Refusals of Suggestions and Offers:
An Interlanguage Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

The current study attempts to study refusals to offers and suggestions of Yemeni EFL learners and compare them with refusals of Arabic native speakers (ANS) and English native speakers (ENS). It examines how Yemenis and Americans realize refusals of suggestions and offers to persons of higher, lower and equal social status. It also aims to find out the most frequently utilized refusal strategies by Yemeni EFL learners compared with those of Yemenis and American native speakers. In order to achieve this, three group participants were used in this study: 20 native speakers of Arabic (ANS), 20 native speakers of English (ENS) and forty Yemeni EFL learners. Data was collected by Discourse Completion Task. This study finds out that Yemenis and Americans used different strategies when refusing persons of equal and lower social status. ANS also used the adjunct of invoking the name of God which is religiously rooted and culturally specific to support and mitigate their excuses. Interestingly, Yemeni EFL learners show a tendency toward the L1 pragmatic norms in the use of invoking the name of God and the use of direct strategies when refusing someone equal or lower in status.

Keywords: *L2 Pragmatics, Refusals, Speech Acts, Semantic Formulas, Yemeni EFL learners.*

Introduction

English has become a means of world communication. For successful communication, knowledge of cross-cultural norms is vitally required (Tran, & Yeh, 2020). As it is known, every culture has different language norms and conventions of what is appropriate.

This has brought the attention of ELT theorists to focus on areas of EFL learners' ability to use the language appropriately in a social context. Hymes (1962, 1974) has made a good effort by emphasizing the knowledge of sociolinguistic aspects of language. He further criticized the notion of performance competence of Chomsky (1962), highlighting the knowledge of the social use of the language.

Bachman (1990) has the credit to first include pragmatic competence in the overall communicative ability that language speaker has to master. For there to be a successful

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communication, a learner doesn't need to have only the knowledge of correct grammatical sentences with excellent pronunciation. Rather, he also needs to be able to use the language appropriately in a social context to fulfill social needs. It is argued that committing a pragmatic error is more critical than committing a grammatical error (Nelson et al., 2002). As for a grammatical mistake, the intended message will be understood and the speaker will be received as less proficient. This is unlike a pragmatic error where the message will be misunderstood and the speaker will be looked at as rude and impolite. By introducing pragmatic competence as an essential competence in language, many researchers started investigating the pragmatic competence among EFL learners (Kim & Kwon, 2010; Morkus, 2014, 2018; Alrefaee & Al-Ghamdi, 2019; Al-Ghamdi & Alrefaee. 2019). For this, incorporating pragmatics into the processes of language teaching and learning has become essential.

EFL learners, in Yemen, are not given certain training on how to use the language appropriately in a social context (Alrefaee & Al-Ghamdi, 2019). The focus of teaching English in Yemen is in promoting learners' grammatical competence (Al-Ghamid & Alrefaee 2020; Al-Sanhani, 2007).

This study attempts to explore the norms and convention of refusing suggestions and offers among Yemeni EFL learners. It seeks to find out whether they have developed a sense of using refusals as native speakers of English or they still use the norms of their first language.

Study Question

1. Are Yemeni learners of English pragmatically competent in realizing the speech act of refusal to suggestions and offers?
2. What are the most frequently used strategies used by the participants?
3. Is there a relation between pragmatic competence and grammatical proficiency among Yemeni learners of English?

Literature review

Speech acts theory has been widely used to elicit responses and measure the pragmatic competence of EFL learners. It was first introduced by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969). Speech acts basically mean that whatever we say is an act that results in certain actions resulting in social behaviors. Austin (1962) mentioned three levels of speech acts: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary is simply the actual saying of an utterance, illocutionary acts is generally what is meant by what is said, and finally perlocutionary is the effect resulted by the illocutionary acts in action.

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In this study, refusal speech act, particularly refusing suggestion and offers, is selected as it is a face threatening act (Alrefaee & Al-Ghamid 2019) in which the interlocutor has to save face while performing. The speaker, when refusing, has to be aware of the norms and conventions of his interlocutor in order to smoothly communicate and save his face. Similarly, EFL learners have to be aware of pragmatic knowledge when performing such speech acts in order to avoid communication breakdown. This is why it has received attention and was investigated (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Morkus, 2014; Abed, 2011; Al-Shalawi, 1997). Al-Gamdi et al. (2019) asserted that EFL learners showed pragmatic failure as the current focus of teaching and learning a language is on promoting speakers' grammatical competence only.

Studies that investigate the pragmatic competence of Yemeni EFL learners are rare and there is a need to examine the pragmatic competence. AL-Sanhani (2007) found that Yemeni EFL learners are not exposed to the actual use of the language as the instruction is focusing on developing a native speaker-like proficiency in terms of correct grammar and pronunciation. In the Yemeni contexts, there is a lack of cross-cultural studies and learner-centered pragmatic studies.

Alrefaee et al. (2019) conducted a study to investigate the speech act of refusal among Yemeni EFL learners in the performance of refusing invitations and requests. This study is significant as it was the first to attempt to figure out the relation between pragmatic competence and proficiency. It is also important as it has investigated the content of some excuses of both Americans and Yemenis. It found out that most Yemeni speakers of Arabic use general and vague excuse, unlike Americans who were found to use specific and clear excuses when giving refusals to persons of all social status. It is only limited to investigate refusals of requests and invitations. This study attempts to study refusals of suggestions and offers in order to fill such a gap.

Methodology

Participants

Participants of this study fall into three categories: 20 native speakers of English, 20 native speakers of Arabic and 40 Yemeni EFL learners of English. Native speakers of English and Arabic are used as baseline data through which Yemeni EFL learners' performance will be compared. The Yemeni EFL participants are recruited from senior students, English Department, Education College, Sana'a University. They were chosen randomly. They comprised 22 females and 18 males. A proficiency test developed by the researcher was used.

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Instrument

A Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT) was used to elicit refusal of offers and suggestions. It consisted of six scenarios requiring participants to supply a written refusal to three offers and three suggestions. Each of the six scenarios sought a refusal to a person of a different status, equal, lower or higher social status. The WDCT was designed by the researchers and it is based on the work of Beebe et al. (1990). It was valeted by three professors of Sana'a University.

Table 1. A description of DCTs situations

Type of Refusal	No	Situation	Status
	1	A friend's part-time job offer	Equal
	2	A boss's offer for a raise	lower
Offers	3	An employee's offer to pay for damages sustained to his/her boss's car	Higher
Suggestions	4	A friend's suggestion to exercise rather than dieting	Equal
	7	An employee's suggestion to change data of meeting	Lower
	9	A boss's suggestion to take memos	Higher

Data analysis

First, to compare the frequency use of the semantic formulas of the four groups, the number of each semantic formula in each situation was presented in a table so as to compare the frequency of the semantic formula in each situation of the DCTs separately.

Second, to compare the order of the semantic formulas of the four groups, the total number of each semantic formula in each situation was counted for each of the groups and listed in order as shown in table 2 below. Then, the similarities and differences of the order of semantic formulas used by the YLEs and the ENSs and ANSs were analyzed.

Table 2: Model table of the order of the semantic formula analysis

Group	Frequency and Order of Semantic Formula			
	1	2	3	4
ANSs	Regret (6)	Excuse (5)	Offer of alternative (7)	Wish
HP				
LP				
ENSs				

Third, with regard to the content of the semantic formulas, the types of excuses and the mitigating formulas used by the YLEs, the ENSs and the ANSs were examined. For example, 'I'm busy.' and 'We'll visit our parents on Sunday evening.' are both categorized as reasons. However, they are different in terms of specificity and persuasiveness.

As for the types of mitigating formulas used by the two language groups, it can be seen that the ways in which refusals are mitigated have a major impact on the overall tone of the refusals. For example, one might refuse directly by using negative willingness, but the refusal effect can be greatly softened by providing various mitigations such as a statement of positive opinion (e.g. I'd love to, but…), a regret (e.g. I'm sorry) or a statement of alternative (e.g. Why don't we get together next Saturday?).

Results

In order to find out how Yemeni EFL learners realize refusal to suggestions and offers of persons of higher, lower and equal social status, each of the 6 situations is discussed separately. The frequency, order and content of refusal strategies in each situation of the DCTs were analyzed.

Situation one (refusing a suggestion from someone equal in status)

In this situation, the participant was asked to refuse a friend's suggestion advising him to make exercises to reduce his weight instead of not eating. This is a situation where the participant is asked to refuse a suggestion from someone equal in status to the participant. Table 3 below displays the frequency and order of the semantic formula in this situation.

Table 3: Frequency and Order of Semantic Formulas S1.

Group		Frequency and Order of Semantic Formula				
		1	2	3	4	Total
YLEs	HP	No (5) Regret (4) Excuse (5) Negative willingness (3) Principle (1) Positive feeling (2)	Excuse (11) Negative Willingness (4) Philosophy (1) Positive feeling (1)	Negative willingness (2) Gratitude (2)		41
	LP	Regrets (4) Excuses (8) Positive feeling (3) Flat no (4) Negative willingness (1)	Negative willingness (2) Excuses (5) Gratitude (4)	Alternative (2) Negative willingness (2) Gratitude (2)		37
ANS		Positive opinion (4) Promise of future acceptance (2) Excuse (4) Flat no (6) Regret (4)	Excuse (8) Regret (2) Gratitude (3) Negative willingness (4)	Excuse (4) Gratitude (3)		44
ENS		Excuse (7) Flat no (6) Gratitude (3) Negative willingness (2) Criticism (2)	Excuse (9) Gratitude (4) Negative willingness (3) Philosophy (1)	Gratitude (2)		39

Yemenis and Americans showed similarity in their preference of gratitude strategy. When refusing a suggestion of someone equal, both Yemenis and Americans used the direct strategy "No" as their face is not threatened with a person equal in social status.

Despite the similarities of the three groups, pragmatic failure was evident in the strategy selection. YLEs of both proficiency levels resemble their L1 in the utilization of statement of regret strategy that was not employed by L2 participants. LP learners also showed another example of pragmatic failure resulted by negative pragmatic transfer in the order of the gratitude adjunct. Unlike ENS participants, they never imitated their refusal with this adjunct. Instead, they preferred to initiate their refusal with statement of excuse strategy followed by gratitude (e.g., I have an injury that makes it impossible for me to run/lift weights, thanks for your concern).

Through examining the content of refusals, both NSs participants and Yemeni EFL learners of both proficiency levels showed similar clear reasons in this situation.

Situation two (refusing a suggestion from someone lower in status)

In this situation, the participant, a boss, was asked to refuse his employee's suggestion to change the date of the meeting. This is a situation where the participant is asked to refuse a suggestion from someone lower in status. Table 4 below displays the frequency and order of the semantic formula of refusals.

Table 4: Frequency and Order of Semantic Formulas S 2.

Group	Frequency and Order of Semantic Formula				
	1	2	3	4	Total
HP	Regrets (5) Excuses (4) Gratitude (2) Negative willingness(2) Consideration or Understanding(1) Criticism (3) Positive opinion (3)	Excuses (4) Principle (1) Negative willingness(4) Lecturing (2) Regrets (2)	Lecturing (2) Excuses (1)		36

LP	Regrets (7) Excuses (2) Positive feeling (1) Wish(4) Flat no (2) Negative willingness(2) Performative (1) Lecturing (1)	Unspecified (1) Criticism (1) Excuses (9) Lack of empathy (2) Lecturing (2) Negative willingness(1)	Negative willingness(1)		37
ANS	Regrets (2) Excuses (6) Wish(2) Negative willingness(7) Invoking the name of God(3)	Excuses (5) Negative willingness(4) Regrets (1) Lecturing (1)	Excuses (2) Negative willingness(2)		35
ENS	Regrets (6) Negative willingness(4) Excuses (5) Hedging (2) Empathy (2) Postponement (1)	Lecturing (3) Excuses (6) Negative willingness(6)	Negative willingness(3) Criticism (2)		40

When refusing someone lower in social status, though the participants of the four groups shared most of the refusal strategies, there were differences in the frequency use of refusals. Most apparently, in the use of negative willingness strategy, Yemeni EFL learner participants of both proficiency levels showed a relatively low-frequency use, whereas both native speakers of English and Arabic participants employed a higher frequency. It was found that 20%, 20%, 65%, 65% of the participants of HP, LP, ANS, and ENS respectively employed this strategy. It is interesting to note here that Yemeni EFL learners did not make use of their L1 pragmatic

norms nor of their target language, having their own interlanguage systems. They neither utilize the patterns that correspond to L1 nor to L2.

One interesting finding in this situation was the employment of lecturing strategy by the four group participants in this situation. Amazingly, this strategy was never employed in the other situations of DCTs. These strategies aggravate rather than mitigate.

With respect to the order and content of refusals, no significant differences were found as the four group participants showed a similar order and content in their use of refusal strategies. Negative willingness strategy, for example, appeared in the first and second positions by the four groups. Additionally, regret and excuse strategies were similarly employed in the first and second positions. Pragmatic transfer evidence by LP learners was in the utilization of wish strategy which was not utilized by ENSs.

Situation three (refusing a suggestion from someone higher in status)

In this situation, the participant was asked to refuse his boss's suggestion to use a memo in order to avoid forgetfulness. This is a situation where the participant is asked to refuse a suggestion from someone higher in status to the participant. Table 5 below displays the frequency and order of semantic formula of refusals in this situation.

Table 5: Frequency and Order of Semantic Formulas S 3.

Group	Frequency and Order of Semantic Formula				
	1	2	3	4	Total
HP	Excuses (4) Principle (3) Wish(2) Pause filler(3) Positive feeling(6) Hedging (2)	Excuses (5) Negative willingness(3) Principle (2)	Excuses (1)		31
LP	Regrets (3) Excuses (6) Positive feeling (3) Gratitude (4)	Hedging (2) Negative willingness(2) Excuses (5)	Alternative (1)		31

	Flat no (3) Negative willingness(1)	Lack of empathy (1)			
ANS	Excuses (7) Negative willingness(3) Positive feeling (2) Gratitude (4) Flat no (3) Wish(1)	Excuses (5) Invoking (3) Negative willingness(4)			32
ENS	Excuses (6) Negative willingness(3) Gratitude (2) Positive feeling (4) Pause filler (2) Flat no (3)	Alternative(7) Gratitude (2) No (1)	Gratitude (2) Excuse (2)		34

Both NS of Arabic and English participants showed similarities rather than differences in the frequency use of refusal strategies in this situation. ENS's and ANS's participants similarly employed almost a similar frequency of flat no and statement of regret strategies. Additionally, gratitude and positive feelings adjuncts were correspondingly used by both NSs group participants. For Yemeni EFL learners, LP learners showed a similar frequency use to both NSs group participants.

Both Yemeni EFL learner participants showed a lack of pragmatic competence as they never employed the alternative strategy which is commonly used by ENS participants. Regarding the order of the refusal strategies, both NSs groups and both Yemeni EFL learner participants similarly used the negative willingness strategy in the first position. Furthermore, the statement of excuse strategy and positive feeling adjunct were similarly employed in the first position by the four group participants.

Situation four (refusing an offer from someone equal in status)

In this situation, the participant was asked to refuse his friend's offer of an advertised job vacancy. This is a situation where the participant is asked to refuse an offer from someone equal in status to him. Table 6 below displays the frequency and order of the refusal strategies in this situation.

Table 6: Frequency and Order of Semantic Formulas S 4.

Group	Frequency and Order of Semantic Formula				
	1	2	3	4	Total
HP	Regrets (3) Gratitude (8) No (2) Pause filler(2) Positive feeling (3) Negative willingness (2)	Excuses (4) Statement of principle (4) Negative willingness (4) Gratitude (4)	Gratitude (2) Alternative (3)		41
LP	Regrets (2) Excuses (3) Gratitude (5) Wish(2) Negative willingness (6) Pause filler (2)	Excuses (3) Negative willingness (8) Gratitude (3	Gratitude (4) Invoking the name of God (3)		41
ANS	Regrets (2) Excuses (2) Gratitude (6) Wish(1) Negative willingness (8)	Excuses (4) Negative willingness (6) Gratitude (2)	Gratitude (4) Invoking the name of God (2)		40

	1	2	3	4	Total
	Pause filler (1)	Invoking the name of God (2)			
ENS	Excuses (3) Pause filler(3) Gratitude (5) Flat no (3) Positive op (3) Negative willingness(3)	Gratitude (6) Negative willingness (3) Excuses (5) Alternative (3)	Positive opinion (1) Alternative (1)	Excuses (1) Gratitude (1) Negative willingness (1)	42

Similarities rather than differences were the norms in this situation. The four groups of participants were similar in the employment of the gratitude strategy in the first, second and third positions. Furthermore, they showed similarity in the frequency and order of the negative willingness strategy.

The only difference was in the employment of the statement of regret strategy by ANS which was not utilized by ENS participants. Yemeni EFL learners resemble ANS participants in the utilization of this strategy in the first positions.

By examining the order of the refusal strategies, Table 6 showed that the four groups of participants have a similar semantic formula order.

Situation five (refusing an offer from someone Higher in status)

In this situation, the participant was asked to refuse his chairman's offer to pay money to repair a car. This is a situation where the participant is asked to refuse an offer from someone higher in status to him. Table 7 below displays the frequency and order of the refusal strategies in this situation.

Table 7: Frequency and order of Semantic Formulas S 5.

Group	Frequency and Order of Semantic Formula				
	1	2	3	4	Total
HP	Positive feeling(5)	Off the hook(4)	Alternative (1) Principle (4)		37

	Off the hook(6) Flat no (2) Alternative (1) Negative willingness (2) Pause filler (4)	Negative willingness (3) Principle (3) Alternative(2)			
LP	Invoking (4) Flat no (3) Positive feeling(3) Principe (3) Off the hook(7)	Invoking (3) Off the hook(5) Principle (2) Negative willingness (3)	Off the hook(2) Concern (2)		37
ANS	Concern (3) Off the hook (5) Flat no(4) Invoking (3) Positive feeling (3) Principle (2)	Off the hook(5) Principle (4) Invoking (3) Negative willingness(3)	Alternative (3) Off the hook(2)		40
ENS	Off the hook(7) Gratitude (3) Pause filler (4) Positive feeling (4) Flat no (2)	Principle (3) Off the hook(6) Alternative (4) Negative willingness (2)	Negative willingness (2) Principle (4)		41

As seen in Table 7 above, the four groups indicate similarities rather than differences in this situation. Both direct strategies of negative willingness and flat no were similarly employed by

the four groups in the first and second positions. Surprisingly, the alternative strategy which is more commonly used by ENS participants is utilized by HP learners in this situation.

All of the four groups almost always used the pragmatic strategy 'let the interlocutor off the hook' in this situation as seen in Table 7. However, ANSs and both learner groups were inclined to make a great effort to 'let the interlocutors off the hook' (e.g., "Don't worry about it" and "That's okay.") by employing multiple uses of this strategy (i.e., using 'let the interlocutors off the hook' strategy more than one time within a response). On the other hand, Americans did not use this strategy more than one time.

Pragmatic transfer occurred in the use of invoking the name of God adjunct, this strategy is commonly used in Arabic. It was employed in this situation by 35% of LP participants.

Yemeni EFL learners showed the lack of pragmatic competence as they did not utilize the indirect strategy of principle and both pause filler and gratitude adjuncts to refusal which were commonly used by ENSs.

Through examining the order of the semantic formula, the four groups similarly initiated their refusals with off the hook strategy followed by negative willingness strategy.

Situation six (refusing an offer from someone higher in status)

In this situation, the participant, a worker, was asked to refuse his boss's offer. This is a situation where the participant is asked to refuse someone of a lower status than him. Table 8 below displays the frequency and order of the refusal strategies in this situation.

Table 8: Frequency and Order of Semantic Formulas S 6.

Group	Frequency and Order of Semantic Formula				
	1	2	3	4	Total
HP	Regret (7) Gratitude (5) Pause filler (2) Excuses (1) Positive feeling(1) Philosophy (2) Negative willingness (2)	Negative willingness (2) Regret (2) Excuse (6) Alternative (4) Gratitude (2)	Negative willingness (2) Excuse (4)		42

LP	Excuse (5) Regret (6) Negative willingness (2) Off the hook(2) Invoking the name of God (2) Positive statement (2) Alternative (1)	Excuse (8) Negative willingness (4) Regret (1) Alternative (1	Excuse (4) Negative willingness (3)		41
ANS	Excuse (5)Regret (6) Negative willingness (2) Off the hook(3) Invoking the name of God (2) Positive statement (2)	Excuse (10) Negative willingness (4)	Excuse (4) Negative willingness (2)		40
ENS	Regret (4) Positive feeling (4) Excuse (4) Condition for Future (1) Gratitude (3) Pause filler (2) Hedging (2)	Excuse (8) Alternative (4) Gratitude (2) Negative willingness (2)	Aalternative (4) Negative willingness (1)	Hedge (1)	42

In this situation, Yemeni EFL learners showed a mixture of pragmatic competence and pragmatic transfer. The four group participants were similar in the content and order of some refusal strategies, namely: excuse, regret, negative willingness and positive feeling.

Moreover, Yemeni EFL learners showed pragmatic competence in the utilization of the indirect strategy of alternative. Aside from that, HP learners were pragmatically competent as they employed gratitude and pause filler adjuncts in the first position in a way similar to their native speakers of English.

On the other hand, YLEs showed evidence of pragmatic transfer in the utilization of 'let the interlocutor off the hook' strategy and invoking the name of God adjunct in a similar way to their ANSs. Additionally, two of the LP participants initiated their refusals with the indirect strategy of 'let the interlocutor off the hook' resembling their ANSs participants.

With regard to the order of the semantic formula, as shown in Table 8, the four groups showed almost a similar order of refusal semantic formulas. Only in the case of negative willingness strategy, both Yemeni EFL learner groups resembled their ANS counterparts employing this strategy in the first position, while the ENS participants used this strategy in the second and third positions.

Through examining the content of the semantic formula, some of the ANS participants used the title "Sir", with their interlocutors as a reference to the latter's superiority as a politeness illusion. Yemeni EFL learners of both proficiency levels transferred this honorific feature when refusing in the L2 especially when refusing someone of a higher status.

In the use of wish strategy, LP learners showed a tendency similar to their native speakers of Arabic. LP learners outweigh HP learners in the frequency use of this strategy in situations 8 and 6 in a way different from ENSs and similar to ANSs.

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings of the study show that Yemeni EFL learners still need further instruction to develop their pragmatic competence. They tended to use their first language pragmatic norms in employing more direct strategies. This finding comes in line with Abed (2011) who found that Iraqi speakers of Arabic use more direct strategies than Americans.

Both learner groups showed a tendency toward the pragmatic norms of L1. Pragmatic failure result from L1 transfer was evident in the overall strategy use of direct strategies and fewer adjuncts to refusals. Unlike Americans, Yemeni EFL learners prefer to use wish strategy and less adjuncts to refusal. However, this finding is inconsistent with that of Morkus' (2018) who found that Americans use a higher percentage of direct strategies than Arabic speakers. This also contradicts the findings from the literature that Arabic communication style tends towards verbosity (Al-Issa, 1998; Al-Shalawi, 1997). Moreover, the finding that Arabs use less adjuncts

to refusal than Americans comes in congruence with that of Abed (2011) who found that Americans tend to use more adjuncts than Arabic native speakers do.

Results revealed the YLEs' tendency toward their L1 pragmatic patterns and their deviation from the L2 ones in the frequency count of some refusal strategies. Yemenis where found to use more wish strategies and less use of adjuncts. Yemeni learners of English showed a tendency toward their native speaker's norms employing wish strategy more and showing less use of gratitude.

With respect to the content of excuse strategy, Yemenis use more general and vague excuses while Americans have used clear and more specific excuses. Yemeni EFL learners showed a tendency toward their l1 norms. This finding is similar to that of Alrefaee et al. (2019).

It is worth mentioning that evidence of pragmatic failure was also present with regard to the strategy selection. The findings showed that there were some refusal strategies that occurred only in the refusal responses given by the ANS group and were never utilized by the ENS group. For example, the adjunct of invoking the name of God was commonly used by the ANS participants and never found in the data of ENSs. However, YLEs of both proficiency levels have utilized this strategy, providing another evidence of pragmatic failure as a result of the negative pragmatic transfer. The use of this formula was found to imply and reflect an Arabic cultural-specific norm or value (Alrefaee et al. 2019)

Interestingly enough, Pragmatic failure was also evident with regard to the content of some refusal strategies. Though certain strategies like excuses/reasons are widely used by both Yemenis and Americans, the ways they are constructed differ. Yemeni's excuses/reasons were more general and less specific. Yemenis just state the excuses of their inability without specifically mentioning the exact reasons. Americans, on the other hand, give more direct, plain and specific reasons. YLEs transferred this tendency of vague general reasons when interacting in English resulting in a pragmatic failure. Such findings was also confirmed by Al-Issa (1998), Al-Shalawi (1997), Abed (2011) and Kim & Kwon (2010).

Based on such results, there should be a reconsideration of the current policy of teaching English in Yemen. The focus of teaching English should not be only to promote learners' ability to speak like native speakers in terms of correct grammar and pronunciation. Rather, Yemeni EFL learners should be able to use the language appropriately to fulfill social needs in a social context. Further studies are required to investigate the current instruction and to suggest ways to teach pragmatic competence in order to promote learners' ability to use the language for successful communication.

This current study has many limitations and further studies can be done to further investigate the Yemeni EFL pragmatics. It deals only with refusals to offers and suggestions. The participants are limited and thus, could not be generalized. The role of gender, length of stay aboard and type of instructions in the performance of this speech act were not investigated.

Pedagogical implications

Results obtained from this study will highly contribute to the current teaching and learning of English in the Yemeni context. Hopefully, teachers, policymakers and curriculum designers will make use of such findings. Teachers will incorporate the pragmatic aspects in the process of teaching and learning. Language policymakers are supposed to reconsider the current teaching methods and objectives set out for teaching English. Teaching a language is not only mastering its linguistics system. Rather, it is also to enable them to use the language appropriately in a social context. Similarly, Curriculum designers will also include the pragmatic dimension in the syllabi.

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