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Gender Difference in Using Refusal Speech Act Strategies by Saudi Arabian Parents in a Natural Context

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an intralingual study that explores the similarities and differences in refusal speech acts by native Saudi Arabian parents in a family domain in a natural setting. Specifically, it investigates both direct and indirect refusal strategies used by both genders (mothers vs. fathers) and the most frequent sub-refusal strategies used by both parents in response to their daughters' requests. The data were collected through phone calls and were recorded between participants (students) and their parents. A total of 9 MA students who contacted their parents (9 mothers and 9 fathers) via phone calls joined the study. The results show that both genders (the parents) rarely opt for direct strategies to turn down requests. The results are also consistent in terms of the frequency of use of indirect strategies such as attempting to dissuade the interlocutor and avoidance. Such findings oppose other studies' results, which indicated that Saudi males are more direct than females. This contradiction in findings may be attributed to the contexts in which the studies were conducted. The study's data also showed the common and frequent use of religious expressions as adjuncts on the part of both parents. Adjuncts are politeness markers used to avoid any kind of offense or hurt in natural contexts. This study also includes some recommendations for further research in the field of pragmatics in general and conversational pragmatics more specifically.

Keywords: Gender; Refusal Strategies; Pragmatics; Speech Acts; Frequent Strategies

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1. Introduction

Speech acts within any given culture are dynamic phenomena that can be observed in daily life. For successful communication, individuals usually submit to the norms of the culture in which the speech act event occurs. Izadi and Zilaie [1] mentioned that Austin [2] and Searle [3] suggested that speech acts are realized universally; however, others, like Wierzbicka [4], believed that speech acts are language-specific. Al-Shboul and Huwari [5] referred to Nureddeen's [6] comment that the "linguistic expressions to convey certain communicative purposes [are]governed by social conventions and the individual's assessment of situations". However, Umale [7] believed that the appropriateness of a speech act depends mostly on the knowledge of the spoken language in that specified culture (cited in Al-Mahrooqi and Al-Aghbari [8]). In the same vein, Saud [9] stated, "Successful communication and performance of speech acts depend largely on pragmatic competence". Thomas [10] defined pragmatic competence as "the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand the language in context".

Utterance is the core component involved in any speech act because it is associated with a response from the interlocutor as an action to the intended meaning. Almathkuri [11] defined speech acts as "the basic minimal units of linguistic communication." Belza [12] and Bruti [13] suggested that the "speech act is an action performed by an utterance" (cited in Al-Mahrooqi and Al-Aghbari [8]). Studies such as those by Saud [9], Ghazanfari, Bonyadi and Malekzadeh [14], and Alrefaee, Mudkanna and Almansoob [15] agreed with Austin [2] that individuals are involved in three speech acts when uttering a sentence. According to Austin [2], these speech acts are the *locutionary act*, the *illocutionary act*, and the *perlocutionary act*. A *locutionary act* deals with the actual utterance, whereas an *illocutionary act* is the intended meaning of the utterance. Last, a *perlocutionary act* is the effect of the intended meaning on the hearer (Alrefaee, Mudkanna and Almansoob [15]). Eslami and McLoed [16] stated that interlocutors of the same cultural and social background share the *illocutionary act*, which makes them able to interpret the intended meaning easily. However, communication breakdown occurs when the *illocutionary act* varies between interlocutors due to cultural and social differences [11].

The aim of this study is to address the refusal speech act strategies employed by native Saudi Arabian parents and their daughters' requests and the most frequent sub strategies used by both parents in the context of Saudi culture. In addition, this study aims to investigate these strategies in a natural context due to limited studies in literature that refer to the concept of natural context. Therefore, the following section will provide an overview of the refusal speech acts.

2. Refusal Speech Acts

Refusal speech acts are challenging to handle because of their inherent sensitivity to the speaker and the hearer. They are subject to different social variables such as gender, age, level of education, power, and social distance [17]. These variables are culture-specific and depend heavily on the common social knowledge among individuals of the same culture. According to Alaboudi [18], the refusal of speech act itself is universal; that is, it can be observed in all cultures. However, the means of conducting the act of refusal vary from one culture to another and are associated with the social variables. Individuals outside the culture may cause unintended offense to the hearer by violating social norms. Hence, these variables affect the strategies of refusal used by members of the same culture to mitigate the refusal's effect. However, transferring the strategies of the refusal speech act to another culture causes a communication failure when applied inappropriately.

Honglin [19] defined a refusal speech act as "perform[ing] the action of refusal". This performance is a result of initiating acts like requests, offers, invitations, and suggestions. Because a refusal speech act is a reaction to an initiating act, it needs careful planning, unlike other speech acts [18]. Due to the sensitivity of the refusal speech act, Umale [7] claimed that a "refusal is a face-threatening act as it causes damage to the face of both the speaker and the hearer". To understand the term *face-threatening*, it is crucial to go back to Brown and Levinson [20]. They claimed the following (as cited in Umale [7]):

They [...] explain that each and every person in a society claims a public self-image known as "face." An individual has two types of face, positive and negative. Positive face is the wish to be liked and approved by others (Wolfson, 1989, p. 67) and negative face is the wish to do your everyday work without others imposing upon you (Cameron, 2001, p. 79). Acts that cause damage to the positive or negative face of the speaker are known as face-threatening acts (FTAs).

Therefore, Brown and Levinson [20] suggested that a person employs different strategies to save face and maintain harmony in relationships. These strategies will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz [21] proposed a framework in which the strategies of the refusal act are divided into two types: *direct* and *indirect* refusal strategies. The former, which corresponds to the *locutionary act*, is to directly refuse a request, offer, etc., by simply using performative verb phrases like "I refuse" or "I decline" or by using nonperformative statements such as "no" or "I can't." The latter type, as noted by Al-Kahtani [22], requires a high level of pragmatic competence. This type involves the *illocutionary act* and indirectly implements strategies of

the refusal speech act to mitigate interlocutors' face-threatening (*perlocutionary act*) through various means. The interlocutor's skills at refusing include but are not limited to an opinion or a request that indirectly incorporates various mitigating intentions to reduce the effect of the refusal speech act, which is delivered using moderate language to convey disapproval. These mitigation plans are related to the politeness system, which will be discussed in detail in the coming section. The hearer who shares a similar cultural background with the speaker will understand the intended meaning from these indirect strategies. Detailed indirect strategies involved in refusal speech acts as reported in Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz [21], are presented in **Appendix A**. From the inventory list of the indirect strategies described by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz [21], it appears that a refusal speech act follows certain sequences that interlocutors adopt to reduce the face-threatening. These sequences that emerge in the indirect strategies are called semantic formulas. According to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford [23], semantic formulas are "the means by which a particular speech act is accomplished, in terms of the primary content of an utterance". An example of a semantic formula from Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz [21] is the refusal of an invitation to a friend's house for dinner: "I am sorry, I have a theater ticket that night. Maybe I could come by later for a drink." The sequence of this refusal formula is [expression of regret] [excuse] [offering an alternative]. Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz [21] mentioned that some semantic formulas include adjuncts, which they define as "preliminary remarks that could not stand alone and function as a refusal". An example of an adjunct is the positive expression before giving an excuse, for example, "I'd love to ..., but." The positive feeling in the semantic formula "I'd love to" cannot stand alone and implies a refusal at the same time because without providing an excuse, it sounds like an acceptance.

To eliminate the effect of face threats as a result of refusal acts, Brown and Levinson advocated politeness theory, based on Goffman [24] and Lakoff's [25]

contributions. According to Brown and Levinson [20], politeness theory is based on the goal of politeness, which aims to reduce the potential effect of imposition on the hearer. It involves two types of face: *positive face* and *negative face*, which were introduced earlier in the face-threatening concept. *Positive face* is consistent with politeness, which is achieved through the similarities of the desires of both the hearer and the speaker. Positive politeness involves solidarity and rapport between speaker and hearer by using terms that imply membership in a group, like expressing sympathy for the hearer. However, *negative face* deals with negative politeness by showing the hearer that their personal space and freedom are not being imposed upon by the speaker. Brown and Levinson [20] said that the hearer's positive face is threatened by the refusal speech act because the desires of the speaker and the hearer are different [26].

Brown and Levinson [20] claimed that there are three universal factors that influence the seriousness of face-threatening. The first is the power of the speaker over the hearer, for example, an interaction between a professor and a student as opposed to an interaction between two students. The second is the distance, which refers to the social distance between hearer and speaker, such as an interaction between strangers as opposed to an interaction between family members. The last factor is weight, or rank of imposition, such as asking someone to pass the salt as opposed to requesting to borrow someone's car. Therefore, the speaker chooses among these factors, and the choice affects the face-threatening of the hearer. The speakers either go to one extreme of the continuum and go bold on record and produce the speech act without mitigation, or the speakers choose the opposite extreme and go off record to minimize the effect of the intended meaning by using hints and making the speaker's intention vague. However, the moderate midpoint is to go on record by using mitigating strategies, the indirect strategies mentioned earlier [26]. **Figure 1** illustrates Brown and Levinson's [20] strategies to mitigate face-threatening.
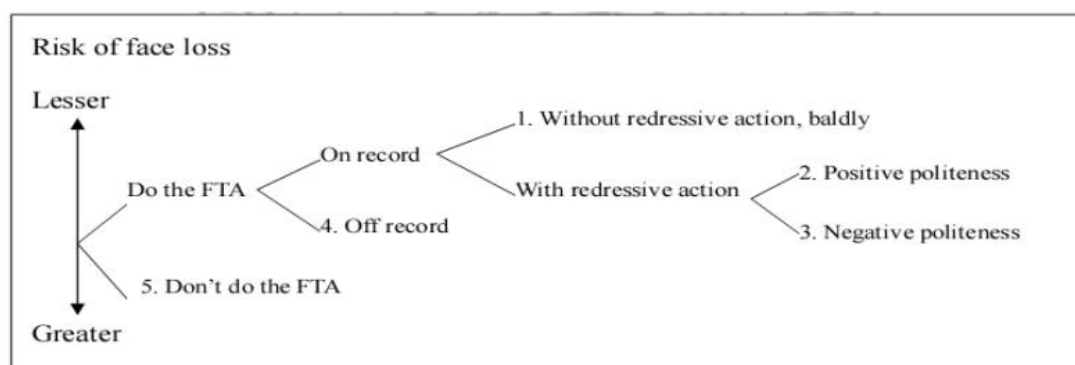
Brown and Levinson 1987: 69

Figure 1. Brown and Levinson's (1987) strategies to mitigate face-threatening.

3. Previous Studies on Refusal Speech Acts

Refusal speech acts in response to requests, suggestions, offers, invitations, etc., have been widely investigated in the literature from various perspectives. Several studies have addressed refusal speech acts from a pedagogical perspective, such as Allami and Naeimi [27], Morkus [28], and Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi [29]. Other studies examined the interlanguage (cross-cultural) differences of refusal speech acts, such as Chang [30], Hashemian [31], Al-Shboul, Maros and Yasin [32], and Al-Momani [33]. A few studies touched upon the gender differences in intralanguages (within a culture), such as Izadi and Zilaie [1], Hedayatnejad and Rahbar [34], and Moaveni [35]. Because many studies adopted the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) in its written or oral version to elicit refusal speech acts from participants, studies have devoted some attention to investigating the refusal speech act in a natural setting. The ensuing sections provide a brief overview of studies conducted on the refusal speech act that address the gender issue.

Al-Ghamdi and Alqarni [36] investigated cross-cultural differences between Saudi females and American females with respect to refusal strategies in response to invitations and requests. They analyzed the semantic formula that is frequent when interacting with interlocutors of different status. They considered the norms and values of culture based on collectivist culture and individualistic culture. As per Triandis's [37] definitions, collectivism cultures are, as cited in Al-Ghamdi and Alqarni [36],

[a] social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, or nation); are primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by, those collectives; are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals; and emphasize their connectedness to members of these collectives.(p. 67)

However, individualism culture is defined as follows:

[a] social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives; are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others; give priority to their personal goals over the goals of others; and emphasize rational analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of associating with others." (p. 67)

They used the DCT, which involves eight situations of refusal speech acts (two situations of refusal to a high-status interlocutor, two situations of refusal to a low-status interlocutor, and four situations of refusal to someone of equal status). Although the study focused only on females, the authors investigated gender differences. The results showed that there are no significant differences between genders within a culture with respect to request-refusal strategies; that is, both genders of the same culture use the same strategies with the same frequency. The results also showed that Saudi females use a less direct "no" in their refusal, but they frequently use regret and explanation strategies. The researchers of this study suggest that the direct "no" is considered impolite, which might affect social relationships and disturb the harmony of the cultural relationship. Thus, they attributed these findings to the collectivist nature of Saudi culture.

Similarly, Alaboudi [18] investigated the refusal speech act strategies of female Saudi students in a university by examining the most frequently used strategies and the effect of the directness of the strategies. She addressed the concept of a high-context culture which was defined by Gudykunst et al. [38] as "members of high-context cultures tend to be collectivistic" which means that individuals of this culture put the interest of the group first (p.83). A modified version of the written DCT was used to elicit participants' refusal strategies. The test included nine situations, three for each initiating speech act. They are request, invitation, and offer, in which the setting, the social distance (close or distant), and the social status (high, low, or equal) are specified. Analysis of the semantic formula and frequency of each refusal strategy shows that "excuse/reason" is the most frequently used refusal strategy by Saudi females. Alaboudi [18] stated that according to Al-Shalawi [39], Saudis' excuses are usually of a general nature, that is, vague and related to the family. Other frequently used strategies are "negative ability" and a direct "no." However, participants who were aware of how direct refusals may affect sensitive interlocutors, they accompanied their direct refusals with other indirect strategies and adjuncts. Alaboudi [18] also mentioned that some participants invoked the name of Allah (God) in their refusals. This is typical of Muslim speakers, who tend to use religious references in their speech [26].

Abed [40] investigated the pragmatic transfer of refusal strategies of three groups: 30 Iraqi native speakers who learned English as a foreign language (15 males and 15 females) at Al-Mustansiriyah University, Iraq, 15 Iraqi Arabic native speakers (8 males and 7 females), and 10 American native speakers (6 males and 4 females). He used a written DCT that included twelve situations: three items for each request, offer, suggestion and invitation. Each speech act included one item for a refusal to someone of higher status, one item for someone of equal status, and one item for someone of lower status. The data were analyzed according to the frequency of use and the social status of the interlocutors. The results showed that Iraqis who learned English used reason/explanation, statements of regret, and wish and refusal adjuncts in their refusals more than native American speakers. However, there were minor

differences between Iraqi males and females in refusal frequency and adjuncts. Iraqi females produced refusal strategies at a rate of 48.26%, whereas Iraqi males produced refusals at a rate of 51.74%. Iraqi females produced more refusal adjuncts (50.88%) than Iraqi males (49.12%) in their refusals to people of higher status. Neither gender used "statement of empathy" in their refusals. In addition, the results revealed that they responded in a similar manner with respect to social status.

Another study conducted by Saud [9] on undergraduate Saudi students who learned English as a foreign language (EFL) at King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia examined the relationship between refusal strategies and social status. Data were collected using a DCT on 150 Saudi females to elicit participants' responses in refusals of requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions. Refusals in these situations involved three social statuses: refusal to a person of higher status, with equal status, and with lower status. The results showed that Saudi female participants used indirect strategies 57.72% of the time, direct strategies 32.49% of the time, and adjuncts 9.79% of the time. In addition, social status played an insignificant role in using refusal strategies in all situations with approximately 33%. Saud [9] concluded that it was essential to implement refusal strategies in the education system to raise EFL students' awareness of their responses to people of different social status.

Septiany [41] performed a case study and examined the refusal strategies of parents and children in the family domain. They collected data through observation by recording conversations. According to data analyses, parents tended to use refusal statements by giving reasons or explanations, showing hesitation, and offering alternatives. Children, however, adopted the refusal strategies of showing hesitation, giving a reason or explanation, and using the postponement strategy. Septiany's results showed that the influence of power asymmetry was evident in their selection of the proper refusal strategies. They also observed that parents and children shared the strategy of giving a reason or explanation when they responded to a hearer with high status. However, parents and children used the hesitation strategy when they responded to a hearer with equal status. The author in the study did not provide enough information about the participants like ethnicity, age or country.

Kuhi and Jadidi [42] investigated 63 MA Iranian students who studied English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Islamic Azad University of Maraghe and Tabriz, Iran, in politeness in three speech acts: request, refusal, and apology. They used a multiple-choice DCT and a politeness rating questionnaire to elicit students' perceptions and production of the task items. The data examined three factors: power, social distance, and gender. The analyses of the results of refusal speech acts showed that Iranian students acquired the knowledge of speech acts and

politeness strategies. In refusal speech acts, Iranian students showed that they preferred the semantic formula of excuse/reason/explanation (74.40%), followed by a statement of regret (69.05%). In addition, gender played a role in face-saving strategies that employed negative politeness. The results demonstrated that male students used direct strategies more often than females.

Alalawi [43] examined gender differences in refusal speech acts between Saudi postgraduate students who learned EFL and Saudi postgraduate ESL (English as a second language) students. The online written DCT was devised to generate students' responses. The results revealed that there were no gender differences between EFL and ESL students in refusal speech acts in using direct and indirect strategies and adjuncts. The difference was found within the group of EFL males and females with respect to direct strategies and the number of adjuncts.

A study conducted by Hedayatnejad, Maleki and Mehrizi [44] examined the effect of social status (high, equal, and low) and gender differences on the refusal of suggestions by 60 Iranian EFL learners (males and females) at the intermediate level of English proficiency in Zaban Negar Institute in Tehran, Iran. They used the DCT, which involves 18 refusal situations. The results showed that EFL Iranian learners used different strategies based on the social status of the interlocutors. EFL learners used direct strategies with people of low status (49.5%), whereas they used direct (46.7%) and indirect (47.5%) refusal strategies with people of high status. However, with people of equal status, EFL learners used indirect strategies (46.7%), direct strategies (41.4%), and adjuncts (11.9%). Regarding gender difference in relation to social status, the findings revealed that there was no significant difference by gender at all three levels of social status. Shedding light on the previous studies on refusal speech acts, the aim of this research is to fill in the gap in literature by presenting a study about the refusal strategies used by Saudi parents to their daughters' requests in Saudi culture within Saudi family using natural context data. Therefore, two questions were constructed to satisfy these objectives:

1. What are gender similarities or differences between Saudi parents (mothers vs. fathers) with respect to refusal strategies (direct vs. indirect) in response to their daughters' requests that uncover the norm of refusal strategies in Saudi culture in a natural context?

2. What are the most frequent sub-strategies used by Saudi parents (fathers vs. mothers) in refusing their daughters' requests in the natural context based on Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz's (1990) model that represents the Saudi culture?

The contribution of this study is that it will reveal whether there are any gender differences and the way Saudi parents deliver their refusal acts in a natural context. To our knowledge, this is the first study that explores the refusal strategies in a natural context by Saudi Arabic speakers and

their parents (Cf. Alsmari [45]).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

The current research explores the similarities and differences in the speech act of refusal when realized by both males and females in Saudi familial contexts. For this reason, we used a descriptive quantitative research method and thus focused on describing, illustrating, and demonstrating the use of the different refusal strategies. The data results were put into tables using percentage, counting, and frequency. The consent and the procedure of this study will be discussed in the coming sections.

4.2. Study Participants

A total of nine MA students (daughters) agreed to participate in this study of 23 students who enrolled in an MA program at the University of Jeddah, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. All participants were young Saudi Arabic speakers with a mean age of 28.5. Many students were residents of Jeddah, whereas others lived in different cities of Saudi Arabia and visited Jeddah two days a week to attend their MA courses. Their English proficiency was not reported because proficiency is not a prerequisite for this study. Every student contacted her parents via phone calls, which made a total of nine fathers and nine mothers. The total number of all participants, including the parents and daughters, was 27 participants. The fathers who participated in this study were Saudis and worked in Saudi private and state sectors and the mothers were Saudis too and were either retired or housewives.

4.3. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected by analyzing the dialogues between Saudi Arabic-speaking parents and their daughters via phone calls. The dialogue was not designed and carried out naturally. The students were requested to feel free to choose any request of their choice, but they needed to be sure that their parents would refuse their request. The requests included travelling abroad alone (five dialogues), stopping their studies (five dialogues), going out with unknown friends (four dialogues), staying out late (one dialogue), and breaking the rules of cultural conventions (three dialogues). There was a total of eighteen conversations (nine dialogues with their fathers and nine dialogues with their mothers). An example of these dialogues is presented below. The participant lived in Rabigh, Saudi Arabia, and wanted to travel to Riyadh with her friends to attend a concert.

Father-Daughter Dialogue

Daughter: Next month, there will be a Korean band in Riyadh, and my friends will go together. They called me to go with them, but I informed them that I need to seek permission from my father because he might say no.

Father: OK, thanks to Allah that you know.

Daughter: Why? I will be in Saudi Arabia. I am not going to be very far.

Father: Darling, you know my principles and please adhere to them.

Daughter: No way at all?

Father: Do not let me change my opinion about you.

The same participant made a phone call to her mother right after calling her father to inform her that she was invited to her friend's house and the party would not end until nearly dawn.

4.4. Study Procedure

Access to the students was granted by MA faculty members during their lectures. All students in the class were requested to switch off their mobile phones and hand them to their instructors. This precaution was to ensure that they would not contact their parents to give them any hints about the study and to make sure that the conversations ran naturally. Students were introduced to the aim of the study and informed of the confidentiality of the data. They were also informed that the data would be used for the purpose of this research and would subsequently be destroyed. Then the procedure was explained to them: they would contact their parents via phone and request their permission to do something that the students knew their parents would refuse, without informing their parents anything about the study. Parents would be put on speakerphones. Nine students of the 23 agreed to do the conversations with their fathers and mothers. Acceptance of making the phone calls with their parents was considered as a consent to participation. Because of the sensitivity of the conversation, the participants were taken to a separate room and were called one by one to contact their parents privately. During the conversation, the conversation was recorded using a separate phone to record the dialogue. *Rev Voice Recorder and Memos App* were used to record the dialogues, which were later transcribed into text.

4.5. Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, which basically includes the classification of the refusal strategies used by the parents, we adopted the semantic criterion suggested by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz [21]. Percentage was tabulated as follows: $P = F/N \times 100$ where P stands for percentage, N stands for the total number of respondents, F stands for the total answer, and 100 is the constant. The refusal strategy that ranked at the top was considered the one most employed by both genders (fathers and mothers).

The transcribed texts were analyzed by the researchers of this study separately. Then, both transcriptions were compared with each other to ensure the consistency of the analyses. There was only minor discrepancy in the analyses, less than 5% of the data. To resolve this inconsistency, the researchers sought the opinion of a third faculty member from another university. Having been classified and categorized in the context of a family domain, the refusal strategies employed by both fathers and mothers will be discussed to draw conclusions and suggest further research and recommendations.

5. Results and Discussion

According to the results shown in **Table 1**, no obvious gender differences occurred in the refusals articulated by both mothers and fathers when addressing their daughters in almost all categories. Indeed, the percentage of the refusal strategies utilized by the participants was almost even from the most-used strategy to the least-used one. Fathers opted for the indirect strategy to express their refusal (58%), and the same applies to mothers, with an insignificant difference of (0.4%).

Table 1. The percentage of refusal strategies utilized by mothers and fathers.

	Direct	Indirect	Adjunct	Interrogative
Fathers	9.9%	58%	16%	16%
Mothers	9.6%	58.4%	18.4%	13.6%

Moreover, both parents scarcely used the direct strategy (fathers 9.9% and mothers 9.6%). This similarity indicates the shared and equal power both parents exercised when it came to making decisions that concerned their children. This finding, however, opposes the common belief that fathers exert the most power in Saudi families. According to Achouri [46], the traditional Saudi family "can be described as patriarchal in that the father or the grandfather had the legal power and social norms, which supported his authority". In another respect, the even use of refusals voiced by both parents can be perceived as advantageous. Liu and Qian [47] suggested that gender differences always cause issues and conflicts between males and females in daily-life conversations, which does not seem to apply to the participants' parents in the current research. The minimal use of the direct strategy, however, can be explained by the fact that fathers and mothers do not want to hurt their daughters when declining their requests but still want to maintain their stable relationship with them, thus selecting the most appropriate expressions and avoiding face-threatening situations that may be intense if the direct strategies are used more frequently.

More importantly, both parents used more indirect refusal strategies than direct ones, which might indicate that they are trying to mitigate their refusals by being less direct. This finding is consistent with Alaboudi [18], who reported that her participants used indirect strategies and adjuncts more than direct strategies to show their awareness of the need to reduce the threat that their refusal poses to the interlocutor.

In another vein, **Table 1** indicates a small difference was identified regarding the use of the adjunct strategy by fathers (16%) and mothers (18.4%). The more frequent use of this strategy by mothers may be attributed to the fact they are more sympathetic to their daughters and thus try to tone down the effect of their refusals by resorting to adjuncts [48], whereas fathers, who conform to the common belief that men are more likely to be straightforward, use this strategy less frequently. Still, we found a discrepancy in terms of the employment of the interrogative strategy by both genders (fathers, 16% and mothers, 13.6%), which may be explained by the familiarity of the mothers with their daughters' concerns, which exceeds the fathers' in most common contexts.

The second research question revolves around the most frequent sub strategies used by Saudi parents in refusing their daughters' requests. The results are illustrated in **Table 2**.

Concerning the frequency of the categories embedded within the direct strategies, **Table 2** shows that the performative strategy was used more by fathers (2.5%) than by mothers (1.6%). Similarly, a nonperformative "no" was utilized by the fathers (6.2%) of the time, more than the mothers' (4%). However, the latter were more willing to reveal their negative willingness or ability at (3.2%) compared with the fathers' (0%). It could be claimed, in light of the above results, that women, as some studies have suggested, may on average use more indirect refusal strategies than men, who express their refusals without much justification or explanation.

Moreover, the results regarding indirect strategy showed that the most frequent use of indirect categories by both mothers and fathers are "attempts to dissuade interlocutors" and "avoidance," which account for (35.8%) by the fathers and (42.4%) by the mothers. However, **Table 2** shows that parents differ in using the other indirect categories: fathers tend to use more indirect types of strategies than mothers. Indirect categories such as "acceptance that functions as a refusal," "promise for future acceptance," and "statement of regret" were absent in the mothers' dialogues (0%) compared with fathers, who used "acceptance that functions as a refusal" (4.9%) of the time and "promise for future acceptance" and "statement of regret" (1.2%) of the time. Another contrast was found between fathers and mothers: mothers used the strategies of

"set condition for acceptance" (2.4%) of the time whereas fathers never used this indirect category (0%).

The remaining indirect categories appeared in both parents' dialogues. Again, their frequency of using these categories differed. Both parents used "statement of alternatives," but the fathers chose this category more often (7.4%) than the mothers (3.2%).

Regarding "statement of principles", mothers seemed more concerned with adhering to social and cultural conventions and self-image. Of their dialogues with their daughters, (4.8%) were about principles derived either from culture or religion whereas the fathers' dialogues contained (2.5%).

The last indirect category that appeared in the parents' dialogues was "excuse, reason, and explanation." In this category, the difference between the parents appeared to be marginal: fathers used this category (6.2%) of the time, and mothers used it (5.6%). **Table 3** summarizes the most frequent indirect strategies used by both parents.

Table 2. Distribution of refusal strategies used by both parents within the direct strategies.

Strategy	Category		Fathers	Mothers
Direct	Performative		2.5%	1.6%
	Non-performative	NO	6.2%	4%
		Negative willingness/ability	0%	3.2%
Indirect	Attempt to dissuade the interlocutor		19.8%	24%
	Avoidance		16%	18.4%
	Excuse, reason, explanation		6.2%	5.6%
	Statement of alternatives		7.4%	3.2%
	Acceptance that functions as a refusal		4.9%	0%
	Statement of principle		2.5%	4.8%
	Promise of future acceptance		1.2%	0%
	Statement of regret		1.2%	0%
	Set conditions for acceptance		0%	2.4%
Adjunct	Religious expression		7%	10%
	Statement of positive opinion, feeling, or agreement		3.7%	4.8%
	Statement of empathy		1.2%	0.8%
	Pause fillers		1.2%	2.4%
	Gratitude, appreciation		1.2%	0%

Table 3. A summary of the most frequent indirect strategies used by both parents.

Fathers		Mothers	
Strategies	Percentage	Strategies	Percentage
Attempt to dissuade the interlocutor	19.8%	Attempt to dissuade the interlocutor	24%
Avoidance	16%	Avoidance	18.4%
Statement of alternatives	7.4%	Excuse, reason, explanation	5.6%
Excuse, reason, explanation	6.2%	Statement of principle	4.8%
Acceptance that functions as a refusal	4.9%	Statement of alternatives	3.2%
Statement of principle	2.5%	Set conditions for acceptance	2.4%
Promise for future acceptance	1.2%	Acceptance that functions as a refusal	0%
Statement of regret	1.2%	Promise for future acceptance	0%
Set conditions for acceptance	0%	Statement of regret	0%

According to the model by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz [21], indirect strategies are classified into subcategories. The first indirect strategy is "attempt to dissuade the interlocutor." In this category, four subcategories appeared in parents' dialogues, as shown in **Table 4**.

Table 5 shows that the speech act of refusal is also expressed through avoidance in the indirect strategy by both mothers and fathers. Although the former opted for verbal avoidance through the repetition of part of the request (9.6%), the latter commonly resorted to verbal avoidance through silence (7.4%). Karapetyan [49] justified the employment of this semantic formula when she articulated that "sometimes even the best verbal communication skills are not enough to create and sustain successful relationships. Very often non-verbal communication speaks louder than words".

The results also indicated the use of all types of adjuncts, based on the model from Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz [21], in the parents' dialogue. However, the percentages varied between the fathers and the mothers, as shown in **Table 6**.

Table 4. A summary of the subcategories of "attempt to dissuade the interlocutor".

Indirect Strategy		Fathers	Mothers
Attempt to dissuade the interlocutor	Threats of statement of negative consequence to the requester	2.5%	3.2%
	Criticize the request/requester (negative feeling or opinion)	7.4%	5.6%
	Dropping or delaying the request	3.7%	5.6%
	Let interlocutor off the hook	6.2%	5.6%

Table 5. A summary of verbal avoidance in the indirect category.

Indirect Strategy		Fathers	Mothers
Verbal avoidance	Topic switch	1.2%	1.6%
	Joke	0%	3.2%
	Repetition of part of request	4.9%	9.6%
	Hedging	2.5%	0.8%

Table 6. A summary of percentages of the adjuncts presented in the dialogues.

Adjunct	Fathers	Mothers
Religious expression	7%	10%
Statement of positive opinion, feeling, or agreement	3.7%	4.8%
Statement of empathy	1.2%	0.8%
Pause fillers	1.2%	2.4%
Gratitude, appreciation	1.2%	0%

Religious expression ranks at the top (7% and 10% for fathers and mothers, respectively) in terms of the common semantic formulas employed by parents, which is self-explanatory because they are Muslims, and this kind of discourse is closely tied to Saudi cultural values and discourse conventions. Examples of religious discourse used by the participants include الله يهديك / الحمد لله/ الله يسهل عليهم (May ALLAH make things easy for them, Thank GOD, May ALLAH show you the right path (translation is mine)). These findings strongly support Al-Rojaie [50], who asserted that the religious expressions used by Arabic speakers have embedded multifunctional dimensions that range between positive and negative politeness. The latter applies to refusals in the present research.

The current research results also revealed that the least frequently used strategies by fathers include "promise of future acceptance" (1.2%) and "statement of regret" (1.2%), whereas mothers rarely resorted to statements of alternatives (3.2%). An example is اطلع انا معاك او أحد من اخوانك ما في مشكلة / Is there a problem if I or any of your brothers join you? Mothers also rarely set conditions for acceptance (2.4%), for example,اخوك معاك تاخدي بالطيارة/ If it is a flight, you need to go with your brother). Such answers from the parents are culturally understood as refusals. Therefore, the speakers do not need to turn down the requests literally and go against their daughters' aspirations but use such strategies in a "clever" attempt to maintain politeness.

However, "giving excuse and reason" is a strategy used by fathers an average of (6.2%) and by mothers (5.6%). These findings are consistent with the results of Septiany [41], who theorized that this is the most frequently utilized strategy. The setting of this work is the family domain, where parents in Saudi families are of higher status and do not need to give reasons or excuses when performing refusals. To quote Alasmari [51],

Status is regarded as the acknowledged position someone gets in a social group. This position is based on "esteem or respect." The main result of this acquired status is the degree of influence the person exercises on the others' behaviors and attitudes without any sort of reward or threat. (p. 398)

To project refusal and indicate strong noncompliance, both genders frequently resort to criticizing the request, thus showing negative feelings or opinions as well as letting the interlocutor off the hook. In fact, these results oppose those found by Alaboudi [18], who listed "excuse/reason" and "negative ability" as the indirect strategies most frequently used by Saudi participants in her study. This difference in findings can be attributed to the different settings where the studies were conducted.

6. Recommendations and Further Research

Based on the findings of the current research and referencing the literature overview on the articulation of refusals, we concluded that the choice and preference of a particular refusal strategy depend on context, academic and familial factors, etc. Therefore, more comparative studies of refusals in different settings would help confirm or reject that hypothesis. Further research is needed because of the sensitivity the speech act of refusal causes among people, as mentioned by Ababtain [52].

A deep overview of the literature shows that most of the studies, this study included, have focused on the articulation of refusal itself without considering the after-effect of such a refusal on the requesters and their responses. Given the pragmatic importance of refusals, their effect on the recipients should be thoroughly researched because their answers may lead to pragmatic inappropriateness, especially within the EFL context. The ways requesters respond after refusal should be given more attention to avoid any pragmatic failure.

The use of adjuncts, specifically religious expressions that serve other pragmatic functions than their literal semantic meanings in a natural family context, paves the way for more studies that decipher and analyze these expressions used in social interactions and the embedded messages the speakers intend to convey through them. Thus, we look for a more comprehensive account of their uses and the embedded multifunctional purposes they serve in natural daily conversations.

7. Limitations

The results of the current research were generated from conversations in which the addressers were females. Different results could have been reached if the addressers had been male. However, if this study included refusal responses to both genders' requests, this work could have yielded more reliable, authentic, and accountable data that would add to the existing pragmatics literature. The same idea was mentioned by Septiany [41], who found that power asymmetry in speaker–hearer relationships between parents and children could influence the selection of certain refusal strategies.

The homogeneity of the participants is another drawback. The parents' ages and educational backgrounds were not specified. Such variables may have influenced the results. Thus, these variables and others should be considered in future work because they could have influenced the particular choice of a given refusal strategy.

This study relied solely on the conversations between the participants as the only instrument for data collection. The absence of an interview with these participants to allow them to explain their particular choice of a given refusal strategy category could affect the results' reliability.

8. Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the similarities and differences in refusal strategies that were used by native Saudi Arabian fathers and mothers in a family domain. Data indicated the almost equal use of the various refusal strategies in terms of frequency. Both genders rarely opted for direct strategies to decline their daughters' requests. Conversely, they commonly employed indirect strategies and adjuncts in which the refusal was hidden in their responses. In addition, the results revealed the frequent use of religious expressions as adjuncts.

To conclude, the results of this study are in some respects consistent with previous studies in the literature on speech acts of refusal and different in some other respects. The speech act of refusal contributes to our everyday communications and interactions. Accordingly, more research is highly recommended even if it is of an interlanguage nature. In fact, most of the research that examines this type of pragmatic conversation in general and speech acts in particular is of the comparative type in which two languages are involved. A deep review of the literature showed that little attention has been paid to interlanguage pragmatics. The current research aimed to augment the scarce available literature by presenting an example of refusal routines that can be used as a reference when analyzing refusals in a natural context. This study focused particularly on familial situations in which the refusal speech act was articulated by Saudi parents with a particular focus on gender differences and similarities between fathers and mothers.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, H.M.K.; methodology, H.M.K.; software, H.M.K; validation, H.M.K and N.A.; formal analysis, N.A.; investigation, H.M.K.; resources, N.A.; data curation, H.M.K and N.A.; writing—original draft preparation, H.M.K and N.A.; writing—review and editing, H.M.K; visualization, H.M.K and N.A.; supervision, H.M.K and N.A.; project administration, H.M.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

All subjects recorded informed consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

Due to the sensitivity of the information in the data, the recordings and the analyses during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Direct strategies	A. Performative (e.g., 'I refuse.')
	B. Non-performative
	1. 'No'
	2. Negative willingness/ability (e.g., 'I can't' 'I don't think so')
Indirect strategies	A. Statement of regret (e.g., "I'm sorry. . .")
	B. Wish (e.g., "I wish I could help you. . .")
	C. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., "I have a headache.")
	D. Statement of alternative
	1. I can do X instead of Y (e.g., "I'd prefer. . .")
	E. Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., "If you had asked me earlier, I would have. . .")
	F. Promise of future acceptance (e.g., "I promise I'll. . ."
	G. Statement of principle (e.g., "I never do business with friends.")
	H. Statement of philosophy (e.g., "One can't be too careful.")
	I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor
	1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (e.g., "I won't be any fun tonight" to reuse an invitation)
	2. Guilt trip (e.g., waitress to customers who want to sit a while: "I can't make a living off people who just order coffee.")
	3. Criticize the request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling)
	4. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request.
	5. Let interlocutor off the book (e.g., "That's okay)
	6. Self-defense (e.g., "I am trying my best.")
	J. Acceptance that functions as a refusal
	1. Unspecific or indefinite reply
	2. Lack of enthusiasm
	K. Avoidance
	1. Nonverbal
	a. Silence
	b. Hesitation
	c. Do nothing
	d. Physical departure
	2. Verbal
	a. Topic switch
	b. Joke
	c. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., "Monday?")
	d. Postponement (e.g., "I'll think about it.")
	e. Hedging (e.g., "I'm not sure.")

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