linguistics & Khorasan Dialects*, *12*(2), 99-125. https://doi.org/10.22067/jlkd.2021.48479.0

Asmali, M. (2013). Cross-cultural comparison of non-native speakers' refusal strategies in English. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*, *1*(3), 106-128.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *Speech acts*. Oxford University Press.

Austin, J. L. (1975). *How to do things with words*. Harvard University Press.

Bach, K., & Harnish, R. M. (1979). *Linguistic communication and speech acts*. MIT Press.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

Barron, A. (2003). *Acquisition in interlanguage pragmatics*. John Benjamins Publishing.

Bayat, N. (2013). A study on the use of speech acts. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *70*, 213-221. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.057

Beebe, L., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals. In R. Scarcella, E. Andersen, & S. Krashen (Eds.), *Developing communicative competence in a second language* (pp. 55-73). Newbury House.

Boxer, D. (1993). Social distance and speech behavior: The case of indirect complaints. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *19*(2), 103-125. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(93)90084-3

Boxer, D. (1996). Ethnographic interviewing as a research tool in speech act analysis: The case of complaints. In S. Gass & J. Neo (Eds.), *Speech acts across cultures: Challenges to communication in a second language* (pp. 217-239). De Gruyter Mouton.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* Cambridge University Press.

Chen, H. J. (1996). *Cross-cultural comparison of English and Chinese metapragmatics in refusal* (Publication No. 9640110) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Chen, Y. S., Chen, C. Y. D., & Chang, M. H. (2011). American and Chinese complaints: Strategy use from a cross-cultural perspective. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *8*(2), 253-275. https://doi.org/10.1515/iprg.2011.012

Dalmau, M. S. I., & Gotor, H. C. I. (2007). From "sorry very much" to "I'm ever so sorry": Acquisitional patterns in L2 apologies by Catalan learners of English. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *4*(2), 287-315. https://doi.org/10.1515/IP.2007.014

Delen, B., & Tavil, Z. M. (2010). Evaluation of four coursebooks in terms of three speech acts: Requests, refusals and complaints. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *9*, 692-697. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.12.219

Deveci, T. (2015). The complaint speech act set produced by university students speaking English as a foreign language [Special issue]. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ)*, *4*(1), 2161-2171. https://doi.org/10.20533/licej.2040.2589.2015.0287

Eshraghi, A., & Shahrokhi, M. (2016). The realization of complaint strategies among Iranian female EFL learners and female native English speakers: A politeness perspective. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *6*(2), 9-20. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v6n2p9

Farashaiyan, A., & Tan, K. H. (2012). On the relationship between pragmatic knowledge and language proficiency among Iranian male and female undergraduate EFL learners. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, *18*(1), 33-46.

Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2008). Perceptions of refusals to invitations: Exploring the minds of foreign language learners. *Language Awareness*, *17*(3), 195-211. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09658410802146818

Gass, S. M., & Selinker, L. (2001). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Halenko, N., & Jones, C. (2011). Teaching pragmatic awareness of spoken requests to Chinese EAP learners in the UK: Is explicit instruction effective? *System*, *39*(2), 240-250. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2011.05.003

Han, T., & Burgucu-Tazegül, A. (2016). Realization of speech acts of refusals and pragmatic competence by Turkish EFL learners. *The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal*, *16*(1), 161-178. https://readingmatrix.com/files/14-j4156s4z.pdf

Holmes, J., & Wilson, N. (2022). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Routledge.

Hong, C. Y., & Shih, S. C. (2013). Proficiency and complaints: Analyses of productions and perceptions. *Intergrams, 14*(1), 1-20.

Hong, C. Y. (2015). Making Complaints—Proficiency Effects on Instructor-and Peer-directed Email Correspondence. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, *6*(1), 53-60. http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0601.06

Hudson, G. (2000). *Essential introductory linguistics.* Blackwell.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

Huwari, I. F., & Al-Shboul, Y. (2015). A study on the perception of Jordanian EFL learners' pragmatic transfer of refusals. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *6*(1), 46-54. http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.6n.1p.46

Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Khamkhien, A. (2022). Speech acts or speech act sets of refusals: Some evidence from Thai L2 learners. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, *16*(1), 97-121. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1343047.pdf

Kim, I. O. (2000). *Relationship of onset age of ESL acquisition and extent of informal input to appropriateness and nativeness in performing four speech acts in English: A study of native Korean adult speakers of ESL* (Publication No. 9968431) [Doctoral dissertation, New York University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Kreishan, L. (2018). Politeness and speech acts of refusal and complaint among Jordanian undergraduate students. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, *7*(4), 68-76. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.7n.4p.68

Laforest, M. (2002). Scenes of family life: Complaining in everyday conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *34*(10-11), 1595-1620. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00077-2

Lee, H. (2013). The influence of social situations on fluency difficulty in Korean EFL learners' oral refusals. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *50*(1), 168-186. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.01.002

Mokhtari, N. (2015). Face-threatening aspect of refusal speech acts: a contrastive study. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, *2*(1), 84-73.

Murphy, B. & Neu, J. (1995). My grade's too low: The speech act set of complaining. In S. M. Gass & J. Neu (Eds.), *Speech acts across cultures: Challenges to communication in a second language* (pp. 191-216). Mouton de Gruyter.

Nunan, D. (2001). *Aspects of task-based syllabus design.* Retrieved from http://www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/syllabusdesign.html

Li, P., Zheng, S. T., & Yang, X. H. (2006). Factors affecting the degrees of severity in the realization of the speech act of complaint. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, *38*(1), 56-60.

Olshtain, E., & Weinbach, L. (1987). Complaints: A study of speech act behavior among native and non-native speakers of Hebrew. In J. Vershcueren & M. Brrtuccelli-Papi (Eds.), *The pragmatic perspective* (pp. 195-208). John Benjamins.

Sattar, H. Q. A., Lah, S. C., & Suleiman, R. R. R. (2011). Refusal strategies in English by Malay university students. *GEMA: Online Journal of Language Studies*, *11*(3), 69-81. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/215570998_Refusal_Strategies_In_English_By_Malay_University_Students

Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.

Searle, J. R. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.

Shahi, B. M. V. (2022). Pragmatic competence of Iranian EFL learners in the light of refusal speech act. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *13*(1), 58-65. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1301.07

Shakki, F., Neaini, J., Mazandarani, O., & Derakhshan, A. (2023). A meta-analysis on the instructed second language pragmatics for the speech acts of apology, request, and refusal in an Iranian EFL context. *Language Related Research*, *13*(6), 461-510.

Shokouhi, H., & Khalili, M. (2008). Pragmatic transfer in learners' refusals: A case of gender distinction. *Journal of the Faculty of Literature & Humanities, Shahid Chamran University of Ahwaz*, *2*(1), 215-252.

Shu, Z., & Bao, Y. (2022, April). The Cross-linguistic influences of third language acquisition in refusal speech act. In *2022 7th International Conference on Social Sciences and Economic Development (ICSSED 2022)* (pp. 1231-1240). Atlantis Press.

Siebold, K., & Busch, H. (2015). (No) need for clarity–facework in Spanish and German refusals. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *75*, 53-68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2014.10.006

Skinner, Q. (1970). Conventions and the understanding of speech acts. *The Philosophical Quarterly (1950-)*, *20*(79), 118-138. https://doi.org/10.2307/2218084

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

Tamimi Sa'd, S. H., & Mohammadi, M. (2014). A cross-sectional study of Iranian EFL learners' polite and impolite apologies. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, *10*(1), 119-136. https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/jlls/issue/9938/122958

Trosborg, A. (1995). Statutes and contracts: An analysis of legal speech acts in the English language of the law. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *23*(1), 31-53. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(94)00034-C

Vaezi, R. (2011). A contrastive study of the speech act of refusal between Iranian EFL learners and Persian native speakers. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, *7*(2), 213-218. http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020110702.024

Valipour, S., & Jadidi, S. (2015). Study of Iranian English language teachers' familiarity with language functions in request, apology, refusal, and greeting. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, *4*(1), 13-30. https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsll.2014.712

Wannaruk, A. (2008). Pragmatic transfer in Thai EFL refusals. *RELC Journal*, *39*(3), 318-337. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688208096844

Wijayanto, A., Laila, M., Prasetyarini, A., & Susiati, S. (2013). Politeness in interlanguage pragmatics of complaints by Indonesian learners of English. *English Language Teaching*, *6*(10), 188-201. doi:10.5539/elt.v6n10p188

Yuan, Z. (2007). English majors' acquisition of complaint. *English Education in China*, *3*, 1-9.

Yuan, W., & Lyu, S. (2022). Speech act matters: Commitment to what's said or what's implicated differs in the case of assertion and promise. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *191*, 128-142. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2022.01.012

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.

Zhang, D. (2001). *The speech act of complaining: A cross-cultural comparative study of Chinese and American English speakers* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Iowa State University.

Appendix

The Written Role-play Scenarios

The following sections include 10 role-plays and related instructions in which the participants should give their answers as detailed as possible. Note that the answers must be within the designated time limitation of 30 minutes. Rejecting an offer, refusing a request, and complaining about a situation are the required tasks. You are not allowed to consult dictionaries. You can either write your detailed answers in the provided box or send them through email or WhatsApp.

Role-play 1

You are taking a history class and are one of the best students. You are also known among your classmates for taking perfect notes during the lectures. Yesterday, the professor just announced that there would be an exam next week. One of your classmates, whom you don't interact with outside of class and who misses class frequently and comes late, wants to borrow your lecture notes for the exam. You have previously helped this student several times, but you feel that you cannot give him the lecture notes again this time.

Role-play 2

You have been working part-time at a bookstore for the past seven months, and you have a good relationship with your 45-year-old boss, who is pleased with your work. The bookstore opens at 7:00 a.m. and closes at 9:00 p.m.; your work shift is Monday through Friday from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. This week is hectic for the bookstore since it is the first week of the semester, and many students come to buy their textbooks. On Friday night, your boss asks you to stay for three more hours until 9:00 p.m., to work on a new shipment of books that just arrived. Nevertheless, you cannot work these extra hours.

Role-play 3

You stop by your friend's house to pick him up to go to a concert where you will meet other friends. Your friend still lives with his parents and has one younger brother in high school. Your friend is running late and needs about ten minutes to get ready. In the meantime, his parents are entertaining you while you are waiting for him in the living room. While you are chatting with his parents, his younger brother, whom you met a couple of times before, comes by to say hi and ask for your help. He is working on a school project and needs to interview you for this project. You cannot, however, help him at this time.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

Role-play 4

You have been working for a company for almost three years and have a good relationship with your boss. Your boss has been delighted with your work and creativity and has decided to offer you a promotion and a pay raise. However, this promotion involves relocating to another town from your hometown. Although you like the offer, you cannot accept it.

Role-play 5

You are visiting a friend of yours whom you have not seen for almost a year. Your friend is originally from another town and is delighted you are visiting. He/ She prepared a big meal. At the end of the meal, you feel full, but your friend offers you more dessert and insists you eat it. But you actually cannot.

Role-play 6

You are a housewife. You are cooking for an important event and discover that the milk you bought is sour. You go back to the shop to complain.

Role-play 7

Your husband does not help you around the house. Moreover, he does not help you with the kids and assumes you will do everything. You are tired of it.

Role-play 8

A co-worker always comes back from lunch late. What is more, he or she always leaves work early. You think it is unfair that you always have to make excuses for your co-worker and finish his or her work.

Role-play 9

You have just bought a new DVD player. When you took it home, you realized one crucial piece was missing. Besides, there was no handbook for instructions. When you went to the store, they mistreated you and gave no satisfactory answer. You feel deceived.

Role-play 10

You and your partner went for a romantic Valentine's meal in a well-known, expensive restaurant. Your food was served cold, so you complained to the waiter. He just heated your dish in the microwave for five minutes, so it was overcooked and inedible when he brought it back to you. You want a complimentary three-course meal for you and your partner.

Thanks for your participation!

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]