An Analysis of Iranian EFL Learners' Dis-preferred Responses in Interactional Discourse

A. R. Jalilifar [*]
Associate Professor, TEFL
Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz
email: ar.jalilifar@gmail.com

R. Dinarvand
M.A., TEFL
Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz
email: dinarvand_r@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present study, on the one hand, attempted to investigate the strategies applied in dispreferred responses by Iranian university students of English and the extent to which pragmatic transfer could occur. On the other hand, the study aimed to probe into the association between dispreferred organization and turn-shape. To this end, 31 relevant naturally occurring conversations, totaling 120 min drawn from approximately 9 hr of audio-taped conversations from 40 voluntary students, were recorded from which the refusal strategies and complexity of turns were elicited. The findings suggested that a sizable number of the learners delivered responsibility to other sources using accounts and discourse markers. As for preference organization, the results showed that solidarity was the dominant aspect among the learners. Moreover, the study compared 2 measures of L2 competence: oral interaction and a discourse completion test (DCT). The results showed that the 2 methods induced somewhat different production samples from the learners in terms of frequency, type of refusal strategies, and turn shapes. These variations suggest that production through DCTs cannot depict the complexity of natural conversations in which the speakers find themselves free to control the conversation. Finally, it is important to consider cultural differences in language usage by emphasizing the significance of a curriculum that utilizes the act of refusal within its cultural contexts.

Keywords: adjacency pairs, dispreferred responses, preference organization, pragmatic transfer, oral interaction

1. Introduction

Adjacency pairs refer to conversational sequences in which an utterance by one speaker depends upon an utterance made by another speaker. It is a sequence of two related utterances by two different speakers. Adjacency is defined by Schegloff (1968) as a unit which plays a central role in sequential organization. The production of the first part of an adjacency pair creates a context for the second part by making it conditionally relevant. Thus, any utterance produced next will be expected for the participants as the second pair part. For instance, a response to an invitation will be some kind of acceptance or rejection (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). The first and second expressions refer "to the order in which these turns occur; they refer to the design features of these turn types and sequential positions" (Schegloff, 2007, p. 20). Refusals are regarded as dispreferred responses and they are marked by different features which differentiate them from preferred responses in terms of turn-shapes (Levinson, 1983).

Levinson (1983), based on his observation introduced four strategies for performing dispreferred responses: (1) Delays which include silences preceding the delivery of the response, prefaces of various kinds, and insertion sequences which displace the response over a series of turns; (2) prefaces such as *uh* or *well*; (3) token agreements, appreciations, apologies, and other forms of hesitation; (4) accounts which refer to explanations for the disagreement or rejection and declination component which are marked as uncertain, conditional, or indirect (p. 334). A refusal is responding negatively to an offer, request, invitation, and suggestion. In many cultures, how one rejects another by saying *no* varies. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), "refusals are face-threatening acts and belong to the category of commissives because they commit the refuser to perform an action which needs considerable cultural and linguistic expertise on the part of the refuser" (p. 323). The interlocutor must know when to use the appropriate form and its function, depending on the community and its cultural values.

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural influences on the use of various refusal strategies in different languages (Al-Issa, 2003; Allami & Naeimi, 2010; Al-Shalawi, 1997; Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Chang, 2009; Keshavarz, Eslami-Rasekh, & Ghahraman, 2006; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002). Refusals differ cross-culturally and linguistically in that they require a different level of appropriateness for their successful completion. Differences in refusal features might cause misunderstanding or pragmatic failure when people from different cultures need to interact with each other (Wierzbicka, 1991). Dispreferred seconds are often preceded by pauses and marked with hedges

and discourse markers (Cashman, 2000; Lazaraton, 1997). In EFL contexts like Iran, especially, in which the learners are less exposed to the target community and culture, producing appropriate dispreferred responses can sometimes be an arduous task for the learners. Moreover, the disparity of social and cultural norms of Iranians from those of English speakers may motivate transfer from their cultural norms into their L2.

Earlier studies on refusals investigating the pragmatic transferability of dispreferred responses by native and nonnative speakers of English (e.g., Japanese, Jordanian, and Chinese), particularly via a Discourse Completion Task (DCT), have underscored the existence of transfer phenomenon (Al-Issa, 2005; Beebe, et al, 1990; Chang, 2008). Chang (2008) demonstrated that while a similar range of semantic formulas were elicited from native and nonnative speakers of English in responding to the refusals, their preference varied in the frequency and content of the semantic formulas.

Clayman (2002), in his study on the relationship between sequence and solidarity, contended that agreements and acceptances usually are produced immediately following the initiation and in a straightforward manner, whereas disagreements and rejections tend to be delayed and more complex. This delay feature and other features of refusals that the interlocutors use as strategies are mitigating factors.

In the Iranian context, Keshavarz, Eslami-Rasekh, and Ghahraman (2006) investigated the refusal strategies produced by the Iranian learners of English. The responses to four situations of requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions by three groups of low, intermediate, and advanced levels of proficiency which were gathered via a DCT were analyzed. The findings showed pragmatic transfer in Iranian EFL learners' refusal strategies, demonstrating that even speech acts exploited by language learners with a fairly advanced level of proficiency still contained nonnative pragmatic features arising from pragmatic transfer. The findings also showed that, Iranians' accounts were less specific in terms of place, time, and parties involved in comparison to those of Americans.

More recently, in another comparative study by Allami and Naeimi (2010), the production of refusals by Iranian EFL learners with regard to learners' language-proficiency (lower-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate), status of interlocutors (lower, equal, and higher) and types of eliciting acts (requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions) on realization of the strategies was investigated. The aim of their study was to find evidence of pragmatic transfer in the order, frequency, and content of semantic formulas used in refusals by Persian learners of English. Results indicated pragmatic transfer in the realization of the speech act of refusal among Iranian EFL learners, and that there was a positive correlation between L2

proficiency and pragmatic transfer. However, they admitted that the complexity of refusing in an L2 calls for the acquisition of the sociocultural values of the target culture.

In sum, though previous studies have offered various findings on how English learners produce face-threatening acts specially refusals under the notion of speech acts, very few studies have explored the realization of dispreferred organization in foreign cultures. Moreover, it seems that far fewer studies, if any, have focused on this area of research in an eastern context as compared to the Western context. Thus, this paucity of research inspires further investigation of this issue. The present study was carried out with the aim of finding the evidence of pragmatic transfer from L1 in uttering dispreferred second pair parts and also how preference organization was realized in conversations among EFL learners.

Most previous studies on conversation analysis have used DCTs as the data-gathering procedure. Comparing the results of production questionnaires with role-plays, Sasaki (1998) found that there were differences between the two methods in terms of response length, variety of strategies, and turn shapes of responses. Although role-play allows speakers to be creative in producing their responses, DCTs give them some time to plan on what they want to say (Brown, 2004). Motivated by the shortcomings of both methods, the present study incorporated both methods as tools in assessing communicative competence. Although the primary purpose of the study was not to compare the results of the DCT with naturally occurring data directly, the findings allude to their differences. To conduct the study, the following directional hypotheses were raised:

H_1: Accounts are the most frequent features of dispreferred responses produced by EFL learners.

H_2: Strategies for giving dispreferred responses are the result of pragmatic transfer from L1.

H_3: Natural conversations are more informative than DCTs.

H_4: Dispreferred responses are associated with turn-shapes.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants were nonnative speakers of English, all of whom were students pursuing M.A. in TEFL at Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. They were assumed to know a fair amount of English after at least 4 years of intensive study of English at the university. These learners were considered to be generally at the intermediate to upper-intermediate levels, because they had passed the Master's university entrance exam that includes a language proficiency test which requires a mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and

reading comprehension. Participation in the study was voluntary. The selected group included a total of 29 females and 11 males aged between 21 and 32. The sample of this study may be best described as belonging to the same community. Therefore, they were considered homogenous in terms of such characteristics as social distance and class. They knew each other though their relationship was formal. Because of the feasibility of DCT as a method of measuring L2 production, in addition to the above participants, the final sample included 20 other participants, with the same characteristics as the main group, who responded to a DCT, as well.

2.2 Instruments
2.2.1 Audio recording
This study aimed to collect information about how EFL learners produced dispreferred responses in natural settings. At first, the study aimed for a vast sample of natural conversations, but some constraints imposed on the study limited the data. The main constraint was that, in this context, the pressures to communicate in English do not usually arise. Therefore, it takes too much time for the researchers to collect the relevant data. Moreover, participants shift from Persian to English, especially on occasions where the topics are related to academic activities. Therefore, the topics of conversations were not diverse. Considering the aforementioned constraints, the researchers ended in 31 relevant naturally occurring conversations, totaling 120 min drawn from approximately nine hr of audio-taped conversations. 30 min of the data were recorded a few months earlier than the main phase of the study, to pilot data, with the remainder of the data recorded over a five-month period. Piloting was done for two main reasons: to check the feasibility of gathering naturally occurring conversations and to check the extent of occurrences of relative elements.

The conversations were recorded using an mp3 player, a voice recorder, and a cell phone. The interactions included English conversations which took place in the university, and each of the interactions was carried out by two or three participants. To ensure the equivalence of the data to naturally-occurring conversations and to control some variables such as selection of politeness strategies in responding to a refusal, all of the participants were aware of the recording, but they were not aware of the aim of the present study. Data of this nature reflect the actual use of language. For the purpose of this study, some interactions in L1 (Farsi) were collected which were simply coded as (B) and the English ones were coded as (A).

2.2.2 Transcription notation

Once recorded, the interactions were transcribed according to the transcription notation developed by Jefferson (2004, derived from Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) for conversation analysis. All verbal components as well as all pauses were included in the transcript. Particular attention was given to discourse markers (DMs) and fillers such as *uh* and *uhm* and were included accurately into the transcript (see Appendix A for transcription conventions).

2.2.3 Discourse completion test

Gathering naturally-occurring conversations was followed by the second phase of data collection with an intermission of 3 weeks between the two phases. The second data collection tool for this study was an open-ended modified version of the eight-item DCT developed by Beebe, et al (1990). The written test comprised two requests ("borrowing one's notes" and "asking a classmate to explain some points"), two invitations ("inviting someone to dinner" and "inviting someone to one's house"), two offers ("offering a piece of cake" and "offering to pay for one's eyeglasses"), and two suggestions ("suggesting a change in teaching methodology" and "suggesting a practice on some subjects"). In each situation, the subject was familiar to the interlocutors and their relationship was formal. These situations were designed in such a way that they could elicit dispreferred responses to the first parts. To insure the congruence of the two sorts of the data, the written situations were designed based on the oral ones taken place in the first phase. The situations were modified to make them more familiar to the Iranian life and culture. 60 English DCTs were distributed among the M.A. students. Forty of the participants who completed the DCTs were those who took part in the first phase of the study, and the others completed them via e-mail. They were encouraged to respond quickly, writing what their oral response would be to each situation posed.

3. Data Analysis

The interactions, comprising 31 excerpts, were scrutinized for the occurrences of dispreferred second pair parts and their turn shapes. To facilitate the analysis, a descriptive label which is called *code* (Birley & Moreland, 1998) was added at the initial of each interaction. This simple and parenthesis-based codification was used to classify separate interactions.

The analysis proceeded from case-by-case examination of the data. Adjacency pairs were identified based on dispreferred second pair parts following Sacks, Schegloff, and Jeffersons's (1974) turn-allocation techniques. The strategies that speakers used for giving dispreferred responses such as pauses were counted and analyzed based on Levinson's

(1983, pp. 334-335) categorization of refusal strategies. Also, the occurrences of other unexpected strategies in the data were analyzed using charts and tables. In general, dispreferred responses such as disagreements and rejections tend to include the following features:

Prefaces: Prefaces are DMs such as *uh* or *well*; token agreements, appreciations, and apologies, and other forms of hesitation. The term DM has different connotations for different groups of researchers, among them being semantic conjuncts, sentence connectives, discourse particles, prefaces, pragmatic connectives, pragmatic markers, and so forth. According to Andersen (2000), the role of DMs is to facilitate processes of pragmatic inference in order for the hearer to arrive at the speaker's intended meaning and attitudes. DMs are used as pause fillers which preface dispreferred responses (Lazaraton, 1997; Levinson, 1983; Heritage, 1984). The present study investigates discourse markers as dispreferring features.

Declination components: Declination components are marked as uncertain, conditional, or indirect.

Delays: Delays are silences preceding the delivery of the response, prefaces of various kinds, and insertion sequences which displace the response over a series of turns.

Accounts: Accounts refer to explanations for disagreement or rejection. Expecting the unexpected nature of the dispreferred action, interlocutors use this kind of strategy to reduce the threat of dispreferred action. For example, a dispreferred second pair part to an invitation may be produced with such strategies as shown in the following interaction (Atkinson & Drew, 1979, p. 85; as cited in Levinson, 1983, p. 333):

Example # 01
- A: Uh if you'd care to come and visit a little while this morning I'll give you a cup of coffee
- B: hehh, well that's awfully sweet of you,
  (delay)(DS.M)(appreciation)
  I don't think I can make it this morning.
  (refusal)
  hh uhm I'm running an ad in the paper and uh I have to stay near the phone.
  (account)

As this example shows, the dispreferred response is accompanied by an account or explanation as the reason for rejecting invitation. In the fourth

line, delay, as another feature appears before account. Thus, these features have complicated the turn shapes of this exchange.

Table 1 presents the total strategies used in the oral interactions. The participants used various features to soften their refusals. Taking a closer look at the frequency of strategies reveals that among the four groups of refusal features, the most frequent strategies were DMs and accounts. Further, as it was expected, relying on their L1 culture to show their empathy, the respondents showed a high level of frequency of the use of apologies, statement of alternative, and statement of willingness. The EFL learners of English, however, displayed a low level of frequency in using repetition:

Table 1. Strategies used in natural interactions

Refusal Strategy	f (%)
Delays	
Silence	11 (57) (4.9)
Insertion sequences	12 (5.4)
Statement of willingness	21 (9.4)
Statement of alternative	27 (12.1)
Promise of future acceptance	19 (8.5)
Prefaces	
Discourse markers	44 (19.8)
Token Agreements	0 (0)
Appreciation	12 (5.4)
Apology	29(13.6)
Repetition	2 (0.9)
Accounts	38 (17.11)
Declination components	7 (3.1)

Because of the importance of DMs to this study, the frequency of different DMs used in these interactions was tabulated in Table 2, which shows the participants' inclination to incorporate *you know* and *uhm* more frequently. The extensive use of *you know* may be explained on account of resemblance to Persian. This marker is also less face-threatening than the others used by interlocutors. There were cases of misuse of this DM in some situations. *Uhm* was also widely employed by the participants as pause filler, which signals the difficulty of uttering dispreferred responses by the participants:

Table 2. Discourse markers used as strategies in oral interactions

Discourse markers	f (%)
Uh(oh)	9 (20.5)
Yeah	5 (11.4)
You know	17 (38.6)
Uhm	13 (29.5)

In the next phase of the study, the number of refusal strategies employed by each participant in response to the DCT situations was categorized and tabulated in Table 3. Initial analysis of the DCTs helped identify 19 irrelevant responses and they were excluded, giving us 1014 strategies:

Table 3. Strategies used in responses to DCTs

Refusal Strategy	f (%)
Delays	
Silence	0 (0)
Insertion sequences	0 (0)
Statement of willingness	80 (8)
Statement of alternative	52 (5)
Promise of future acceptance	66 (7)
Prefaces	
Discourse marker	198 (19)
Token Agreement	0 (0)
Appreciation	100 (10)
Apology	122 (12)
Hesitation (repetition)	0 (0)
Accounts	298 (29)
Declination component	98 (10)

Table 3 shows the number of strategies used by the participants when they produced written dispreferred responses. Participants tended to make a greater use of accounts and DMs in their dispreferred responses, as they do so in oral responses. However, strategies such as silence, insertion sequences, token agreement, and hesitation were not observed in written responses, probably due to their interactive nature and the characteristic of the written mode. In other words, they can occur only in situations where the speakers have the opportunity to express themselves through long turns. Thus, it seems that natural interactions were more successful in eliciting

what participants would say in real situations. Table 4 suggests the variable use of DMs by participants in oral and written responses:

Table 4. Discourse markers used as strategies in response to DCTs

Discourse markers	f (%)
Uh(oh)	57 (29)
Yeah	35 (18)
You know	82 (41)
Ok	24 (12)

Like the oral interactions, *you know* (41%) was the widely used DM in the written responses followed by *oh* (29%), *yeah* (18%), and *ok* (12%). The absence of *uhm*, which was among the most frequently used DMs in the oral data, was expected, seeing that there was no way to mark the pauses in the written data.

4. Results and Discussion

Accounts, as remedial reflexive explanations given by the offenders as to why certain problems or offences occurred, can be employed to apologize and divert responsibility of the refusal to another source (Fraser, 1981, as cited in Jebahi, 2010). Our own presupposition before analyzing the data was that accounts would have the highest frequency vis-à-vis the other categories (hypothesis # 1). Interestingly as seen in Tables 1 and 3, the participants utilized accounts much more frequently than the other strategies save for DMs. As a cultural etiquette in the Iranian society, accepting someone's invitation, for example, is considered as a responsibility, and the one who is invited has to accept it unless the refusal is convincing enough. Quite frequently, in terms of the order of appearance of strategies employed by the participants, accounts stood almost down the hierarchy. Because of the insistence of the interlocutor on his offer, which is normal even if the speaker does not really mean it, after several refusals on the part of the respondent, he was forced to solidify the reality of his refusal through giving an account. Even if the respondents do not like to accept someone's offer, they have to prevaricate and produce an account to free themselves from the responsibility and, at the same time, they would not hurt the feelings of their interlocutors. This is related to two components of face in Persian called s*haxsiat* (social standing or honor) and *ehteram* (deference, comity). Although *shaxsiat* is ostentatiously individual, ehteram is a joint social venture that is achieved in the talk in interaction (Koutlaki, 2002, as cited in Don & Izadi, 2011; Sharifian, 2007). A speaker deals with the *shaxsiat* of others via displaying *ehteram*, for example, by conforming to societal norms

of behavior (Don & Izadi, 2011). Sacks (1992) states that "everyone has to lie and this lie involves our response to an utterance" (p. 559). Considering the environment, speakers determine what kind of response is appropriate. An evidence of acceptability of a lie is in the attempt of individuals to keep their relationships (Garfinkel, 1967) and achieve social conformity. In the Iranian culture, giving direct refusals is considered as curt, and so face threatening; thus, people try to utter their dispreferred responses in such a way that it does not hurt the feelings of their conversation partners. Even in some circumstances, they resort to ostentatious lies, as can be shown example # 02, in which S (a female) invites N (a female) to go to Shiraz with her. The dispreferred message to invitation is produced by an account (Extracted from 21A):

Example # 02
1. N: and when you go to Shiraz?
2. S: I'll go to Shiraz [.hhhh] <u>next week</u>. Could you e:h come with ↑me to Shiraz?
3. N: E::h you [know= (DS.M)
4. S: [↑come]
5. N: =you know ↑maybe at that time I'll be in <u>Tehran</u> (0.3) but I <u>don't</u> know=
6. S: If you can do your works and after that we will go to <u>Shiraz.</u>
7. N: =o::h I like to come so much (D.M) (willingness statement)
8. <↓but (0.2) sorry I can't> (D.M) (apology) (refusal component)
9. S: ↑wh::y? ↑we have good me::mories from Shiraz.
10. I want to recall it again for you
11. N: OK. >I tell you about my decision< but I think I can't come (D.M)   (indefinite response)

When N tries to reject S s invitation, she is also interpreted as doing *ta'arof*, a concept of politeness in Iranian culture which exercises some degree of *face-work* (Sharifian, 2007, p. 39) immediately preceding a refusal, so in lines (6-9), S persistently proposes her invitation again to convince N. A long sequence and complication of some of the dispreferred responses such as this one seems to occur in the Persian context because speakers take the dispreferred response as a kind of ta'arof (face saver) and ehteram (deference) and therefore, take turns to repeat their invitation or request until the respondee gives a positive or at least indefinite response as we see in line (11).

The following interaction which includes a talk between two friends (females) illustrates how the Persians behave when they want to convince

someone to accept their invitation (the N and S are the same participants as those in excerpt 2; extracted from 1B):

Example # 03

1 N: *rasti   5shanbe   vase   tavalod-am*
       D.M   Thursday   for   birthday-1SG.AG
       mi-kh-am   bacheha   ro
       IMPF-want-1SG.AG   freinds   RA
       davat   kon-am   biroon
       invitation   do-1SG.AG   outside
       to   ke   miay?
       you   D.M   IMPF-come-2SG.AG
       By the way, on Thursday I want to invite my friends for my birthday. Will you come?

2 S: *ehh! che khoub.   Vase   nahar?*
       ehh! how nice   for   lunch?
       Oh! how nice! for lunch?

3 N: *na   vase sham   asr   dige*
       no   for dinner evening DS.M
       No for dinner on the evening.

4 S: *Emm man fekr   nakonam*
       (pause) I   think   NEG- do-1SG.AG
       betoonam
       SBJN-can-1SG.AG
       I think I can't come.

5 N: *chera?*
       why?
       Why?

6 S: *ne-mi-doun-am.*
       NEG-IMPF-Know-1SG-AG
       be-bakhsh-id   man   ne-mi-toun-am.
       SBJN-excuse-IPL.AG   I   NEG.IMPF-can-1SG.AG
       kash   mi-zasht-i   ye   vaght   dige
       wish   IMPF-put-2SG.AG   a   time   other
       I wish you'd postpone it to another time.

7   N: *ye   kar-ISH   bekon*
               a   work   SBJN-do-2SG.AG
               doost   daram   biay
               like   have-1SG.AG   SBJN-come-2SG.AG
               There is nothing hard. I'd like you to come.

8   S: *mi-doon-i   khob   ne-mitoun-am*
               IMPF-know-2SG.AG   DS.M   NEG-IMPF-can-1SG.AG
               shab   ta   dir   vaght   biroon   basham
               night   until   late   time   outside   being-1SG.AG
               You know, I can't be out at night till late hours.

10   S: *hala   be-bin-am   chetor   mishe*
               D.M   SBJN-see-1SG.AG   how
               IMPF-come-3SG.AG
               Let me see what happens.

11   N: *bashe   merc.*
               ok   thank you
               Ok. thank you.

     In extract (3) taken from an interaction in Persian between N and S, in response to N's offer (line 1), S pauses for (0.4) seconds which projects a disprefered response. After the (0.4) second pause, N repeats her offer and attempts to persuade S to accept her invitation. During these turns, N emphasizes her offer until S incorporates an account (line 8). This demonstrates how accounts show the genuineness of dispreferred seconds. It also illustrates how a rejection of offer is taken as a genuine one when preceded by an account and not followed by reoffer (Taleghani-Nikazm, 1998).

Indefinite responses are also incorporated when the respondent wants to put an end to the conversation. Such expressions as *I'll try my best,* or *I'll think about that* appear to terminate the insistence on the part of the offerer. Line (14) of the following example illustrates how an indefinite response was strategically utilized (extracted from 12A):

Example # 0**4**
1. Z: ↑hi Sar:a I haven't seen you 2 mo::nths
2. S: I was busy doing my thesis I'm really bored
3. Z: why don't you get some help from your ↑brother >he is a kind of expert in< ( )
4. S: ye::ahhh, he helped me but I don't know what's wrong?

5. Z: I think you are a little homesick for Isfahan
6. OH I have an↑ IDEA
7. would you like watching a ↑movi::e with me?
8. S: ↓tomorrow night? <I'd like to but I already have a plan>
                i. (repetition)   (willingness)   (account)
9. I'm sorry I can't
                i. (regret)   (refusal)
10. Z: it's an exciting movie; I promise you'd like it
11. S: may be at the other time
                i. (alternative)
12. Z: ↓y' know that our free time is only >tonight<
13. S: OK. I do my best
                i. (indefinite response)

This tactical response is culturally value-laden which can be described by reference to the concepts of *ta'arof* (Taleghani-Nikazm, 1998) and *ehteram*. Put it another way, the interlocutors do not consider the dispreferred response as a real one, especially in situations where they want to do someone a favor, for example, inviting someone to a party. Considering the refusal as a kind of *ta'arof*, they emphasize their invitation until they ascertain that the refusal is a real one. To convince the interlocutor, the respondents usually provide an account. In the above example, the offerer has used an indefinite response. Producing this response, the interlocutor tries to terminate the conversation and free himself from his classmate's insistence while at the same time he maintains his deference.

The two DMs, *you know* and *uhm*, respectively, are the most frequent DMs used in the oral interactions in this study (see Table 2). According to Fung and Carter (2007), *you know* is often used alluding to the assumed shared knowledge or experience of the speaker for the acceptance of information. The following example is a typical use of *you know* among English speakers (adopted from Anderson, 2000):

Example # 0**5**
Well she don't like your auntie *you know*. That's why she's crying

In the following example, an EFL learner produces a suggestion that should be interpreted as a request for confirmation from the recipient. However, he does not produce such confirmation, so he does not follow the expectations presented in the first part of the adjacency pair (extracted from 21A):

Example # 0**6**

     1 M: Are you agree:: about writing an <u>article</u> with ↑<u>me?</u>
     2 S: I'd like to, but *you know*, uhm:: <it's not applicable now,>
     3   <I'm very <u>busy</u>, Hhhh I SHOUld finish my works ↓sorry

In this case, the use of *you know* signals an explanation for dispreferred response which would follow. This is a clear deviation from the typical function of *you know* in English interactions (hypothesis # 02). The speaker intends to convince the hearer that what he is going to produce is known, although his information is not given. In Iranian interactions, when this DM prefaces an utterance, it indicates the dispreferred message of it as the equivalent of this expression in Persian is *midouni* (*you know*). Using this kind of DM, the speaker also tries to make solidarity and save face. The following example lends support to this transfer (extracted from 2B):

Example # 0**7**

1   A: *mi-khay in mozo'o ro kar kon-im?*
     IMPF-want this topic RA work do-IPL.AG
     Do you like to do our study on this topic?
2   B: *khob (0.2) in khoub-e vali midouni man mi-kha-m*
     well, (0.2) this good-3SG.AG but D.M I IMPF-want-1SG.AG
     ye chize dige ro entekhab kon-am
     a thing   other RA choose do-1SG.AG
     well, (0.2) that's good but you know, I want to choose another topic.

In line (2), upon introducing his response by *khob* (*well*), a DM in Persian, followed by another DM, *midouni,* B tries to mitigate the difficulty of his answer. In English extract (6), *you know* marked the same function. Comparing this interaction with (6), we assume that use of this DM is the result of pragmatic transfer.

An interesting point indicating the reliance of Iranian learners of English on their native culture-specific refusal strategies was the use of *oh* used just in turn-initial positions (Hypothesis ≠ 3). A prototypical example of a speaker's use of *oh* is demonstrated in the following example (adopted from Schiffrin, 1987, p. 86):

Example # 0**8**

     Irene: How can I get an appointment t'go there t'bring
     2   my son on a tour?
     3   Debby: *Oh* I didn't even know they gave tours! I'm not
     4   one t'ask about it.

Here, *oh* is used to indicate that the speaker has undergone some kind of change in his or her current state of knowledge, or awareness (Heritage, 1984, p. 299). Although frequently used by native speakers of English, only one function of this marker is distinguished in this study. The participants used this marker to indicate their emotional state and uneasiness. This way, the respondent shows his or her sympathy with his or her partner and that he or she is uneasy with the conditions—the behavior which is common among Iranians. It seems that the inappropriate use of this DM is likely due to nuances of knowledge which eventually leads to pragmatic transfer. An example of this can be seen in (9), where the speaker in line (11) initiates the dispreferred turn with *oh* to show his uneasiness (extracted from 2A):

Example # 09
1   H: <u>This year</u>, I try to take- take part in, you know, in university exam
         for Ph.D
2   (.)
     ↑I don't know the exact sources
3   >can you tell me and give me some of your books?<
4   N: you can take them from the department, the sources (   )
5   H: you know e::h unfortunately you know I can't go there
6   and also I have no time to refer to   [department]
7   N: [↑Sure] I can give you the list of the books
8   H: and also ↑I have some of this list
9   but (0.2) I have problems you know, to find some of the books
10 ↑can you help me with these books?
11   N: oh. (0.3) sorry, you know eh I need my books I <u>have to</u> read
         them [but I]
                   (D.M) (delay) (regret) (D.M)   (account)
12 H: [↑Can   t you borrow
12 H: them for one or two months? ↓I promise to give you back
13 N: sorry I can't, you know that the exam is e::h (0.4) two months
     later
    (regret) (refusal)   (account)   (delay)
14   and I have to read them
                   (account)

Using *oh* in line (11), the speaker evinces that she is upset about the situation that she cannot lend her books to H. In this way, she illustrates that the condition is out of her control, and she is forced to reject the request. As Kasper (1996) points out, learners' knowledge of previously learned languages, mostly their native languages and cultures, affects the formation of their L2. In other words, pragmatic transfer takes place when learners use

L1 speech act strategies that are inappropriate in the corresponding L2 setting.

     In another interaction (10), the classmate refusing to lend her notes used various features to negotiate a refusal response in comparison to the same situation in DCT (11) as it appears below (extracted from 1A):

Example # 10
1   F: can I have your notes just for <u>two hours</u>?
2   I need just make a copy of it
3   M: umm:: (0.4) sorry I have to go an
           (D.M) (delay) (apology) (account)
4   <I <u>can't</u> see you till [tomorrow]
           (account)
5   F: [↑I promise to give it back to you
6   M: <ye::ah I know>, but you should have taken it from me
   yesterday
           (willingness)
7   you know, I want to read [them for tomorrow] =
           (D.M) (account)
8   F: [ok maybe I return them earlier] =
9   M: = and I don't have time
            (account)
10   ↓really sorry. umm I can't wait for you. Excuse me
          (apology) (D.M)   (refusal component)
11   o:k. ↓no problem

     As shown in the interaction in (10), the refusal is introduced by a DM (umm) in line (3), which here acts as pause filler and signals a dispreferred response. Following this, the speaker employs explanation/account (3-4). This refusal is followed by an additional insistence on the part of the interlocutor who is attempting to borrow the notes (5), and his classmate's final response in which she refuses the request using willingness statement, DM, account, apology, and finally refusal (6-10).

     Now, note the following example extracted from the data obtained via the DCT (extracted from DCT, situation 1):

Example # 11
Situation: You are a junior college. You attend classes regularly and take good notes. One of your classmates often misses class and asks you for your notes.

Classmate: Oh God! We have an exam tomorrow but I don't have the notes of last week. Sorry, could you please lend me your notes once again?

      (Written response)

      Sorry, I haven't yet studied them. If I give them to you I'll fail the exam tomorrow. You can borrow them from someone else.

In contrast to the verbal response, in excerpt (11), there is no hesitation as a discourse marker before the refusal component, although both were produced by the same participant (Hypothesis $\neq$ 3). In contrast to (10), there is no wish statement and excuse before the refusal component in the written refusal. Application of these strategies may soften the face-threatening atmosphere of oral refusal. By using these kinds of features, the speaker tries to prevent appearing rude to her classmate (Felix-Brasdefer, 2006).

Comparing the dispreferred responses obtained through DCTs and audio-recording conversations, we found differences in terms of frequency, order of strategies, and length of responses. The written responses were significantly shorter than the oral ones, which confirm Sasaki s (1998) findings. Response length was measured by the number of strategies produced for each response. The refusals in the EFL interactions averaged 5.8 formulas, whereas in the DCTs it was 3. The length difference was mainly caused by hesitations and pauses which are typical in oral response. Another difference was caused by the number of strategies used in the oral responses. In oral interactions, the participants have the opportunity to take turns and extend the adjacency pairs, an element which is absent from written responses. For example, seen in data analyses, insertion sequences were used as the strategy in producing dispreferred responses as illustrated in examples # 10 and 11 above.

In order to show solidarity and to delay the dispreferred response, the recipient, through asking an embedded request, tries to offer an alternative before producing his or her response. The participant probably has to use these strategies in actual interactions, which one does not have to do in writing. The participant responding to a written situation, not receiving any feedback, would limit his or her response to a single turn, even a single strategy. The frequent order observed in the DCTs was the combination of *oh + regret + account.* The tendency of the participants to use accounts in most of the interactions probably lies in the fact that the situations in the DCTs could not really simulate the real situations and, as a result, they produced only the most crucial components of dispreferreds (regret + account).

In the literature of conversational analysis, preference organization of adjacency pairs has been described in terms of markedness, frequency of occurrence, face, and solidarity, as well as accountability (Blimes, 1988; Boyle, 2000; Heritage, 1984; Levinson, 1983; Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987). Although these features have been associated with preference organization, Garfinkle (1967) states that the preference can only be determined in circumstances in which the action occurs. Thus, although there may be a generalized preference in community for agreement, there are situations in which refusal is preferred, as for example, in the Iranian culture where accepting an offer immediately is considered unexpected (Taleghani-Nikazm, 1998). In these situations, the complexity of responses does not determine the preference. Because preference is culture-dependent, speakers may transfer their cultural norms into their L2. The evidence of such a transfer is illustrated in the following example derived from a natural conversation (extracted from 9A):

Example # 12
    1   A: I fe:el very ba::d about ↓your eyeglasses.
    2   I:: want to buy one of those for <u>you.</u>
    3   M: N::o, ↑don't say those things
                (refusal)

In this extract, the respondent directly refuses the offer of his friend, who has broken his eyeglasses. In rejecting his offer, the respondent tries to save his face. This refusal is regarded as a preferred response in the Iranian culture. In English, typically, acceptances and refusals have specific turn organizations. Refusals generally occur late with some delay features such as prefaces. But acceptances which are preferred occur immediately and without hesitation. Similar to English, offers in Persian are either accepted or rejected. However, they differ in terms of turn shapes when the recipient delays and accepts the offer only after several rejections when performed in formal context. In the above situation, the offer is rejected in a preferred manner. As the example illustrates, the rejection involves direct negation and is produced without hesitation. Unaware of conventions in Persian, native speakers of English would assume this kind of rejection as a real one and terminate the conversation. But knowing that these rejections are performed only to postpone the real response, Persians provide the recipient with reoffer. These kinds of direct refusals occur when they are preferred. As seen in this study, it seems that in the Iranian culture the preference organization is perceived from the perspective of the relationship between dispreferred response and social solidarity. That is, there is an association

between preference and solidarity. Although the association between markedness and dispreferred responses is considered as valid in many investigations, in Iranian interactions, some dispreferred responses are considered as expected and unmarked as we noticed in example (12). Thus, what determines dispreferred response is social face because what is important for Iranians is saving face, and dispreferred responses in some situations make affiliation.

Although the frequent strategies such as inserted sequences used in dispreferred turns made the responses and turn shapes complicated, the main reason for using this complicated order lies in cultural notions transferred from L1. Though being polite is preferred universally, the connotation of politeness might vary across cultures. As the data show, the EFL learners were indirect in refusal, and the justification lies in the absence of *no* in most of their dispreferred responses. This indirectness may result from their intention to save face. This part of the study disagrees with Levinson (1983) and lends support to Brown and Levinson (1987) in that face is an essential factor in the notion of preference. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is rejected because it seems that solidarity is associated with preference.

5. Conclusion

The shift in focus from linguistic competence to communicative and pragmatic competence resulted in a growing number of studies on conversation analysis in general, and on the speech act of refusal in particular. This study showed that EFL learners find it very difficult to refuse an act by saying *no* or *I can't*. Instead, they feel obliged to come up with very convincing excuses and explanations to save not only their own face but the face of their interlocutors, too. The frequent application of accounts justifies this claim. First, the results show two areas in which cultural transfer has a bearing on EFL learners' speech: choice of accounts and DMs as strategies and preference, each found to reflect cultural values transferred from Persian to English. Second, it seems that preference organization among EFL learners is associated with structure-based as well as solidarity aspects. The structure-based idea of preference is shown in the complex ways in which the dispreferred turns are constructed. We also see that despite the strategies that were used for dispreferred turns, the face saving present in interactions associates with preference. Third, from examining the results of the DCTs, it transpired that audio-recording of natural conversations was more successful in indicating the real responses that recipients produce in real situations. The DCTs failed to reveal the pragmatic complexities of face-threatening acts like refusals, on account of

the fact that DCTs necessarily contain short decontextualized written responses dissimilar to what happens in real interaction.

With preference organization being language specific, language teachers should devote more time and energy to the development of pragmatic competence in EFL contexts, which implies that most learners might lack pragmatic knowledge. Learners should recognize that they have knowledge to express proper types of dispreferred responses in various situations, in or out of the class.

Furthermore, as students hardly have the opportunity to interact with native speakers, they must be provided with appropriate contexts and situations to use interactional markers spontaneously. As DMs facilitate communication, it is assumed that lack of DMs in an L2, or their inappropriate use, which was common in this study, could, to a certain degree, hinder successful communication or lead to misunderstanding. Therefore, in terms of communicative competence, L2 learners must acquire appropriate use of DMs in English. Further studies should be launched to tackle the different variables that may affect the production of dispreferred responses.

Understanding and familiarity with different cultures and the way EFL learners refuse in English are required to improve communication with native speakers. There are many differences between the communities' cultures. This study focused on two types of strategies employed in dispreferred responses (DMs and accounts). Researchers need to probe into specific cultures and try to identify different patterns and discourse strategies.

Last but not least, the present results should warn researchers against unwarranted speculation about students' competence based on questionnaires alone. As Jebahi (2010) reminds, what the participants claim they would say in a particular situation is not necessarily what they do in real life.

References

Al-Issa, A. (2003). Sociocultural transfer in L2 speech behaviors: Evidence and motivating factors. *Journal of Intercultural Relations 27*, 581-601.

Allami, H., & Naeimi, A. (2010). A cross-linguistic study of refusals: An analysis of pragmatic competence development in Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Pragmatics, 10*, 1-22.

Al-Shalawi, H. (1997). *Refusal strategies in Saudi and American cultures.* Unpublished master's thesis, Michigan State University, United States of America.

Andersen, G. (2000). *Pragmatic markers and sociolinguistic variation*: *A relevance-theoretic approach to the language of adolescents.* Amesterdam: John Benjamins.

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

Benwell, B., & Stokoe, E. (2006). *Discourse and identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Birley, G., & Moreland, N. (1998). *A practical guide to academic research*. London: Routledge Press.

Blimes, J. (1988) The concept of preference in conversational analysis. *Language in Society, 17,* 161-182.

Boyle, R. (2000). Whatever happened to preference organization? *Journal of Pragmatics, 32*, 583-604.

Brown, H. D. (2004). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices.* Longman: Pearson Education.

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

Cashman, H. (2000). Constructing a bilingual identity: Conversation analysis of Spanish/English language use in a television interview. *Texas Linguistics Forum, 44*, 33-47.

Chang, Y. (2009). How to say no: An analysis of cross-cultural difference and pragmatic transfer. *Language Sciences, 31*, 477-493.

Clayman, S. (2002). Sequence and solidarity. *Group Cohesion, Trust and Solidarity, 19*, 229-253.

Don, Z. M., & Izadi, A. (2011). Relational connection and separation in Iranian dissertation defenses. *Journal of Pragmatics, 43*(15), 3782-3792.

Fe´lix-Brasdefer, C. (2006). Linguistic politeness in Mexico: Refusal strategies among male speakers of Mexican Spanish. *Pragmatics, 38*, 2158-2187.

Fung, L., & Carter, R. (2007). Discourse markers and spoken English: Native and learner use in pedagogic settings. *Applied Linguistics, 28,* 410-439.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Heritage, J. (1984). *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Jebahi, K.. (2010). Tunisian university student's choice of apology strategies in a discourse completion task. *Journal of Pragmatics, 30*, 1-15.

Kasper, G. (1996). Introduction: Interlanguage pragmatics in SLA. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 18*, 149-169.

Keshavarz, M., Eslami-Rasekh, Z., & Ghahraman, V. (2006). Pragmatic transfer and Iranian EFL refusals: A cross-cultural perspective of Persian and English. *Pragmatics and Language Learning, 11*, 359-402.

Lazarton, A. (1997). Preference organization in oral proficiency interviews: The case of language ability assessments. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 30,* 53-72.

Levinson, S. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pomerantz, A. (1984). Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: Some features of preferred/dispreferred turn shapes. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.). *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp.57-101). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sacks, H. (1987). On the preferences for agreement and contiguity in sequences in conversation. In G. Button & J. R. E. Lee (Eds.). *Talk and social organization* (pp. 54-69). England: Multilingual Matters.

Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on conversation*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sacks, H., E. A., Schegloff, & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn taking for Conversation. *Language, 50,* 696-735.

Sasaki, M. (1998). Investigating EFL students production of speech acts: A comparison of production questionnaires and role-plays. *Journal of Pragmatics, 30*, 457-484.

Sasaki, M. (1998). Investigating EFL students production of speech acts: A comparison of production questionnaires and role-plays. *Journal of Pragmatics, 30*, 457-484.

Schegloff, E. A. (1968). Sequencing in conversational openings. *American Anthropologist, 70*(6), 1075-1095.

Schegloff, E. (1996). Turn organization: One intersection of grammar and interaction. In E. Gchs, E. Schegloff, & A. Thompson (Eds.). *Interaction and grammar* (pp. 52-133). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schegloff, E. (2007). *Sequence organization in interaction: A primer in conversation analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schegloff, E. (2010) Some other Uh(m)s. *Discourse Processes, 47*, 130-147.

Schiffrin, D. (1987). *Discourse markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sharifian, F. (2007). L1 cultural conceptualization in L2 learning: The case of Persian-speaking learners of English. In F. Sharifian & G. B.

Palmer (Eds.). *Applied cultural linguistics* (pp. 33-52). The Netherlands: John Benjamin.

Taleghani-Nikazm, C. (1998). Politeness in Persian interaction: The preference format of offers in Persian. *Crossroads of Language, Interaction and Culture, 1,* 3-11.

Taleghani-Nikazm, C. (2002). A conversation analytical study of telephone conversation openings between native and nonnative speakers. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34, 1807–1832.

Wierzbicka, A. (1991) *Cross cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction*. Belin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Appendix A
The Jeffersonian (2004) Transcription Notation

Symbol	Name	Use
[text]	Brackets	Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech.
=	Equal Sign	Indicates the break and subsequent continuation of a single interrupted utterance.
(# of seconds)	Timed Pause	A number in parentheses indicates the time, in seconds, of a pause in speech.
(.)	Micropause	A brief pause, usually less than 0.2 seconds.
. or ↓	Period or Down Arrow	Indicates falling pitch.
? or ↑	Question Mark or Up Arrow	Indicates rising pitch.
,	Comma	Indicates a temporary rise or fall in intonation.
-	Hyphen	Indicates an abrupt halt or interruption in utterance.
>text<	Greater than / Less than symbols	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker.
<text>	Less than / Greater than symbols	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual for the speaker.
°	Degree symbol	Indicates whisper or reduced volume speech.
ALL CAPS	Capitalized text	Indicates shouted or increased volume speech.
underline	Underlined text	Indicates the speaker is emphasizing or stressing the speech.

:::	Colon(s)	Indicates prolongation of an utterance.
(hhh)		Audible exhalation
? or (.hhh)	High Dot	Audible inhalation
(text)	Parentheses	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript.
((italic text))	Double Parentheses	Annotation of non-verbal activity.

(Adopted from Benwell & Stokoe, 2006)

Appendix B
Sample Interaction Excerpts Analyzed in the Study

(2A)

1   H: <u>This year</u>, I try to take- take part in, you know, in university exam for Ph.D
2   (.)
           ↑I don't know the exact sources
3   >can you tell me and give me some of your books? <
4   N: you can take them from the department, the sources (   )
5   H: you know e::h unfortunately you know I can't go there
6   and also I have no time to refer to [department]
7   N: [↑Sure] I can give you the list of the books
8   H: and also ↑I have some of this list
9   but (0.2) I have problems you know, to find some of the books
10   ↑can you help me with these books?
11   N: oh. (0.3) sorry, you know eh I need my books I <u>have to</u> [read them but I]
12   H: [↑Can't you borrow
12   H: them for one or two months? ↓I promise to give you back
13   N: sorry I can't, you know that the exam is e::h (0.4) two months later
14   and I have to read them