

“Thank You for Thinking Of Me”: A Cross- Cultural Study Of The Refusal Speech Act Among Malaysian And Moroccan Students

**Norhayuza Mohamad*¹, Siti Nur Hazirah Rosli², Anis Nabilah Mamat³,
Normah Ahmad⁴, Zuraini Mohd Ramli⁵, Bashasunnahar Puasa⁶,
Ahmad Wan Abdul Rahman⁷**

¹²³⁴⁵⁶⁷Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract

Advances in technology and globalization have made it possible for multicultural societies to communicate more effectively. Understanding the characteristics of speech acts across different cultures is increasingly essential for enabling communities that speak various languages to achieve their communication goals. This study aims to identify the use of refusal speech acts among Malaysian and Moroccan students. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, involving 34 students from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia, and the Dar El-Hadith El-Hassania Institute for Higher Islamic Studies, Morocco. The researcher used a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) containing 10 refusal scenarios adapted from Al-Issa's (1998) study. The data were analyzed deductively using the refusal strategies outlined by Beebe et al. (1990). The results indicate that Malaysian and Moroccan students predominantly use an indirect approach. The study also found that social status factors influence refusal strategies in certain situations.

Keyword: Speech Act; Refusal; Direct Strategies; Indirect Strategies; Adjuncts Strategies

INTRODUCTION

This cross-cultural study focuses on the speech act of refusal, a topic of growing interest within the field of pragmatics. As an area of applied linguistics, pragmatics examines the relationship between meaning and context, particularly the illocutionary force of speech acts that extends beyond mere semantics. Pragmatic analysis centres on dynamic speech acts where the meaning of language is closely tied to human intention (Min, 2023). Recent research has increasingly addressed various speech acts, including their cultural dimensions.

Speech acts have been extensively studied across diverse languages and cultures. Yun (2015) posits that speech acts often reflect cultural norms within societies. These acts can be culturally specific, or they may exhibit cross-cultural variations. Yan (2007) identifies four key aspects of cross-cultural variation in speech acts, noting that some acts may be unique to specific cultures. In different contexts, speech acts may be performed differently across languages, with variations in responses and utterances depending on cultural norms.

Intercultural communication has become increasingly prominent, driven by advancements in communication technology that facilitate interactions among people from different cultures and countries. Understanding the speech acts prevalent in various societies is crucial for successful communication. Familiarity with common speech acts, such as requesting, directing, apologizing, and praising, can enhance cross-cultural

interactions. The speech act of refusal, for example, is frequently encountered in daily communication. Saud (2019) highlights that a lack of awareness regarding variations in the use of refusal speech acts can lead to communication breakdowns. Refusal, a universal speech act, is often realized through specific formulas that must be recognized and adapted across cultures. For instance, Americans tend to employ direct refusal strategies, whereas Jordanian Arabs may prefer indirect approaches (Al-Shboul & Maros, 2020).

The study of speech acts has been extensively explored by researchers in pragmatics across various languages. Some research focuses on speech acts within a single society or language, while other studies compare multiple cultures. Research on the speech act of refusal within individual languages or cultures includes investigations into Spanish (McIntire, 2021), Korean (Lee et al., 2018), EFL speech acts among Moroccan students (El Hiani, 2015), Saudi Arabian students (Saud, 2019), Malay students (Norma et al., 2021), and American students (Moaveni, 2014), among others. Additionally, studies on speech acts in cross-cultural contexts have been conducted, revealing cultural specialization in language use, particularly regarding the speech act of refusal compared to other speech acts (Liu & Liu, 2022). The pragmatic complexity of refusal strategies has garnered significant attention in intercultural communication research.

Notable cross-cultural studies on the speech act of refusal include comparisons between Jordanian and American cultures (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2020), Chinese, Korean, and American cultures (Liu & Liu, 2022), Turkish and English (Çiftçi, 2016), Chinese and American (Guo, 2012), Korean and American (Lyuh, 1992), Egyptian Arabic and American (Nelson et al., 2002), and American English and Mandarin (Liou & Bresnahan, 1996), among others.

In conclusion, research on the speech act of refusal can be further expanded across various languages and cultures to enhance understanding of cross-cultural communication. This study aims to contribute to the knowledge base on speech acts, particularly by examining interactions between the Malay and Arab communities with diverse national and cultural backgrounds.

The speech act involves interaction between a speaker and a listener, where the listener comprehends and responds to the speaker's words. According to McIntire (2021), speech acts possess the potential to communicate more authentically, although listeners may not always fully grasp the illocutionary force behind the utterances. Speech act theory focuses on performative utterances rather than assessing the correctness of statements. Instead, it aims to describe the factors influencing the success or failure of linguistic communication (Almusa, 2010).

Sophia (2001) highlights the significant impact of John L. Austin's work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) on linguistic philosophy, particularly pragmatics. Austin's theory, known as 'Speech Act Theory,' was further developed by his student John R. Searle. This theory has prompted deeper exploration into speech acts. It addresses the use of sentences in communication and considers that some utterances constitute actions. This raises issues concerning the nature of the act, the speaker's motivation and intention, and the socio-cultural context in which the act occurs. For instance, the utterance "I sentence you to ten years of hard labor" can alter an individual's fate if pronounced by a judge in a legal setting. Despite the importance of appropriate verbs in performing speech acts, Sophia (2000) notes that speech acts can also be executed without specific verbs and may be conventionally predictable or unpredictable.

1. I will be there on time

2. I'm coming over the weekend

In the examples provided, Sophia (2000) illustrates that example (1) demonstrates a promise, or at least performs an obligation that can be interpreted as a promise, even though the verb "promise" is not explicitly used. In this case, the use of "I," referring to the speaker, combined with the verb "will," indicating future intent, constitutes a predictable speech act. On the other hand, example (2) does not convey certainty about whether the speech act will be executed. Although the verb indicates the future, it does not imply an obligation to act. Instead, this example can be interpreted in various ways, including as a statement about future events, a promise, a warning, or a threat. This speech act is expressed indirectly, reflecting the speaker's intention.

With the growth of pragmatic studies, new criteria for speech acts have emerged, reflecting cultural variations. Chen (1996) asserts that some speech acts require a higher level of pragmatic competence due to their potential impact on interpersonal relationships. The speech act of refusal is one such example. Beebe (1990) highlights that refusal is a critical cultural component and reaching consensus on its application in cross-cultural communication can be challenging. Refusal typically occurs in situations where there is a conflict between the individual and the listener, such as disagreements over offers or requests (Alabi, 2022). Searle and Vanderken (1985) identify refusal as akin to negation in acceptance and agreement. For instance, if a person can accept offers, requests, and invitations, they can also refuse them. Albawardi (2020) notes that refusal inherently involves sensitivity and requires careful handling. Factors influencing refusal include power dynamics, coercion, and organizational management. Maniavannan (2012) underscores the importance of refusal as a means of protecting oneself from exploitation by asserting "no" at appropriate times. Moaveni (2014) clarifies that refusal does not apply universally to all requests, invitations, offers, or proposals; it may also play a role in negotiations where the speaker needs to ascertain the outcome.

Brown and Levinson (1987) classify refusal as a 'face-threatening act' (FTA) that can challenge the speaker's and listener's desire to avoid threatening facial expressions. Khalil (2014) explains that 'face' pertains to the desire to avoid FTAs and to replace them with less confrontational speech acts. Consequently, the speech act of refusal should provide a reasonable and polite response when declining an offer, request, or suggestion. Beebe et al. (1990) describe this act as involving communication of information the listener may not wish to hear, necessitating the speaker's effort to garner support and minimize embarrassment. Sattar and Suleiman (2011) note that refusal varies by culture and language, requiring a high level of understanding to execute effectively. Cultural and linguistic differences between speakers and listeners can lead to misunderstandings or pragmatic failures. Kawate-Mierzejewska (2002) states that the speech act of refusal aims to gain acceptance of the refusal (refusal goal) while maintaining a positive relationship with the requester (relationship goal). Beebe et al. (1990) developed a scientific classification for refusal, dividing it into three strategies: direct, indirect, and additional.

Table 1. The Refusal Speech

Direct	Indirect	Adjunct
<p>1. Using performative verbs (<i>I refuse</i>)</p> <p>2. Non performative statement "No" Negative willingness/ability (<i>I can't/I won't/I don't think so</i>)</p>	<p>1. Statement of regret (<i>I'm sorry.../I feel terrible...</i>)</p> <p>2. Excuse, reason, explanation (<i>I have a headache</i>)</p> <p>3. Wish (<i>I wish I could help you...</i>)</p> <p>4. Statement of alternative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. I can do X instead of Y (<i>I'd rather.../I'd prefer...</i>) b. Why don't you do X instead of Y (<i>Why don't you ask someone else?</i>) </p> <p>5. Set condition for future or past acceptance (<i>If you had asked me earlier, I would have...</i>)</p> <p>6. Promise of future acceptance (<i>I'll do it next time</i>)</p> <p>7. Statement of principle (<i>I never do business with friends</i>)</p> <p>8. Statement of philosophy (<i>One can't be too careful</i>)</p>	<p>9. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor</p> <p>a. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (<i>I won't be any fun tonight to refuse an invitation</i>)</p> <p>b. Guilt trip (waitress to customers who want to sit a while: <i>I can't make a living off people who just order coffee</i>)</p> <p>c. Criticize the request/requester (statement of negative feeling or opinion; insult/attack (<i>Who do you think you are? /That's a terrible idea!</i>))</p> <p>d. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request</p> <p>e. Let interlocutor off the hook (<i>Don't worry about it./That's okay. / You don't have to.</i>)</p> <p>Self-defense (<i>I'm trying my best. /I'm doing all I can do.</i>)</p>

Several cross-cultural studies have been conducted on refusal speech acts. Al-Shboul et al. (2012) explored refusal strategies by examining the similarities and differences in refusal language behavior in English between Jordanians and Malays from an intercultural communication perspective. This descriptive quantitative research utilized the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and interview recordings. The findings revealed that Jordanian participants more frequently employed indirect strategies compared to their Malay counterparts.

Çiftçi (2016) conducted a comparative study on refusal strategies among three groups: native Turkish speakers, native English speakers, and Turkish EFL speakers. Using a discourse completion test with six different scenarios, the study found that all three groups utilized a wide range of refusal strategies. However, differences emerged in the use of refusal strategies based on the status of interlocutors, the content of semantic formulas, and the level of directness or indirectness across the groups. Norma et al. (2019) conducted an intercultural study on the refusal speech acts of Malaysian university students, focusing on Malay, Chinese, and Indian undergraduates. The findings indicated that substantial reasons or justifications and expressions of apology or regret were commonly used to mitigate the threat posed by refusal and to signal that the refusal was

unavoidable. Direct strategies were employed sparingly, with a limited degree of directness and negative willingness.

Al Bugam (2019) compared refusal patterns between native speakers of British English (NS) and non-native Saudi speakers (NNS) studying in the UK. The results showed that while both groups used direct and indirect refusal strategies, the frequency of use varied. Additionally, a significant correlation was found between the length of stay in the UK, exposure to native speakers, and the adoption of pragmatically competent and socially acceptable norms of refusal by Saudi speakers when interacting with native speakers. Durham (2019) examined the level of directness in refusal strategies among native Arabic speakers residing in the United States and the Middle East, compared to native English speakers, using Matsugu's (2014) multiple-choice discourse completion test. Contrary to previous research, the findings revealed no significant differences in the directness of refusal strategies used by native Arabic speakers in both English and Arabic compared to those used by native English speakers.

Mohd Jalis et al. (2019) investigated the refusal strategies and corresponding linguistic forms used by Malay and German native speakers. The study found that German native speakers preferred slightly more direct strategies than their Malay counterparts, particularly in formal situations. In terms of frequency, German speakers employed more refusal strategies overall. Notably, Malay respondents more frequently used statements of regret in their refusal strategies and commonly incorporated religious terms, such as "In shaa Allah" ("if God wills"), in their refusals. Al-Ghamdi & Alrefae (2020) conducted a study on 20 Yemeni Arabic speakers and 20 American English speakers, investigating their refusal strategies. The DCT results showed clear cross-cultural differences, with Yemenis tending to be more direct than Americans, especially in interactions involving lower and equal social status.

Hovsepyan (2021) conducted a cross-cultural study to identify similarities and differences in the politeness strategies used in refusal acts by native English speakers (NES) and Armenian non-native English speakers (ANNES). The study involved 24 Armenian English speakers with high English proficiency and 15 American English speakers. The analysis revealed many similarities in the use of politeness strategies and adjuncts by American and Armenian English speakers, particularly in cushioning the intrinsic threat to the interlocutors' face during refusals. Hashemian (2021) conducted a cross-cultural study on refusal speech acts involving 40 American native speakers, 40 Iranian Persian speakers, and 40 Iranian English speakers, using a DCT with contextual variations in power and distance. The results indicated that both Iranian and American participants preferred indirect refusal strategies over direct ones, adhering to cooperative and politeness principles to avoid misunderstandings and potential offenses.

Na & Yan (2023) compared refusal patterns of Chinese Australians from a cross-cultural perspective, involving 30 Chinese and 30 Australian university students using the DCT framework. The study noted that due to differing cultural perspectives, Chinese and Australian students often responded differently to the same situations when refusing others. Previous studies have demonstrated various findings regarding similarities and differences in refusal strategies across cultures. While some studies report significant differences in the use of direct and indirect strategies, others highlight similarities in directness but differences in the semantic formulas employed.

METHOD**Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to explore differences in refusal speech acts between Malaysian and Moroccan students. According to Fauzi et al. (2014), descriptive research provides a general overview by answering questions about the subjects, objects, time, location, and methods involved. Järvinen & Mik-Meyer (2020) explain that qualitative researchers focus on how meaning is produced, negotiated, maintained, or altered within specific social contexts. This research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) for Malaysian and Moroccan students, along with content analysis. The content units analyzed are the expressions of refusal speech acts, following the approach suggested by Beebe et al. (1990).

Subjects

The subjects of this study were selected using purposive sampling. According to Rai and Tapha (2015), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the study, such as expertise or willingness to participate. Selecting an appropriate sample enhances the accuracy of qualitative research (Gill, 2020). However, the sample for this study was also influenced by the researcher's constraints. The study involved 34 undergraduate Arabic students from Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia and 34 students from Dar El-Hadith El-Hassania Institute for Higher Islamic Studies, Morocco. These students were chosen because they participated in an online communication program organized by both universities to enhance their Arabic language proficiency and cultural knowledge. The participants were aged between 20 and 30 years.

Data Collection and Procedure

Data was collected using the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Wojtazek (2016) describes a typical DCT as a written document consisting of a set number of situational descriptions, followed by a brief dialogue with blanks for the subjects to fill in. DCTs became popular after the influential work of Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984) and are considered useful tools in pragmatics research for data collection (Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Kwon, 2003; Nurani, 2009). They allow researchers to collect data efficiently and are easy to administer (Varghese & Billmyer, 1996). In this study, subjects were asked to imagine how they would refuse in 10 different situations and write their responses. The researcher adapted 10 DCT scenarios from Al-Issa's (1998) study, requiring students to respond in writing to each refusal scenario. The scenarios included:

1. Refusing to lend a notebook to a classmate.
2. Refusing to order expensive food suggested by a chef at a restaurant.
3. Refusing to use a notebook suggested by a friend.
4. Refusing a drink purchased by an unknown person.
5. Refusing a car ride offered by an unknown person.
6. Refusing to speak frankly with a professor.
7. Refusing to take care of a stranger's belongings.
8. Refusing to help a professor pick up books.
9. Refusing a loan offered by a friend.
10. Refusing to register for a new course suggested by a supervisor.

Data was collected via Google Forms, with scenarios presented in a language understood by the students—Malay for Malaysian students and Arabic for Moroccan students. The data collection period spanned nearly a month, with all 34 subjects completing the DCT.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data was analyzed deductively using the speech act theory of refusal developed by Beebe et al. (1990). All responses collected through Google Forms were transferred to Google Sheets for analysis. The researcher categorized the responses into three main categories: direct, indirect, and adjunct strategies. For example, a refusal to lend a notebook such as "Sorry, I cannot lend you this book" was classified under the direct category, while "I don't have my notes with me; they're at home" fell under the indirect category. The content analysis technique involved carefully examining the students' responses and matching them with the semantic formulas for refusal. After several revisions, expressions related to refusal were categorized. To compare the use of refusal speech acts between the two groups, the researcher compiled tables showing the total frequency for each scenario and category.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results will be presented in tables and narrative writing, showing the frequency of direct and indirect refusal and adjunct strategies.

Table 2. Number Of Subjects According to Gender

	Male	Female	Total
Malaysian student	12	22	34
Moroccan students	5	29	34

Table 3. Frequency of Refusal Strategies As A Whole By Malaysian And Moroccan Students

Strategies	Malaysian Students	Moroccan Students
Direct	153	125
Indirect	399	381
Adjunct	101	139

The table above illustrates the refusal strategies employed by Malaysian and Moroccan students overall. Indirect refusal strategies were the most commonly used by both groups, surpassing direct and adjunct strategies. Among direct refusal strategies, Malaysian students exhibited a higher frequency of use compared to Moroccan students. Similarly, Malaysian students also demonstrated a slightly higher frequency in the use of indirect refusal strategies than their Moroccan counterparts. However, in the case of adjunct refusal strategies, Moroccan students were found to use these strategies more frequently than Malaysian students.

Table 4. Example Of Direct Strategies Used By Malay And Moroccan Students

Student	Malay/Arabic language	Translation
Malaysian student	Saya tak mahu	I don't want
Moroccan student	لا أرغب في ذلك	I don't want it

Malaysian students employed direct refusal strategies more frequently than Moroccan students in six of the situations studied. However, this difference is not statistically significant. Social status did not appear to be a significant barrier for some students in directly rejecting requests from professors, restaurant chefs, and supervisors. Similarly, the study participants were more direct in refusing requests from classmates and strangers.

Table 5. The Frequency Of Direct Refusal Strategies By Malaysian And Moroccan Students

Situations										Malaysian Students		Moroccan Students	
Situation 1 (refuse to lend a notebook to a classmate)										8		11	
Situation 2 (refuse to order expensive food as suggested by a chef at a restaurant)										18		11	
Situation3 (refuse to use a notebook as suggested by a friend)										7		6	
Situation 4 (refuse to accept a purchase of drinks by an unknown person)										23		18	
Situation 5 (refuse to ride a car with an unknown person)										20		14	
Situation 6 (refuse to speak frankly with a professor)										15		19	
Situation 7 (refuse to take care of stranger's belongings)										6		7	
Situation 8 (refuse to help a professor to pick up books)										9		11	
Situation 9 (refuse to be given a loan from a friend)										29		12	
Situation 10 (refuse to register for a new course as suggested by a supervisor)										18		16	
TOTAL										153		125	

Table 6. Table Comparing The Use Of Direct Refusal Sub-Strategies Between Malaysian and Moroccan Students

Situation	S1		S2		S3		S4		S5		S6		S7		S8		S9		S10	
	M L	M R																		
D 1 perfomative	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
D 2 Non perfomative	2	1	1	1	7	6	2	1	2	1	19	6	7	9	1	2	1	18	1	6

*S=Situation, D=Direct, ML= Malaysian students, MR = Moroccan Students

The table above indicates a minimal use of performative strategies, with Malaysian students employing this strategy in three situations, compared to only one situation for Moroccan students. In contrast, non-performative strategies are utilized more frequently, with Malaysian students demonstrating a higher usage in seven out of the ten situations compared to their Moroccan counterparts.

Indirect Strategies

Table 7. Frequency Of Indirect Refusal Strategies By Malaysian And Moroccan Students

Situations										Malaysian Students		Moroccan Students	
Situation 1 (refuse to lend a notebook to a classmate)										42		47	
Situation 2 (refuse to order expensive food as suggested by a chef at a restaurant)										36		46	
Situation3 (refuse to use a notebook as suggested by a friend)										26		29	
Situation 4 (refuse to accept a purchase of drinks by an unknown person)										30		26	
Situation 5 (refuse to ride a car with an unknown person)										33		31	
Situation 6 (refuse to speak frankly with a professor)										35		26	
Situation 7 (refuse to take care of stranger's belongings)										61		56	
Situation 8 (refuse to help a professor to pick up books)										72		59	
Situation 9 (refuse to be given a loan from a friend)										26		21	
Situation 10 (refuse to register for a new course as suggested by a supervisor)										38		41	
										399		381	

Table 8. The Sub-Indirect Refusal Strategies Employed By Malaysian And Moroccan Students

Strategy	S1		S2		S3		S4		S5		S6		S7		S8		S9		S10	
	M L	M R																		
ID 1 Regret	15	21	6	8	7	2	4	7	9	6	5	5	26	24	34	24	2	4	11	1 3
ID 2 Wish	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ID 3 Reason	13	14	4	19	8	12	20	11	28	21	11	11	21	25	27	19	10	15	16	2 0
ID 4 Alternat ive	4	4	12	7	10	8	0	1	2	0	1	5	6	3	7	11	4	1	5	4
ID 5 Conditi on	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
ID 6 Promise	1	1	3	8	0	1	1	3	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
ID 7 Principl e	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
ID 8 Philoso phical	2	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ID 9 Dissuad e interloc utor	5	1	8	1	12	6	4	2	3	0	11	3	1	1	0	0	7	1	5	2
ID 10 Funtion of refusal	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ID 11 avoidan ce	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	2	2	5	1	0	0	0

*S=Situation, ID= Indirect, ML= Malaysian students, MR = Moroccan Students

The table above illustrates the sub-indirect refusal strategies employed by Malaysian and Moroccan students. Regret, excuse, and alternative strategies emerged as the three most commonly used sub-indirect strategies. In terms of regret, Moroccan students surpassed Malaysian students in five situations, while Malaysian students led in four, with one situation showing equal usage between the two groups. For excuse strategies, Moroccan students outnumbered Malaysian students in six out of ten situations. Conversely, the alternative strategy was more frequently used by Malaysian students in six out of ten situations. The less prevalent sub-strategies in this study were hope, principle, philosophical, and avoidance strategies.

Table 9. Example of Indirect Strategies (Regret) used by Malay and Moroccan Students

Students	Malay/Arabic Language	Translation
Malaysian student	Maaf nota saya tidak lengkap	Sorry my notes are incomplete
Moroccan students	انا اعتذر كثيرا لا يمكنني فأنا سأذهب قريبا	I'm so sorry, I can't, I'll be gone soon

Adjuncts**Table 10. Frequency of Adjunct Refusal Strategies Used by Malaysian and Moroccan Students**

Situations	Malaysian Students	Moroccan Students
Situation 1 (refuse to lend a notebook to a classmate)	8	5
Situation 2 (refuse to order expensive food as suggested by a chef at a restaurant)	4	8
Situation 3 (refuse to use a notebook as suggested by a friend)	16	23
Situation 4 (refuse to accept a purchase of drinks by an unknown person)	18	25
Situation 5 (refuse to ride a car with an unknown person)	12	23
Situation 6 (refuse to speak frankly with a professor)	7	6
Situation 7 (refuse to take care of stranger's belongings)	4	4
Situation 8 (refuse to help a professor to pick up books)	2	5
Situation 9 (refuse to be given a loan from a friend)	19	37
Situation 10 (refuse to register for a new course as suggested by a supervisor)	11	5
	101	139

The table above highlights the use of adjunct refusal strategies by both groups of students. Moroccan students employed these strategies slightly more frequently than Malaysian students, with Moroccan students using them in 6 situations compared to 4 situations for Malaysian students. Notably, Moroccan students were more inclined to use adjunct refusal strategies in scenarios involving interactions with unknown individuals.

Table 11. Frequency of Adjunct Refusal Sub-Strategies by Malaysian and Moroccan Students

Ref / Situa	S1		S2		S3		S4		S5		S6		S7		S8		S9		S10	
	M L	M R																		
A 1 Under standing	6	5	2	4	9	12	2	7	0	4	3	4	0	4	0	5	2	15	4	2
A 2 Empat hy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
A 3 Pause filler	1	0	1	0	2	0	4	0	2	0	2	0	3	0	2	0	4	0	2	0
A 4 Gratitu de	1	0	1	4	5	12	12	18	10	19	1	2	1	0	0	0	13	20	5	3

*S=Situation, A=Adjunct, ML= Malaysian students, MR = Moroccan Students

The table above shows that both groups of students employed three adjunct strategies: understanding, empathy, and gratitude. However, no data were found on the use of empathic strategies. For the understanding strategy, 9 out of 10 situations indicate that Moroccan students used it more frequently than Malaysian students. In contrast, no data were found for Moroccan students using pause fillers. Regarding the gratitude strategy, Moroccan students also had a higher frequency in 6 out of 10 situations compared to Malaysian students. Overall, it can be concluded that Moroccan students utilized adjunct strategies more often than Malaysian students.

Table 12. Example of Adjunct Strategies Used by Malay and Moroccan Students

Student	Malay Language	Translation
Malaysian student	Oh, ini idea yang bijak. tapi maaf, saya malu untuk bercakap bersemuka dengan profesor	Oh, this is a smart idea. but sorry, I'm embarrassed to talk face to face with the professor
Moroccan students	شكرا الحسن ظنك بي، لكن أظنه لا يناسبني	Thank you for thinking of me, but I don't think it suits me

In addition to analyzing the three refusal strategies used by the subjects, this study also examines the frequency of strategies employed within each response. Some students utilized only one strategy per sentence, while others combined multiple strategies in a single sentence.

Table 13. Total Use of Refusal Strategies in Each Sentence

Use of refusal strategies in each sentence	1 strategy	2 strategies	3 strategies	4 strategies	5 strategies
Malaysian students	102	168	59	13	1
Moroccan students	92	186	59	1	1

The table above illustrates that students employed various numbers of strategies in their responses. While some students used only one strategy, others used up to five strategies in a single response. Both groups of students predominantly used two strategies, followed by one, three, four, and five strategies. Malaysian students were found to use one and four strategies more frequently than Moroccan students, while Moroccan students used two strategies more frequently than their Malaysian counterparts. Both groups showed similar frequencies for using three and five strategies. Notably, Malaysian students significantly outpaced Moroccan students in using four strategies in a single utterance, with 13 instances compared to only one for Moroccan students.

Table 14. Example of More Than 1 Refusal Strategies Used By Malaysian And Moroccan Students

Student	Malay Language	Translation	Strategies
Malaysian student	Oh, maaf Saudara, saya selepas ini ada kelas yang ingin dikejar, saya perlu segera. Mungkin awak boleh bawa sekali buku ini untuk beli makanan bersama atau awak suruh orang lain jagakan. Maaf ye.	Oh, sorry Brother, I have a class after this that I want to catch up on, I need to hurry. Maybe you can take this book to buy food together or you can ask someone else to take care of it. I'm sorry.	Phrase filler Regret Explanation Suggestion
Moroccan student	شكرا على الاقتراح، ولكنني الأفضل كتابة الملاحظات لنفسي لأنها لا تساعدني في التذكر بالفعل. أعتقد أنني سأبحث عن طريقة أخرى لذكر الأشياء بشكل أفضل. شكرًا للعناية!	Thank you for the suggestion, but I do not prefer writing notes to myself because it doesn't really help me remember. I think I will look for another way. To remember things better. Thanks for taking care!	Regret Explanation Suggestion

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the use of refusal strategies among Malaysian and Moroccan students, focusing on three types of strategies suggested by Beebe et al. (1990): direct refusal, indirect refusal, and adjunct strategies. The findings indicate that both groups predominantly use indirect refusal strategies more frequently than direct refusal and adjunct strategies. While there is a general agreement in the preference for refusal strategies between the two groups, differences emerge in the content and frequency of semantic formulas used. These results align with findings from previous studies, including Xiumin (2022), Çiftçi (2016), Norma (2020), Mohd Jalis (2019), and Al-Ghamdi (2020).

In summary, there is no significant difference in the overall use of refusal strategies between Malaysian and Moroccan students across the three main categories (direct, indirect, adjunct). However, notable differences exist within the sub-categories. Malaysian students were found to use non-performative direct refusal strategies more frequently than Moroccan students. Among indirect refusal strategies, Malaysians preferred alternative strategies, whereas Moroccans frequently used regret and excuse strategies. Moroccan students used adjunct strategies more often than Malaysian students. Additionally, both cultures showed that distance and social status influenced the choice of refusal strategies, with indirect strategies more commonly used when addressing individuals of higher social status. For instance, both groups often expressed regret when refusing requests from professors. Malaysian students tended to use more refusal strategies per utterance compared to Moroccan students.

The study contributes valuable insights to intercultural comparison research. However, it has limitations, such as a small sample size and the constraint of written Discourse Completion Tests (DCT), which may not fully capture natural responses. Future research should address these limitations by employing larger sample sizes and incorporating various methods, such as oral DCTs, interviews, or role-plays, to obtain more accurate and realistic data on refusal speech acts. Additionally, future studies could explore gender-specific differences and consider the impact of specific scenarios, situations, or contexts.

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