

THESIS

LEARNER-CENTERED COMPARISON STUDY BETWEEN AMERICAN NATIVE  
SPEAKERS AND SAUDI ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN FORMING ENGLISH  
REQUESTS AND REFUSALS IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS

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## ABSTRACT

### LEARNER-CENTERED COMPARISON STUDY BETWEEN AMERICAN NATIVE SPEAKERS AND SAUDI ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN FORMING ENGLISH REQUESTS AND REFUSALS IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS

Native speakers of a language may not consider cultural differences when performing speech acts which can lead to misunderstandings between people from different cultures. Therefore, this study investigates differences between Saudi Arabic learners of English and American English speakers in how requests and refusals are realized. Specifically, the goal of this research is to look at different factors that go into forming a request or a refusal such as formality, social status, and scale of directness. Using a Discourse Completion Task, this study examined the significant differences between American Native Speakers (n=15) and Saudi Native Speakers (n=15) to explore the frequency of request and refusal strategies. Overall, findings in the study resulted in statistically significant differences in participant's requests. It was also found that ANSs used significantly more requests than did SNSs. Additionally, ANSs used way more sub- strategies than did SNSs. For refusals however, no statistically significant difference was found. There was a wider use of refusal strategies by SNSs; ANSs used certain refusal strategies more extensively. Some implications for the findings include identifying authentic requests and refusals selected from an American academic spoken corpus or by role plays with hypothetical request and refusal situations.

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## DEDICATION

*I would like to dedicate my thesis to my wonderful mother, inspirational father, my extraordinary husband and my dear son.*

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Austin (1962) presents the pragmatics of language by first distinguishing between language as a system and language in use (p.47). He discusses language in use as speech acts that are expressions that are used to communicate a social function. Austin's (1962) speech act theory is based on the theory that language differs as a system and in use. Speech Acts are defined as acts of language in use that in their production also perform an action—such as requests, demands, and refusals.

The notion of face also plays a significant role in comprehending the pragmatics of language. Brown and Levinson (1987) introduce negative and positive face as the basis of politeness in communication and describe positive face as the desire to be liked and viewed positively in social interactions while negative face is the desire to not be impeded upon or inconvenienced. Face threatening acts can challenge both positive and negative face of the speaker and addressee. For example, a refusal speech act challenges the positive face of the speaker since there is the risk of the listener perceiving the speaker negatively as a result. Understanding this concept explains the misunderstandings that occur in real life situations. Many studies have been conducted in how refusals and requests are carried out, for example, Hergüner & Çakır (2017), Morkus (2014), Allami and Naeimi (2011) and Hamouda (2014) conducted studies in forming refusals and the refusal strategies used. Altasan (2016), Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily (2012) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) conducted studies on the formation of requests in English and how they are modified.

The following study will discuss previous research on cross-cultural differences in forming English speech acts and case studies that examine L2 speakers who have difficulties

forming the speech acts of refusals and requests. Then, I will examine speech act modifiers and the impact of high and low context cultures as well as the status and power of the receiver of the request or refusal on the directness and indirectness of a speech act. Following this, I will introduce the study's methodology, including a description of discourse completion tasks (DCT) which are the main method used to collect data. Finally, I will analyze the data and the results, conclusions, limitations, and suggest teaching implications.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Speech Act theory

In applied linguistics, the field of pragmatics has been explored extensively in a variety of studies. Speech act theory is a theory within the field of pragmatics. Cummings (2010, 453) states that former to developing speech act theory, language was perceived from a highly formal approach which was known as *ideal* language philosophy. The *ideal* language philosophy “explores natural language using logical and mathematical languages” (Cummings, 2010, p.453). Within the *ideal* language philosophy are notions of truth, falsity, and truth conditions. Cummings (2010) states that "The meaning of a sentence amounts to the specification of the conditions under which the sentence is true" (p.453). In the 1940's and 1950's, a group of philosophers at Oxford suggested focusing on the study of *ordinary* language instead of the *ideal* one so that the usage of language in context was more significant than the theoretical meaning. While the formal approach to the philosophy of language lists various factors about sentence meaning, it neglects the significance of how language is used which is the basic idea behind speech act theory. Cummings (2010) notes that “Language is a tool and therefore to produce language is to do something with the language” (p.453).

Austin (1962) argues that aspect logical meaning of language is too narrow and that language in use is more important than just logical meaning. Austin (1962), initially made the distinction that speech acts are performatives which are not *constatives* used to describe the world, such as statements and assertions, but rather to perform actions. Subsequently, Austin (1962) says that even *constatives* are *performatives* because describing is also a social act.

Therefore, there is only one way of looking at speech acts so that they include *constatives* and *performatives* under the approach stated in Searle (1969) by which *representatives*, the class of *constatives*, are categorized as speech acts. Instead of separating language into speech acts and non-speech acts, Austin (1962) distinguishes speech acts as *locutionary*, *illocutionary*, and *perlocutionary* which emphasizes the social function of the sentence instead of theoretical meaning.

Performatives cannot be true or false statements, yet they can be wrongly formed or infelicitous. Successfully forming a speech act requires certain institutional arrangements so it would not be infelicitous. To prevent the performative from failing, certain felicity conditions should be present. Levinson (1983) explicates Searle's (1969) classification of felicity conditions into four kinds of conditions: “prepositional content, preparatory preconditions, conditions of sincerity, and the essential condition” (p. 239). In the prepositional content condition, a speaker can say what it is s/he want to say. In preparatory conditions, the circumstances and the performer of the speech act must be appropriate to have a conventional effect on the receiver of the speech act. In the essential condition, the procedure must be executed correctly and completely, whereas in the sincerity condition, the person making the speech act has the necessary thoughts and intentions as specified in the procedure.

Morris (1938) defines pragmatics as “the study of the relation of signs to interpreters” (p.158). Thus, it is important to make a distinction between the usual meaning of a word or sentence and the meaning it has in specific circumstances. So, a person must differentiate between logical meaning and meaning in use. There are two fields that constitute the core of linguistic pragmatics: the analysis of utterances and the analysis of conversation. Austin (1962) pointed out that utterances are part of an action, which means they are performative. For

example, when a priest or another recognized officiant says: *I hereby pronounce you husband and wife*, this utterance is an action and as soon as it is produced by a person who is entitled to do so and the circumstances are appropriate then the action is complete. Thus, when the priest utters this sentence he performs an action of making a couple legally married. Therefore, when a speech act is made it accomplishes an act beyond just speech or description, it introduces and completes an action. Speech act theory manifests that utterances cannot be assessed as merely true or false but must also be assessed as appropriate or inappropriate in their context and apply felicity conditions. Speech act theory assumes that speakers are simultaneously involved in three different speech acts when producing language: a *locutionary act*, an *illocutionary act*, a *perlocutionary act*. To clarify, when the utterance ‘*Don’t do that!*’ is said to a student who is about to insert his flash memory to the class computer to display his PowerPoint presentation, the utterance ‘*Don’t do that!*’ is considered a *locutionary act* because it is an act of uttering a sentence which is comprised of phonetic, lexical and syntactic aspects that have corresponding meaning in the linguistic system being used. Thus, a locutionary act is defined by the basic linguistic analysis of an utterance. The *illocutionary act* on the other hand describes what the speaker tries to accomplish by uttering a sentence. In this example ‘*Don’t do that!*’, the *illocutionary act* is a directive that has been delivered to the student. The intended effect of an utterance used to perform an illocutionary act is called the illocutionary force, which in this example would be the speaker’s intention that the student would then stop what they were doing. In other words, the locutionary act transfers the intended effects on the listener by means of performing the illocutionary act. When an act is formed in the case of the utterance ‘*Don’t do that!*’ the effects of the utterance are specific to the occasion and may or may not be what the speaker intended; so, attaining a certain effect on the hearer is called the *perlocutionary act*.

In short, Austin (1962) summarizes speech acts by declaring that a speaker utters sentences with a particular phonetic, lexical, and grammatical meaning –*locutionary act*-, and with a particular force –*illocutionary act*-, in order to achieve a certain effect on the hearer –*perlocutionary act*.

Austin (1962) and his student Searle (1969), who further developed speech act theory, believe that forming a grammatically correct and complete statement is not enough to perform a speech act unless it is felicitous or appropriate. All speech acts follow felicity conditions that should be fulfilled to perform the speaker's intended purpose for an utterance. Felicity conditions are conditions that must be in place and are criteria that must be satisfied for a speech act to be successful. There are several types of felicity conditions: propositional content condition, preparatory conditions, essential conditions, and sincerity conditions. Huang (2007) defines the first category of felicity conditions, the propositional content condition, as "in essence concerned with what the speech act is about which has to do with specifying the restrictions on the content" (p.105). The second category of felicity conditions is preparatory conditions. Huang (2007) defines preparatory conditions as conditions "that state the real-world prerequisites for the speech act" (p.105) e.g., a person cannot request a loan of \$1000 from a bank unless he is of the legal age to get a loan, has an account in the same bank, and the bank employee has the authority to approve the loan request. The third category of felicity conditions is essential conditions, which Huang (2007) says, "defines the act being performed in the sense that the speaker has the intention that his or her utterance will count as an identifiable act, and that this intention is recognized by the addressee" (pp.106-106) Thus, the speaker intends that his speech act is an attempt to get the receiver to perform an action for him. The fourth category of the felicity



conditions are the sincerity conditions which indicate that the speech act is being performed earnestly and sincerely.

The set of speech acts recognized by the speakers of a language is diverse, so based on the felicity conditions, a more sophisticated scheme was proposed by Searle (1979, pp.21–26) that divides speech acts into five groups: *representatives*, *directives*, *commissives*, *expressives*, and *declaratives*. Huang (2007) identifies *representatives* or *assertives*, which were originally known as *constatives*, as "kinds of speech act that commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition, and thus carry a truth value. They express the speaker's belief" (p.106). Huang (2007) says that *representatives* include "asserting, claiming, concluding, reporting, and stating" (p.106) e.g., '*You are the most hardworking student in this class.*' Huang (2007) defines *directives* as "attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something" or "They express the speaker's desire/wish for the addressee to perform an action" (p.107). *Directives* "include advice, commands, orders, questions and requests" (p.107) e.g., '*Wash the dishes*' or '*Could you to wash the dishes, please?*' *Commissives* as stated by Huang (2007) are "speech acts that commit the speaker to some future course of action." (p.107). *Commissives* include threats or promises, pledges, offers, and refusals e.g., '*If you don't wash the dishes, you're fired*' or '*I swear I will wash the dishes tonight.*' Huang (2007) recognizes *expressives* as "speech acts that express a psychological attitude or state in the speaker" (p.107). *Expressives* include thanks, apologies, congratulations, blame and praise e.g., '*I'm sorry I couldn't make it to the party.*' Finally, *declarations* are statements that bring about an immediate change in status or condition to an object by virtue of the statement itself such as declaring, firing someone from a job e.g., When a king says: '*I declare war on the neighboring country.*' (Searle, 1976, p.14)

There are cases where the performance of a speech act will be infelicitous or inappropriate. Austin (1962, p.18) refers to failures of felicity conditions as *misfires* and *abuses*. The first case of failure in felicity conditions is called a *misfire* which is a speech act that cannot be performed because the circumstances are not appropriate, or the addressee fails to respond with an appropriate *uptake or* reaction. A *misfire* also occurs when the person making the utterance is not the proper person in a specific context. For instance, if a student makes an announcement that the midterm exam will be cancelled, his classmates will not react to the announcement with the appropriate *uptake* because the student doesn't have the authority for the delivered speech act. The act thus misfires since the speaker violated the *preparatory* felicity condition. In the previous example, the speaker performed an act of speech but not a speech act because the student is not in the right position/authority to be entitled of making such an announcement; therefore, it wasn't accepted by the other students.

The second case of failure in felicity conditions is called an *abuse*. *Abuses* are speech acts that can be performed but are still infelicitous because one of the felicity conditions is absent. For instance, if someone promises to donate all his money to charity and does not intend to do so, the act is an *abuse* because it lacks *sincerity* which is a standard condition for the felicity of speech acts.

## **2.2 Face**

Brown and Levinson's (1987) work introduces an important aspect of forming speech acts, the aspect of "face" which is defined as "The public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p.61). Face consists of two aspects which are either positive face or negative face. Positive face is concerned with the hopes and expectations of an individual to have the positive image they present outwardly be accepted by their speech partners. For example, giving advice

may act as a threat to the speaker's positive face because it might imply that the speaker is better than the listener who is receiving the advice and cause the listener to challenge the image of the speaker. The listeners' positive face will be threatened because s/he presumes him/herself in a certain image. Negative face is someone's desire not to be impeded, bothered, or burdened. Negative face is threatened, for example, by requests which have the intended outcome of the listener doing something for the speaker but also inconvenience the listener who would be performing the act. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that many speech acts intrinsically are face-threatening acts, meaning that by definition they run contrary to the face wants of the speaker or hearer. Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish between "Acts that threaten negative face and those that threaten positive face" (p. 65) as well as "Acts that primarily threaten H's [the hearer's] face and those that threaten primarily S's [the speaker's own] face" (p. 67). The complexity of face is a contributing factor to the difficulties with pragmatics for non-native language users. Table 1 presents examples that intrinsically threaten each of these four face wants.

Table 1

*Examples of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Four Types of Intrinsic Face-Threatening Acts*

Acts That Primarily Threaten	Speaker's Face	Hearer's Face
Positive face	Apologies Confessions	Criticism Insults
Negative face	Promises Offers	Requests Recommendations

*Table 1. SOURCE: Brown and Levinson (1987, pp.65-68). Copyright 1994 by Cambridge University Press*  
*Note.* All tables in this thesis will be numbered consecutively but they will not be renumbered in the subsequent chapter.

Relating to the issues of context for speech acts, culture is not a simple term to define as it extends beyond the history, food and art of a geographical location. The following definitions of culture are found in a collection of culture definition quotes by Spencer-Oatey (2012). As

cited in Spencer-Oatey (2012, p.2), Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) suggest a definition of culture as, "Explicit and implicit patterns, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action" (p.181). Although the definition by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) is valid, I most agree with the definition Spencer-Oatey (2008) proposed for culture as, "A fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour" (p.3).

In speech acts, some may argue that the notion of face is not universal however its manifestations are culturally specific. The notion of face is universal regardless of individual personality or whether you come from an individualist or a collectivist culture. Instead, a person will always be concerned about face, either positive or negative, and the conditions of a face threatening act will vary from culture to culture. These conditions are primarily affected by individualistic and collectivist cultures such that people are concerned with being accepted as being members of a community or being perceived as individuals independent of shared community values.

### **2.3 Requests**

According to Searle (1969), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), and Morkus (2014), speech act theory categorizes requests as directives. Requests are utterances that typically express a wish. Cummings (2010, pp.402-403) states that requests are closely related to questions and

commands. Two markers of a request are the use of the word “please” and the interrogative mood. However, this is not definitive and there may be many variations of a request, based on directness and indirectness. For example, a request can be stated in different ways, such as saying “I would like...” There may also be different levels of politeness in a request, which may lead the request to be similar to a command. When a request is formed in the interrogative, the request is not a question in which the person is eliciting an answer, it is rather a question in which a person is eliciting an action.

Requests are considered threats to both negative and positive face. Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) note that by making a request, “The speaker infringes on the recipient’s freedom from imposition. The recipient may feel that the request is an intrusion on his/her freedom of action or even a power play. As for the requester, s/he may hesitate to make requests for fear of exposing a need or out of the fear of possibly making the recipient lose face” (p. 11). Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that requests are mitigated to decrease the threat to negative face. This can be done using politeness, such as offering the receiver a choice and using indirect speech. In terms of politeness, directness and indirectness, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) propose that politeness varies between cultures and contexts. For example, it may be considered polite to hint in one culture such as an Arab culture where Ting-Toomey (1988) refers to the indirect mode as “the use of verbal messages that camouflage and conceal speakers’ true intentions in terms of their wants, needs, and goals in the discourse situation” (p. 100). While another culture may find hints offensive and would rather have been directly asked the question in the form of a request. Bello et al. (2006) state that individuals who prefer directness are usually “individuals in a low-context culture who are impatient with indirect communication because they will see it as vague and avoidant such as Australia” (p.28).

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) distinguish four request perspectives, hearer oriented, speaker oriented, speaker and hearer oriented and the impersonal perspective, See Table 2 for request perspectives.

Table 2

*Request perspectives*

<i>Request perspective</i>	<i>Semantic formula</i>
1. Hearer oriented	' <i>Could you tidy up the kitchen soon?</i> '
2. Speaker oriented	' <i>Do you think I could borrow your notes from yesterday's class?</i> '
3. Speaker and hearer oriented	' <i>Could we please clean up?</i> '
4. Impersonal	The use of <i>people/they/one</i> as a neutral agents, or the use of passivation ' <i>It might not be a bad idea to get it cleaned up</i> '

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) categorize requests in different perspectives as listed in Table 2, *hearer oriented*, *speaker oriented*, *speaker and hearer oriented*, and *impersonal*. A speaker can refer to receiver of a request by the use of any of the four perspectives. The *hearer-oriented* perspective, which is frequently used among cultures, stresses the role of the addressee such as the form '*could you+ request*' in which the subject is the hearer, '*Could you tidy up the kitchen soon?*' While the *speaker-oriented* perspective emphasizes the role of the speaker '*do you think I+ request*' note the subject '*Do you think I could borrow your notes from yesterday's class?*' which is considered more polite than the *hearer-oriented* perspective. The politeness stems from having the request appear as if the requestor is seeking permission from the requestee, which implies that the hearer is the one with the dominance. Another mark of politeness in *speaker-oriented* requests is avoiding naming the addressee as the principal performer of the act to avoid imposing on the hearer. According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), *speaker-oriented* and *hearer-oriented* perspectives are the most used perspectives

between the four perspectives. In these perspectives Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) explain that “ the difference between 'could you do it' and 'could we have it done' is one of perspective— ‘could you ...’ emphasizes the role of the hearer in the speech event, while 'could we ...' stresses that of the speaker” (p.203). The second most commonly used perspectives are the *Speaker and hearer oriented* that use the semantic formula '*Could we please clean up?*' (p.245). The *impersonal voice* uses the semantic formula '*Could people/they/one clean up?*' or the use of passivation '*It might not be a bad idea to get it cleaned up*'. *Speaker and hearer oriented* perspectives and *impersonal perspectives* are considered ambiguous perspectives and defined by Czerwionk and Cuza (2012) as “verbal ellipsis with no overt marking of person”, person here refers to a *proper noun* or *I* and *you*. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) state “in requests it is the hearer who is 'under threat', any avoidance in naming the addressee as the principal performer of the act serves to soften the impact of the imposition” (p.203)

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) separate requests into three segments, attention getters, head acts, and supportive moves. See Table 3 for request segments.

Table 3

*Request Segments*

<i>Request segments</i>	<i>Semantic formula</i>
1. Attention getters	<i>'Excuse me' or 'Pardon me' + request</i>
2. Head Act	<i>Can/Could/ would you + request</i>
3. Supportive moves	Explanation/ reason
	a. before the head act
	<i>My schedule is crazy this week I know I will forget something, would you mind reminding me of tomorrow's meeting?</i>
	b. after the head act
	<i>Can you remind me of the meeting tomorrow? Otherwise it may slip out of my mind!</i>

Before uttering the actual request, a speaker may use address terms that function as alerts or *attention getters* such as calling the requestee's name or using phrases such as '*Excuse me*' or '*Pardon me*' prior to the request. A condition for the success of the act is that both the speaker and receiver are aware of the speech act. A crucial part of the request is the *head act* which is defined by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) as "A part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements." (p.200). The head act is usually formed by an interrogative word followed by the request statement such as, '*can/could/ would you + let me borrow your book*'. Another segment in requests is the supportive moves, which can be placed before or after the head act. Supportive moves usually appear as explanations or reasons to request something and their role is to modify requests. Table 4 is a modified taxonomy from Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) as well as Blum-Kulka, Danet, and Gerson (1983) of types of requests and strategies to mitigate the face threatening act of requests and its level of imposition.

Request are only successful if certain felicity conditions are fulfilled. Below are Searle (1969) felicity conditions for requesting as adapted from Huang (2007, p.105).

1. Propositional content: Future act of a hearer.
2. Preparatory: (a) Speaker believes the hearer can do the act (b) It is not obvious that hearer would do the act without being asked.
3. Sincerity: Speaker wants the hearer to do the act.
4. Essential: The utterance of an act counts as an attempt to get the hearer to do the act.

Assuming that all facility conditions are met, requests are divided into three main strategy types; Direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect, each with its detailed



strategies. For more clarification on request strategy types and how to mitigate them, see Table 4 for a modified taxonomy of Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) work on requests.

Table 4

*Taxonomy of request strategies*

Types	Strategy types	Semantic formula
Direct	1. Explicit performatives	<i>I am asking you to open the door</i> <i>I request you make changes on your paper</i>
	2. Hedged performatives	<i>I'd like to ask you to review your work</i> <i>'tidy your room'</i>
	3. Mood derivable (imperatives)	
	4. Want statemets	Speakers intentions or feelings <i>'I really wish you would clean your room</i>
	5. Obligation statements	<i>You will have to see me at 10:00 p.m.</i>
Conventionally indirect	6. Preparatory request strategy	a. Attention getters <i>Excuse me' + request</i> b. Adjunct to head act 1- Grounders (checking on availability/ability/willingness) <i>Could we/they/one [as a neutral agent] + request</i> 2- Disarmers <i>I know you're a busy person, but could you....</i> 3- Apologies <i>I am sorry to ask, but can you...</i> 4- Discourse orientation moves <i>You recall we have to submit the homework by Noon?</i> 5- Sweeteners Compliment the listener + <i>request</i> 6- Requesting favors <i>Would you do me a favor?</i> 7- Supportive moves(explanation/ reason)
	7. Formulaic suggestions	<i>Why don't you.....</i> <i>It might not be a bad idea to+ request</i>
	8. Promise	<i>'Could you help me out? I promise I'll repay you soon'</i>
	9. Downgrades	a. Syntactic downgraders 1- Past tenses ( <i>distancing attitude</i> )

- I wanted to ask for...*
- 2- Negations (*pessimistic attitude*)  
*I don't suppose there is any chance ...*
- 3- Conditional clauses (*hesitant attitude*)  
*I wonder if you would ...*
- 4- Interrogatives *Would you mind ....?*

- b. Lexical/phrasal downgraders
  - 1- Understates '*a bit*'
  - 2- Downtoners '*might/ perhaps*'
  - 3- Politeness devices '*please*'
  - 4- Consultative devices: *do you think...*
  - 5- Subjectivizers: *I wonder, I suppose*
  - 6- Cajolers: *You see, you get it*
  - 7- Appealers: *remind me, ok/right?*

10. Upgraders (lexical)

- c. Expletives  
*You still haven't cleaned up this darn mess!*
- d. Intensifiers  
*You better start cleaning your room!*
- e. Time intensifiers  
*You better clean your room now!*
- f. Commitment indicators  
*I'm sure you won't mind cleaning your room tonight.*
- g. Lexical uptoners  
*Clean up this disaster!*

Non-conventionally indirect 11. Hints

- a. Strong hints  
*Your living room is awfully freezing*
- b. Mild hints  
*I'm engaged (in response to a hassler)*

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*Note.* Single quotation marks refer to examples I made

Direct requests appear as *explicit performatives*, where the requests use explicit wording for requesting e.g., '*I am asking*', '*I request*', or *hedged performatives* which usually place a modal before the request e.g., '*I'd like to request...*'. Other direct strategies are *mood drivable* strategies which use imperative verbs e.g., '*clean up*', statements of desire that express the speakers' intentions or feelings e.g., '*I wish you could attend*', and *obligation statements* e.g., '*You will have to attend the meeting*'.

Indirect requests can be formed conventionally or non-conventionally and they modify how requests are made in English despite varying from one context to another.

Conventionally indirect requests use request strategies such as preparatory request strategies which act as adjuncts for head acts or attention getters. Adjuncts to the head act include several variations. Some adjuncts take the form of *requests for favors* and *apologies* where the speaker apologizes for posing the request or for the imposition incurred. In preparatory conditions, adjuncts that check on availability, ability or willingness are called *grounders*. *Disarmers* are another type of adjunct which show compassion and understanding for the receiver's situation. *Sweeteners* are adjuncts that compliment the listener before requesting and *supportive moves* are adjuncts which make an explanation or a reason for the request. *Discourse orientation moves* serve an orientation function but do not necessarily mitigate or aggravate the request in any way. The last type of adjuncts to consider in this discussion are *formulaic suggestions* which are also considered conventionally indirect request strategies—e.g., the professor tells a student: '*Why don't you consider working in a group?*'. Alternatively, a speaker may also make a *promise* to be fulfilled upon the completion of the requested act.

Two other conventionally indirect request strategies are *downgraders* and *upgraders*. Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) define *downgraders* as "Modifiers which are used by the speaker in order to reduce the impact his or her request is likely to have on the hearer" (p.284). *Downgraders* can either be syntactic or lexical. *Syntactic downgraders* are conventionalized phrases or sentences that designate various attitudes, a *pessimistic attitude* towards the outcome of the request by *negation*, such as '*I don't suppose...*', or a *hesitant attitude* by using conditional clause, such as '*I wonder if you wouldn't mind.*' *Hesitant and pessimistic attitudes* may also be considered hedges. When the speaker uses a *hedge*, he or she uses a modal verb or adverb to

avoid a firm commitment to the illocutionary point of the utterance such as naming the required action or describing how the action should be performed e.g., '*It would really help if you did something about the kitchen*'. Common hedges include verbs such as *wonder* or *could* and adverbs like *possibly* or *maybe*. Another syntactic downgrader attitude is the *distancing attitude* which uses the past tense such as, '*I wanted to order a book but I didn't have any internet access*.' Usage of the past tense distances the request by using a tense which is temporally distant from the present when the request is being produced. A requester may also use the *interrogative* as a downgrader—e.g., '*Would you mind giving me a ride?*'

Furthermore, there are seven *lexical downgraders*, where the emphasis is on specific words or lexical items more than the syntactic frame as a whole: (1) *understates* are used when the speaker minimizes parts of the proposition using diminutive words as in, '*Could you tidy up a bit before I start?*'; (2) *downtoners*, are used when the speaker modulates the impact of his/her utterance by signaling the possibility of the receiver's non-compliance—e.g., '*would you perhaps be able to drive me?*' (3) *politeness device* '*please*' is described by Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) as, "An optional element added to a request to bid for co-operative behavior" (p.283). (4) *consultative devices* are noted in Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, p.204) as devices within which the speaker seeks to involve the hearer's cooperation such as, '*Do you think I could borrow your notes from last week?*' (5) *subjectivizers*—like *I wonder* or *I suppose*—Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1989) describe as "Elements in which the speaker explicitly expresses his or her subjective opinion via the state of affair referred to in the proposition, thus lowering the assertive force of the request." (p.284) (6) *cajolers*, including *you see* or *you get it*, are explained in Sifianou (1992) as, "conventionalized, addressee-oriented modifiers whose function is to make things clearer to the addressee and invite him/her to metaphorically participate in the speech act

(p.180).” (7) *appealers* are also addressed in Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1989) as, “Addressee-oriented elements occurring in a syntactically final position that may signal turn availability, and they are used by the speaker whenever he or she wishes to appeal to his or her hearer’s benevolent understanding.” (p.285) *Remind me, ok, and right* are examples of *appealers*.

Unlike *downgraders*, *upgraders* are only lexical and intensify the impact of a request instead of reducing its impact on the hearer. *Upgraders* may include any of the following items (1) *expletives* where the speaker explicitly expresses negative emotional attitudes, e.g., '*you still haven't moved out of your trailer! It is filthy!*' (2) *intensifiers* which are used to vary the degree or strength of a request, e.g., '*You better start cleaning your room*' (3) *time intensifiers*, e.g., '*You better start cleaning your room now!*' (4) *commitment indicators* which remind the receiver of a predetermined responsibility, e.g., '*I'm sure you won't mind cleaning your room tonight.*' and, (5) *lexical uptoners* where the speaker over-represents the reality, e.g., '*Clean up this disaster!*'

The last request type employs a non-conventionally indirect strategy. Coulson and Lovett (2010) describe non-conventionally indirect strategies as "Statements whose illocutionary force derives not from their form, but rather from the relationship between the speaker, the statement, and the context of utterance." (p.108). In non-conventionally indirect requests, a requestor is performing an act that is idiosyncratic to a particular context. This strategy uses two kinds of hints which Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) classify as: (1) *Strong hints*, “Utterances that contain partial reference to object or to elements needed for the implementation of the act, directly pragmatically implying the act” (p.201) —e.g., hinting to turn up the thermostat by saying '*Your living room is awfully freezing*' (2) *Mild hints*, as defined by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) are "Utterances that make no reference to the request proper or any of its elements but are interpretable through the context as requests and indirectly imply the desired

result of the request pragmatically" (p.201)—e.g., a woman who responds to a man's advances by saying '*I am married*'.

## 2.4 Refusals

Refusals are face threatening acts because they contradict a listener's expectations. To limit the level of threat in refusals, Chen (1995) suggests that a speaker use indirect strategies and various degrees of politeness that require a high level of pragmatic competence. However, in order for refusals to be performed without flaws, they must meet certain felicity conditions. In the dictionary of English speech act verbs, Wierzbicka (1987, pp.93-95) presents the felicity conditions for refusals, (*X* refers to the request, offer or suggestion being refused, *I* refers to the speaker, *you* refers to the receiver, *it*, *that* and *this* refer to the refusal act):

1. I know you want me to do X (because you said so)
2. I think you assume that I will do it
3. I say I don't want to do it and I will not do it
4. I assume that I don't have to do it if I don't have to do it – if I don't want to do it
5. I say this because I want you to know it
6. I assume you understand that X will not happen because of that

Beebe et al. (1990) divided refusals into a series of *pre-refusal*, *main refusal*, and *post refusal* strategies. *Pre-refusal* strategies prepare the addressee for having his request or offer refused. A *main refusal* is the expression that carries the actual refusal and the *post refusal* strategy may mitigate or justify why the refusal occurred. If all refusals meet the required felicity conditions, a speaker can follow the refusal strategies Beebe et al. (1990) created.

Making a refusal requires high indirectness in some situations and a refusal can also be direct; therefore, Beebe et al. (1990) designates a taxonomy with 3 direct refusal strategies, 11

indirect refusal strategies and 4 adjuncts to modify refusals and to mitigate the 'face threatening act' of the addressee who is the principal receiver of the act. The following tables 5-6 show refusal strategies in response to requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions to modify refusals and reduce their imposition on both the listener and speaker.

Table 5

*Taxonomy of refusal strategies*

<i>Type</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Semantic formula</i>
Direct	1. Performative	<i>I refuse</i>
	2. Non-performative statement	<i>No</i>
	3. Negative willingness/ability	<i>I can't; I won't; I don't think so</i>
Indirect	1. Statement of regret	<i>I'm sorry; I feel terrible</i>
	2. Wish	<i>I wish I could help you</i>
	3. Excuse, reason, explanation	<i>My children will be home that night. I have a headache</i>
	4. Statement of alternative	<i>I can do X instead of Y (I'd rather.../I'd prefer...)</i>
	5. Set condition for future or past acceptance	<i>If you had asked me earlier, I would have...</i>
	6. Promise of future acceptance	<i>I'll do it next time. /I promise I'll.../Next time I'll...</i>
	7. Statement of principle	<i>I never do business with friends</i>
	8. Statement of philosophy	<i>One can't be too careful</i>
	9. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor	a. Guilt trip (waitress to customers who want to sit a while: <i>I can't make a living off people who just order coffee.</i> )
		b. Criticize the request/requester - Statement of negative feeling or opinion - Insult/attack <i>Who do you think you are? That's a terrible idea!</i>
c. Request for help, empathy, and assistance		
d. Let interlocutor off the hook ( <i>Don't worry about it. / That's okay. / You don't have to.</i> )		
e. Self-defense ( <i>I'm trying my best./ I'm doing all I can do.</i> )		
f. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester. For example, in refusing an invitation a speaker would say: <i>I won't be any fun</i>		
10. Acceptance that functions as a refusal	a. Unspecific or indefinite reply	
	b. Lack of enthusiasm	

## 11. Avoidance

- a. Nonverbal
    - i. Silence
    - ii. Hesitation
    - iii. Doing nothing
    - iv. Physical departure
  - b. Verbal
    - i. Topic switch
    - ii. Joke
    - iii. Repetition of part of request (Monday?)
    - iv. Postponement (I'll think about it.)
    - v. Hedge (Gee, I don't know. / I'm not sure)
- 

One way of producing a refusal is to be direct. The *direct* strategies include: (1) *performatives* such as saying, “I refuse,” (2) *nonperformative* strategies where a speaker would say “no” or a similar express, or (3) *negative willingness* by saying “I can't,” “I won't,” or “I don't think so.”

Another way to refuse is to be indirect. There are 11 indirect refusal strategies in taxonomy. (1) *Statement of regret* is a refusal where a speaker apologizes or shows a sense of regret for not being able to perform or accept what the interlocutor has asked. (2) *Wish* is where the speaker expresses his desire to accept the request. (3) An *excuse* is a statement following the refusal to support why a speaker is not able to do something. (4) A *statement of alternative* is a refusal where a speaker suggests doing something else or refers the interlocutor to an alternative option. (5) Refusing with a *set condition for acceptance* allows the speaker to refuse by saying that he would have accept or preformed what he was asked if it were under different circumstances—e.g., ‘*If you had asked me earlier/next week, I would have...*’ (6) A *promise of future acceptance* assures the requester that the receiver will respond positively to a request asked in a time in the future. (7) A *statement of principle* and a (8) *statement of philosophy* are



where a speaker makes a general statement he/she believes to be true which led him/her to refuse. (9) There are several ways to *attempt to dissuade interlocutor* from expecting the speaker to perform something by using any of the following semantic formulas: *guilting* the interlocutor to feel remorse for the person refusing, *criticizing* the interlocutors' act, *requesting empathy* from the interlocutor, *letting the interlocutor off the hook*, *Self-defense*, and making a *threat* which is a statement of negative consequence to the interlocuter.

Another indirect refusal strategy is (10) *acceptance that functions as a refusal* which can be performed by responding with an *indefinite reply* or by *lacking enthusiasm* in the tone of the response. The last indirect refusal strategy is (11) *avoidance* which can be *nonverbal*, such as replying with hesitation, or *verbal* such as postponing the act.

Table 6

*Adjuncts to refusals*

<i>strategies</i>	<i>Semantic formula</i>
Statement of positive opinion	e.g. <i>I would love to</i>
Pause filler	e.g. <i>well, umm</i>
Appreciation	e.g. <i>I appreciate that, thanks</i>
Alerts	e.g. <i>that would be risky</i>

Another refusal strategy is the use of *adjuncts to refusals* is in Table 6. From a conversational analysis point of view, adjuncts such as pause fillers and alerts are known as prefaces, which are markers of dispreferred responses. Refusals are dispreferred responses to the receiver of the act. Shishavan and Sharifian (2016) find that in English "Direct refusals or indirect refusals, if a direct refusal is absent, are considered head acts to a refusal, whereas adjuncts on the other hand are elements or supportive moves accompanying refusals and don't stand on their own as refusals" (p.80).

Understanding the concept of face will make English language learners more aware of the importance of not attempting a face threatening act deliberately and encourage them to learn mitigating strategies. The strategies for modifying refusals and requests can affect the way students deliver these speech acts, and therefore how the listener interprets refusals and requests.

## **2.5 Research on Refusals and Requests**

Hall (1959) as cited in Bennett (2013) states that, "Cultures could be compared in terms of *etic* categories that generate the cultural-general categories to make a comparison between a *high context* indirect style and a *low context* direct style of delivering a message" (p. 37). Bennett (2013) describes a *high context* culture as "A culture where people rely heavily on indirect and implicit strategies in communication." (p.65) In a high context culture like Saudi Arabia, collectivism is valued and therefore implicit communication is often used to minimize the assertiveness of the individual over the group. A low context culture is one in which people use more explicit verbal communication. An example of a low context culture is the United States, in which individualism is valued along with explicit communication. Lengthier indirect speech is often perceived as inefficient in low context cultures while high context cultures view explicit speech as rude and abrasive. Whether a culture is a high or low context culture will affect how the speakers form speech acts and how they may perceive them. The notion of a binary division between high and low context cultures is not always accurate since it is mostly mistaken as being correlated with individualism and collectivism. This notion should not be accepted since most cross-cultural studies show that American participants, from low context cultural, are typically indirect which, according to this notion, is a contradictory result. Therefore, this research does not look into cultural differences, it rather focuses on the differences in forming refusals and requests between Saudi English language learners and American English speakers. The

following section reviews a number of case studies on ESL/EFL speakers' refusals and requests. These studies help to illustrate the scale of directness, the cultural status of the speakers, and the cultural differences in forming refusals and requests.

Hergüner & Çakır (2017) conduct a study that aims to determine choices Turkish English language trainees make when using refusal strategies in terms of directness in an EFL environment. The study elicits judgments in terms of directness and indirectness in various refusal formulations of the ELT trainees in eighteen diverse situations. The participants were chosen randomly. There were 133 ELT teacher trainees (100 female, 33 male) who were fourth-year students from ELT Departments of Education Faculties at four different universities. The study used a questionnaire in the form of Discourse Completion Task based on Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) cross-cultural speech act realization project (CCSARP) for data collection. The contextual analysis was based on three variables: gender, social status and social distance. Hergüner & Çakır (2017) analyzed the data through the sequence of semantic formulae provided by Beebe et. al. (1990) stated previously, see Tables 3-4. The findings of Hergüner & Çakır (2017) study indicate that teacher trainees generally preferred indirect strategies since they were sensitive to the status of the person making the request. Trainees' were also more sensitive in making refusals to requesters of an opposite gender. This study differs from other studies such as Morkus (2014) study of refusals in Egyptian Arabic and American English which uses a different data collection instrument and aims for a different measure.

Morkus (2014) explores how native speakers of Egyptian Arabic and native speakers of American English recognize the speech act of refusal in equal and unequal status situations. The data was collected through six refusal situations which used context-enhanced role plays from 10 native speakers of Egyptian Arabic and 10 native speakers of American English. Data collection

was both quantitative and qualitative. Results show that the data marked obvious distinctions between the two groups. Morkus (2014) reflects on some general characteristics in Arabic communication style.

“The Arab speech acts include a tendency toward verbosity, frequent use of religious expressions, specially invoking the name of God, preference for indirectness, especially when interacting with someone higher in status, preference for directness when interacting with someone equal or lower in status, preference for family oriented excuses, and preference for formulaic and fixed expressions such as proverbs and common sayings" (p. 88)

On the other hand, Morkus (2014) states that American NSs produce fewer words and turns when refusing. They are also more direct and use expressions of regret and gratitude more frequently than the Egyptians.

Moaveni (2014) investigates refusal strategies between American and international college students. The instrument for electing data from 16 undergraduate American students and 32 international students was a written Discourse Completion Task. The responses were formed as an email refusal to professors, friends, and a staff member of an academic department. The results suggest that all groups preferred direct refusal in their emails. Although, when applying indirect refusal strategies, American participants preferred expressions of gratitude, stating positive opinions, excuses and alternatives. Compared to American students, international students used more semantic formulas and frequently used regrets, yet they lacked positive opinions and using statements of alternative solutions.

Allami & Naeimi (2011) examine the production of refusals by Iranian EFL learners of different proficiency levels. They chose to investigate the frequency of refusal strategy use, content, and shift of semantic formulas learners use. Shift refers to the participant's change in the order of semantic formula based on the interlocutor's social status. The tool for data collection was a

Discourse Completion Test where 30 Persian-speaking learners of English and 31 native speakers of Persian replied to 12 situations for a comparative analysis. Allami & Naeimi (2011) compared the EFL responses with 37 American native speakers responses from a relevant study by Kwon (2004). The data were coded and put under the appropriate category in the taxonomy of refusals developed by Beebe et al. (1990). Results reveal differences between the Iranian NNSs and the American NSs in the production of refusal semantic formulas made in varied social status situations. For example, both groups frequently used supportive moves in their responses, but the American NSs seem to be more specific when reporting their excuses or explanations. Furthermore, the results also indicate a correlation between L2 proficiency and pragmatic transfer. L1 transfer of sociocultural norms and pragmatic errors were found more with higher proficiency level learners, but less with lower proficiency learners. The correlation seems contradictory, but Allami & Naeimi (2011) support this result by stating that "refusing in a second language is complex and it entails the acquisition of the sociocultural values of the target culture" (p.385).

Requests, like refusals, have been explored thoroughly across the years, and extensive research exists on requests since they are known to be controversial face threatening acts. The formation of requests in American English includes syntactic and sentence level formations along with request parameters such as the scale of directness, formality, and social distance. For example, making a request to your boss, an authority figure, to ask for a raise differs from making a request of a sibling to borrow a sweater. A speaker is generally more formal with greater social distance. To understand the cultural differences in how requests are realized, the

considerable cross-cultural research on requests in various languages is described in the following paragraphs.

One of the noticeable studies on requests is by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) who have conducted research on requests in 7 languages and formed a scale of directness which categorizes requests as: direct, conventionally indirect and, non-conventionally indirect. Relating to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Altasan (2016) conducted a comparative study investigating how two Arab learners of English at two levels of proficiency (high and intermediate) modify requests compared to a native speaker of English. The performances by the three informants were compared in terms of internal modification (lexical and syntactic down graders) and external modification (supportive moves). The data was collected by means of a Discourse Completion Test. The overall results revealed that although the advanced-level learner outperformed the intermediate-level learner in using lexical and syntactic mitigation, both learners made little use of internal and external modifiers compared to the native speaker.

Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily (2012) illustrate directness and politeness in a cross-cultural comparison that examines the notions of indirectness and politeness in the speech act of requests among Saudi Arabic native speakers and American English native speakers. In the study, American English native speakers prefer to use conventional indirectness even if it was with their subordinates, while Saudi Arab native speakers, regardless of the degree of imposition and the weight of a request, did not use conventional indirectness unless subordinates were addressing their managers. Saudi participants use direct requests when superiors address their inferiors or with friends. According to Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily (2012), in American English context, there is a relationship between conventional indirectness and politeness as "Conventional indirectness expressed respect to every individual's right to be free from

imposition" (p.10). The perception of politeness Americans embrace in Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily's (2012) study seems to agree with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory which suggests that politeness is addressed by being indirect. Al-Marrani and Sazalie (2010) argue that Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness theory is in opposition with other points of view such as Wierzbicka (2003) who argues that "Directness in some cultures is not considered impolite, but rather seen as a way of expressing connectedness, closeness, camaraderie and affiliation as shown in these studies of Saudi culture." (p.10)

In summary, research in cross-cultural pragmatics has demonstrated that there are culture-specific preferences in the realization of the speech acts of requests and refusals. Most of the studies prefer the Discourse Completion Task as an instrument for data collection, since it is a reliable but not necessarily accurate tool to elicit responses from participants. Cross-cultural research in refusals leads to a number of different findings, but the most significant results indicate that non-native speakers have a tendency to use direct refusal strategies with inferiors, but they use more indirect strategies when concerned with social power. The nonnative speakers' pragmatic development is affected by L1 transfer. NNSs frequency and shift in refusal semantic formulas is limited when compared to native speakers. Research on requests also indicates that nonnative speakers tend to be more direct than native speakers when requesting. When nonnative speakers make conventionally indirect strategies, they make little use of internal and external modifiers compared to the native speakers.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Present study**

Research in speech acts may be intralingual, cross-cultural, or learner-centered. An intralingual study looks at speech acts within a single culture, a cross-cultural study looks at speech acts across multiple cultures, and a learner-centered study focuses on how the learners realize speech acts. For the purpose of this study, I will be looking at speech acts from a learner-centered perspective, where I will compare requests and refusals across Saudi Arabian participants and American native participants.

This study will explore the differences in the realization patterns of requests and refusals in Saudi Advanced English language learners and American English speakers. This work aims to expand upon the literature on speech act theory and the teaching implications which will encourage instructors to tackle informing the development of pragmatic competence in requests and refusals in their ESL/EFL classroom.

This study will be carried out from a constructivist perspective. Bennett (2013) refers to this concept as "A person's knowledge and culture that is shaped through the experience of interacting with his own culture and other cultures" (p.8). The study will address the cultural differences between Saudi and American speakers in how the speech acts of requests and refusals are realized. The research will not only reveal the linguistic variances on forming requests and refusals, but it will also look into how culture affects factors of formation such as formality, social status, directness, and indirectness. Most studies look at participants who are still in the process of learning English; however, this study differs from other studies in the proficiency level of participants which is higher than that of the studies previously mentioned. It investigates the possibility of significant differences between advanced Saudi Arabic English



learners and native English speakers. This study also makes connections between the layers of pragmatics that are present in the Arabic language. For example, Arabic speakers rely on indirectness and mitigation when they want to ask for or refuse something, with the degree of mitigation depending on the social distance of the speakers, yet when they are forming the same speech acts in English they may not always choose to mitigate.

### **3.1 Research Question**

The research question for this research will be: What are the differences between advanced Saudi Arabic English learners vs. American English speakers in forming English requests and refusals in an Academic Setting?

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Participants**

The sample consisted of 30 Saudi and American male and female graduate students from various areas of specialization. The open role-play sample was performed by 5 male and 10 female American native speakers (ANSs) and 4 male and 11 female Saudi Native speakers (SNSs) who were advanced speakers of English. The participants' median age was 30. The Saudis were advanced learners of English. Their level of proficiency is indicated through their IELTS exam results. Since the Saudi group are graduate students in an American university, they had to earn a grade of 6.5 or above to get admitted to their graduate programs. The grade of 6.5 or above indicates that their proficiency level is advanced. The sample represents the participants' university level and close age range to insure as much homogeneity as possible in terms of educational stage, age and social class.

### **4.2 Instrument**

Since the goal of the present study is to examine the participants' use of requests and refusal strategies in given situations. All the participants were asked to fill out a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) through a website called SurveyMonkey. A DCT is a tool to elicit particular speech acts in linguistic and pragmatic. The DCT is a form of questionnaire representing natural one-sided role-plays with situational prompts to which the respondents are expected to respond by making requests and refusals. This test was originally constructed by Blum-Kulka, et al. (1982) and has been widely used since then in gathering data to prompt responses for speech act realizations. Some studies that have used this instrument are Hergüner & Çakır (2017), Morkus (2014), Hamouda (2014), and Allami & Naeimi (2011). Since I was

eliciting responses from English NSs and Saudi advanced English language learners in the present study, there wasn't a need for a translated Arabic version of the DCT, thus there was only one format of the DCT.

The DCT was an open-ended role-play comprising twelve combined situations resulting in the elicitation of six requests and six refusals from each participant, followed by a short questionnaire where the informants were asked general questions about their sex, age, nationality and could optionally write their name. Furthermore, the situations depicted in the role-play present varied social situations which reflect academic occurrences familiar to both American and Saudi participants. These situations focused on different social variables: the social distance between the interlocutors (interlocutors of higher, equal, and lower status), the frequency of the interaction, and a description of the setting. See Appendix A for the original DCT with situations I created for this study. Reiter (2000, p.59) suggests that there are theoretical difficulties in defining social variables, so what is considered an equal interlocutor in America may be considered a higher interlocutor in Saudi Arabia. Having considered these possible social differences between the two cultures, I discussed the role-plays with other native speakers of English and Arabic to make sure that they all have the same interpretation of what is intended by the high, low, and equal social differences in the DCT before distributing it to the participants.

### **4.3 Procedure**

Before the participants were given the DCT, I received the Institutional Review Board approval (IRB) from Colorado State University, which is a requirement for collecting data for this study to assure that it follows the federal regulations governing review of research that involves human subjects. After I was granted the approval to collect the data for my study, I signed up for a SurveyMonkey account which is an online survey development software

that provides customizable surveys with data analysis, sample selection, bias elimination, and data representation tools (SurveyMonkey, n.d.). This software was chosen to distribute my DCT over a paper or a Word document form because most my participants were not available in person. Additionally, the convenience of answering through a website rather than in person or via personal email meant that more participants were able to respond to the study as they could participate when they were available, with less time commitment required. The potential for human error was also minimized since going through emails or paper would have increased the risk of losing participants' responses. Therefore, I contacted my participants via email and WhatsApp, a smartphone chat application, and administrated the sample with an attached consent form that included a description of the study, the risks to the participant, and contact information. See Appendix B for the consent form. The participants were provided a SurveyMonkey DCT questionnaire link and the responses were collected electronically in a written form found on my personal SurveyMonkey secured page as in Figure 1.

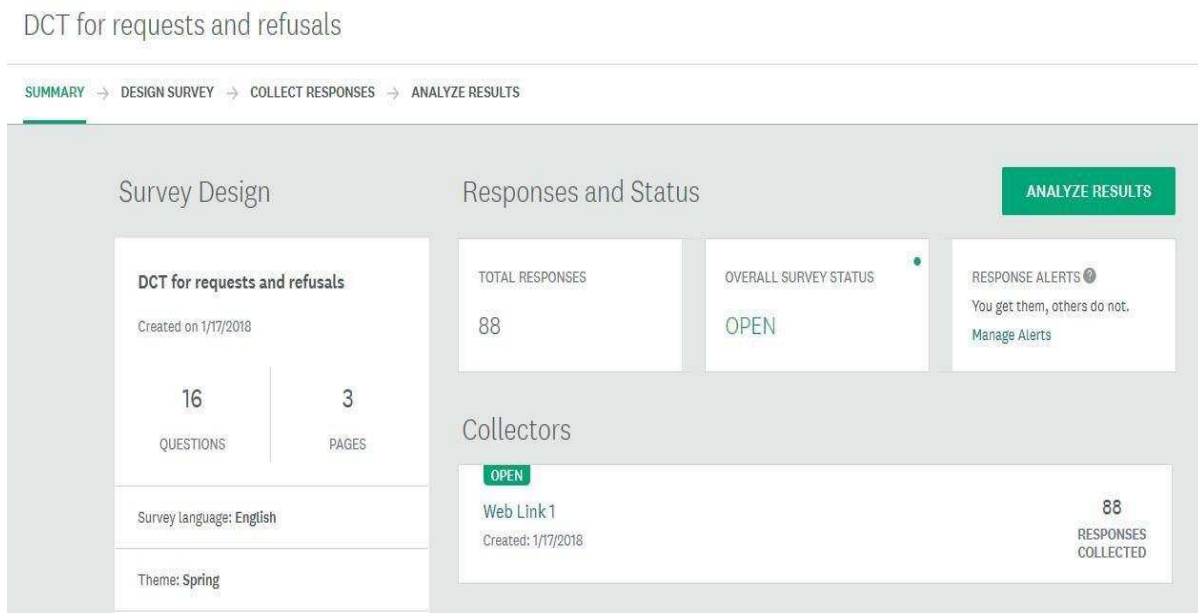


Figure 1. Screenshot of the data collected using Survey Monkey Audience.

The participants spent an average of 20 minutes, according to the software, to answer all 12 role-plays. I received 88 responses and only 45 responses were complete where none of the situations were skipped (15 American speaker responses and 30 Saudi responses). Then the responses were downloaded in an Excel file from the software. Since I only needed 15 Saudi participants, I had to eliminate the extra participants objectively by arbitrarily selecting the highlighted participants and removing alternating numbers as in Figure 2.

ID	Age	gender	Equal status responses	Lower status responses	Higher status responses
S1	25- 30	female	Hi! Yes I know that.	Hi, were have you	I'm sorry professor I
S2	25- 30	female	Sure, but please	Sure, but please bring	I would love to help
S3	25- 30	female	Unfortunately now	I would love to help	Thank you but, I have
S4	31- 35	female	I'm sorry but I need	Yes of course but the	I'm sorry but these

Figure 2. Screenshot of eliminating the extra Saudi participant responses in Excel.

Note. All responses have been intentionally cut off for participant's privacy. Any full examples in the text are approved by particular participants.

The data were organized according to nationality, participant number, age, gender, and the responses to the role-plays in different social scales as in Figure 3.

ID	Age	gender	Equal status responses	Lower status responses	Higher status responses
S1	31- 35	female	I am struggling	Can you guide me to t	I am really struggling
S2	31- 35	female	Hi ... I struggle	Hi friend I need your	I need an extension to
S3	25- 30	male	could you please	could you please	could you please
S4	25- 30	male	Would it be possible	Can you please send	May I submit my

Figure 3. Screenshot of the organization of the data for participant responses in Excel.

#### 4.4 Coding and data analysis

I investigated the differences between the ANSs and SNSs and coded the data by following Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) cross-cultural study of speech act realization pattern (CCSARP) taxonomy for requests previously listed in the literature review in Table 4. All 180

requestive utterances were placed under the appropriate category in CCSARP. As for the 180 refusal utterances, they were placed under the appropriate category in a taxonomy of refusals developed by Beebe et al. (1990) previously listed in Tables 5 and 6 in the literature review.

For refusal utterances, I analyzed the data using the Beebe et al. (1990) taxonomy. I considered the scale of directness and the frequency of refusal strategies participants use in the analysis. The refusal utterances are coded as: *direct strategies*, *indirect strategies*, *adjuncts*. For example, if a participant responds to an invitation to a group study by saying: "I wish I could! But I don't think the time suits me. I'm sorry" the response will be coded as using a direct strategy which is *negative willingness* "I don't think", in addition to two indirect strategies: a *wish* and a *statement of regret* "sorry" After coding the refusal utterances, I entered the number of strategies used in each response, one direct strategy, two indirect strategies and zero adjuncts as in Figure 4

Response	Direct	#Direct	Indirect	#Indirect	Adjunct	#Adjunct
I wish I could! But I don't think the time suits me. I'm sorry	Negative willingness	1	wish/ regret	2	-	0

Figure 4. Screenshot of coding the data for participant responses in Excel.  
 Note. # refers to the number of refusal strategies in direct, indirect strategies and adjuncts.

Requests data was coded by categorizing the participants' responses based on Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's CCSARP for directness level and internal and external mitigation devices. The requestive utterances were analyzed according to the kind of request strategies they used. Requesting behavior is based on choices from a variety of options ranging from direct to indirect ones. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) distinguished requests in three degrees of directness: *direct* requests, *conventionally indirect* requests, and *non-conventionally indirect* requests. In coding

the data, I added a category I called *sub-strategies* within the conventionally indirect strategy type which include internal and external mitigation devices. For example, if a participant says: 'Hey Mark, I'm struggling with the organization of the final paper, are you willing to share your final paper from last semester?', the response will be coded as a conventionally indirect strategy called *preparatory request strategy* that has three sub-strategies: (1) *attention getter* 'Hey Mark', (2) *supportive move* which is the explanation of the speaker's condition before requesting, and (3) *grounder* which checks the addressee's willingness to perform a request. After coding the requestive utterances, I entered the number of strategies used in each response

The data were analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0). An independent *t-test*, a widely used statistical method to compare group means, was implemented to analyze the data. Before running any statistical test an alpha level, which is also called the significance level must be determined. The alpha level of the statistically significant difference was set at 0.05 which is mostly indicated in most social humanity tests. Data were also analyzed qualitatively by comparing the use of refusals and requests strategy types across the two groups. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that qualitative data should be quantified as a test for possible researcher bias. Therefore, the analyzing process adapted quantitative methods as a primary method and qualitative methods as a secondary method.

## Chapter 5 Results and Discussion

To answer the research question for this study: are there differences between advanced L2 Saudi Arabic speakers and American English speakers in forming English requests and refusals in an academic setting, I will split the answer in two parts where I will report the detailed request results and discuss them, then I will also report the detailed refusal and discuss them as well. A *t-test* was run in SPSS to compare the means and standard deviation to investigate whether there were statistically significant differences between the distributions of the two groups in forming requests and refusals or not.

### 5.1 Request results and discussion

These analyses reveal a statistically significant difference between the mean number of SNSs total number of request strategies ( $M = 23.53, SD = 5.152$ ) and the mean number of ANSs total number of request strategies ( $M = 29.33, SD = 8.764$ )  $t(28) = 2.210, p = .035, \alpha = .05$ . ANSs resulted in using more requestive strategy types than SNSs.

Although the main effect resulted in significant differences between SNSs and ANSs, it is important to investigate the pairwise comparisons to indicate if the significant differences were consistent throughout the equal, low, and high social status situations. Sub-strategies, i.e., external and internal mitigation devices, are discussed in detail in the low and high social groups where a significant difference between the groups exists. See means and standard deviations between the two groups in equal, low and high status situations on Tables 7-9.



Table 7

*Means and Standard deviations for SNSs/ANSs Requests in equal status situations*

Strategy	Respondent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Direct	1	.13	.352
	0	.13	.352
Non-conventionally Indirect	1	.07	.258
	0	.00	.000
Conventionally Indirect	1	3.20	.775
	0	3.00	.845
Sub-strategies	1	4.86	1.407
	0	6.26	2.520

*Note.* 1= SNSs, 0=ANSs

Table 8

*Means and Standard deviations for SNSs/ANSs Requests in low status situations*

Strategy	Respondent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Direct	1	.27	.594
	0	.07	.258
Non-conventionally Indirect	1	.00	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	0	.00	.000 <sup>a</sup>
Conventionally Indirect	1	2.80	.775
	0	3.20	1.146
Sub-strategies	1	4.33	1.676
	0	6.6	2.720

*Note.* 1= SNSs, 0=ANSs

Table 9

*Means and Standard deviations for SNSs/ANSs Requests in high status situations*

Strategy	Respondents	Mean	Std. Deviation
Direct	1	.33	.617
	0	.13	.352
Non-conventionally Indirect	1	.00	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	0	.00	.000 <sup>a</sup>
Conventionally Indirect	1	3.00	1.069
	0	3.47	1.302
Sub-strategies	1	4.53	1.457
	0	6.46	2.065

*Note.* 1= SNSs, 0=ANSs

Tables 7-9 include four request strategies: *direct strategies*, *non-conventionally indirect strategies*, *conventionally indirect strategies*, and *sub-strategies*. The sub-strategies refer to the mitigation devices that take place in the conventionally indirect responses. Sub-strategies can either be external mitigation devices such as syntactic and lexical downgrades or internal mitigation devices such as checking on availability.

For each request strategy, I calculated the total number of instances the respondents used for each strategy. For example, the number instances for each ANS who used conventionally indirect strategies are 3, 3, 3, 4, 2, 3, 3, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 5, 3, 2. The sum of the 15 respondent instances is calculated. The total number of conventionally indirect strategies ANSs use in equal status situations is 48. Figures 5-7 illustrate the data visually in line graphs. Three individual independent t-tests were run to investigate the pairwise comparisons of the equal, low, high status situations.

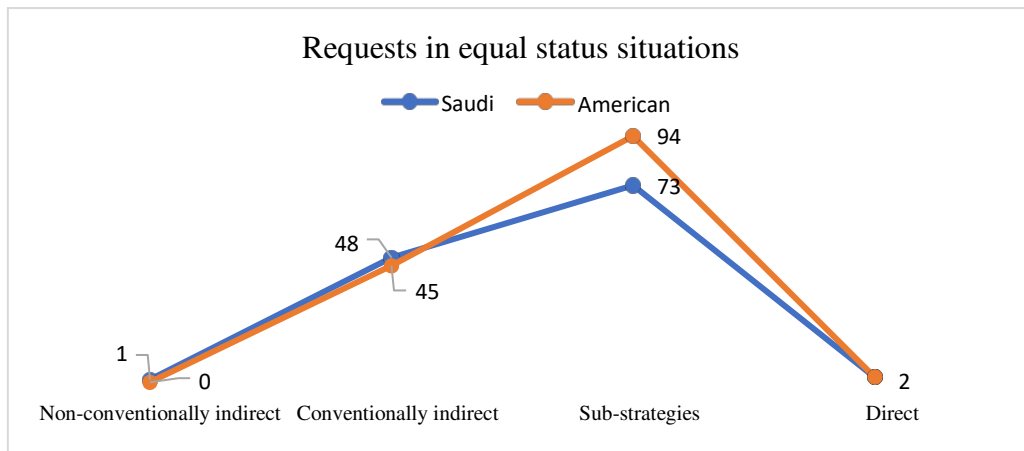


Figure 5 Line graph for SNSs and ANSs request responses for equal status situations  
 Note. The numbers refer to the total number of direct, conventionally indirect, non- conventionally indirect, and sub-strategies participants used.

There was no statistically significant difference in the total number of request strategies SNSs and ANSs used in equal social status situations  $t(28) = 1.120, p = 0.272, \alpha = .05$ . Both groups used the same number of direct strategies. SNSs used more conventionally indirect

strategy types ANSs whereas ANSs used more sub-strategies than SNSs. SNSs used one non-conventionally indirect strategy whereas ANSs used none. Although figure 5 visually illustrates that the two groups seem similar in all requestive strategies and different in their use of requestive sub-strategies, SNSs and ANSs appear to not be statistically significantly different in their use of requestive sub-strategies in equal status situations  $p= 0.1$ .

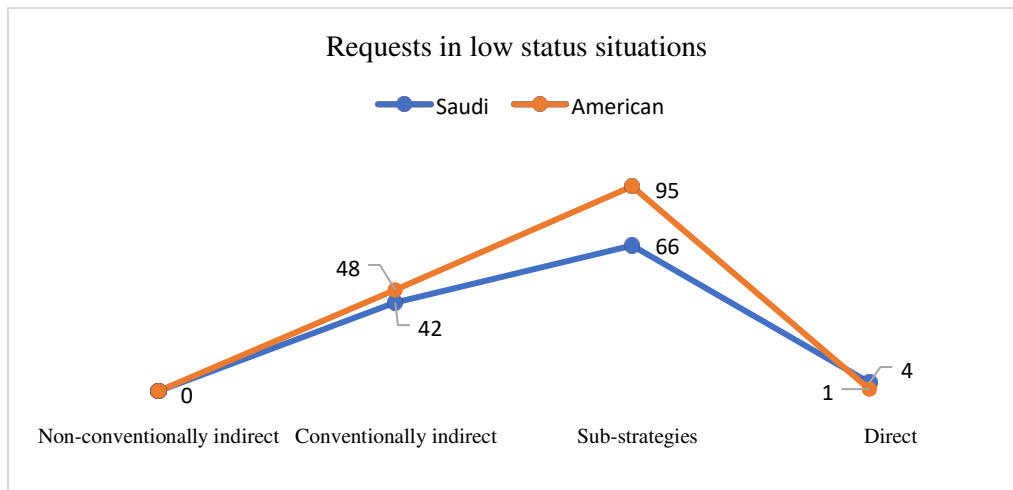


Figure 6 Line graph for SNSs and ANSs request responses for low status situations

Note. The numbers refer to the total number of direct, conventionally indirect, non-conventionally indirect, and sub-strategies participants used.

Contrastingly, when calculating the total number of request strategies SNSs and ANSs used in low social status situations, significant differences are found  $t(28) = 2.186$ ,  $p = 0.037$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ . Neither groups use any non-conventionally indirect strategies. ANSs used more conventionally indirect strategies and sub-strategies than SNSs and SNSs tend to be slightly more direct than ANSs. Figure 6 shows a noticeable difference between the two groups in their use of sub-strategies in low social status situations. After calculating the number of requestive sub-strategies SNSs and ANSs formed, it resulted with a  $p$  value of  $p= 0.01$ , implying that the variances are unequal which suggests that there is in fact a significant difference between ANSs and ANSs in forming requestive sub-strategies when the requestee has a lower status than the

requester. For a better understanding of the differences between SNSs and ANSs in making requestive sub-strategies in lower status situations, see Tables 10-11.

Table 10

*External mitigation devices SNSs/ANSs use in low status situations*

External mitigation devices	SNSs	ANSs
1. Attention getter	5	20
2. Grounder	27	28
3. Disarmer	2	2
4. Apology	4	3
5. Discourse orientation move	3	11
6. Sweeteners	2	0
7. Supportive moves	10	13
Total External mitigation	53	77

*Note.* SNSs= Saudi native speakers, ANSs= American native speakers

Table 11

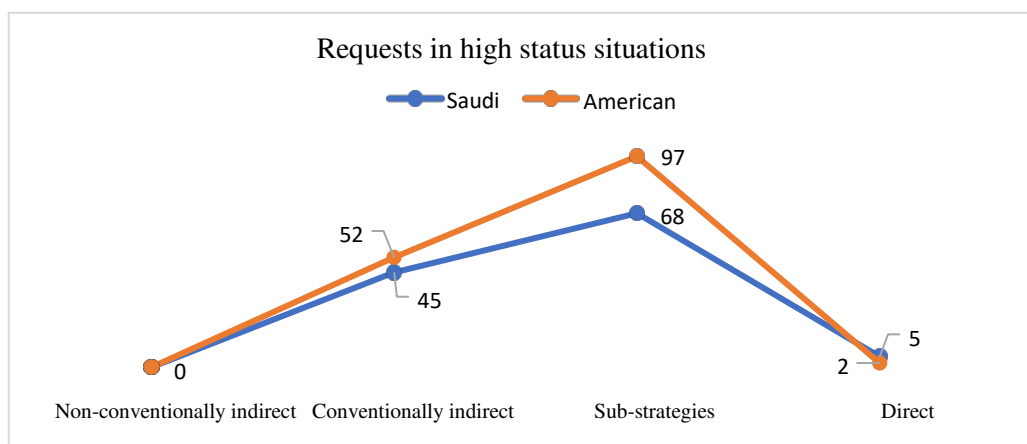
*Internal mitigation devices SNSs/ANSs use in low status situations*

Internal mitigation devices	SNSs	ANSs
a. Syntactic downgraders		
1. Negation	0	1
2. Interrogative	0	2
b. Lexical downgraders	0	1
1. Understates		
2. Downtoners	0	2
3. Politeness device	10	0
4. Consultative device	0	8
5. Subjectivizers	2	1
6. Appealers	0	3
c. Upgraders		
1. Time intensifiers	1	0
Total Internal mitigation	13	18

*Note.* SNSs= Saudi native speakers, ANSs= American native speakers

In Table 10 grounders are the most frequently used external device by both SNSs and ANSs. Attention getters were mostly used by ANSs. SNSs used grounders and supportive moves frequently in external devices. Whereas ANSs on the other hand, used discourse orientation

moves and supportive moves much more frequently than the SNSs. Compared with external mitigation devices, internal devices were not used very often; see Table 11. However, SNSs speakers showed a greater tendency to use politeness devices more than ANSs. Among the internal mitigation devices, consultant devices were the most preferred by ANSs. Neither group used several of the internal mitigation devices, such as past tense and conditional clauses, cajolers, expletives, intensifiers, commitment indicators and lexical uptoners. In general, ANSs use internal and external mitigation devices much more frequently and diversely than SNSs. In addition to external and internal mitigation devices, there were some responses that used mixed mitigations where both internal and external mitigation devices are used. These mixed methods were more obvious in ANSs than in SNSs requests. For example, when requesting resources from a friend, an ANS says: “Hey X, I’m struggling with finding sources for my X project. I know you did one similar and I was wondering if you could help me out. What databases or journals did you find helpful? Do you know of any resources that would be particularly helpful with this kind of project?” whereas a SNS says: “I know you have a lot to do but can you send me the resources you’ve got for this project?”



*Figure 7 Line graph for SNSs and ANSs request responses for high status situations*  
*Note.* The numbers refer to the total number of direct, conventionally indirect, non-conventionally indirect, and sub-strategies participants used

Analyses indicate that the t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean number of request strategies in high status situations SNSs use ( $M = 7.86$ ,  $SD = 2.099$ ) and request strategies in high status situations ANSs use ( $M = 10.06$ ,  $SD = 2.987$ )  $t(28) = 2.334$ ,  $p = 0.027$   $\alpha = .05$ . Neither group used non-conventionally indirect strategies. ANSs used more conventionally indirect strategies and sub-strategies than SNSs and SNSs tend to be more direct than ANSs although there were very few direct instances all together. The significant difference between the two groups takes place in the variance in the use of requestive sub-strategies in high status situations. For a closer look of the differences between SNSs and ANSs in making requests in in high status situations, see Tables 12- 13

Table 12

*Internal mitigation devices SNSs/ANSs use in high status situations*

Internal mitigation devices	SNSs	ANSs
<i>a. Syntactic downgraders</i>		
1. Negation	0	1
2. Interrogative	1	4
3. conditional clause	5	1
4. Past tense	1	0
<i>b. Lexical downgraders</i>		
1. Understates	2	6
2. Downtoners	0	1
3. Politeness device	6	0
4. Consultative device	0	1
5. Subjunctivizes	2	0
6. Cajolers	0	1
<i>c. Upgraders</i>		
1. commitment indicator	1	4
<b>Total Internal mitigation</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>

*Note.* SNSs= Saudi native speakers, ANSs= American native speakers

Table 13

*External mitigation devices SNSs/ANSs use in high status situations*

External mitigation devices	SNSs	ANSs
1. Attention getter	9	22
2. Grounder	21	24
3. Disarmer	1	2
4. Apology	6	2
5. Discourse orientation move	2	9
6. Sweeteners	1	0
7. Supportive moves	10	19
Total External mitigation	50	78

*Note.* SNSs= Saudi native speakers, ANSs= American native speakers

In Table 13 grounders are the most frequently used external device by both SNSs and ANSs. Attention getters and supportive moves were mostly used by ANSs. Apologies were the only external device SNSs clearly used more than ANSs. Compared with external mitigation devices, internal devices were not used very often; see Table 12. However, SNSs speakers showed a greater tendency to use politeness devices than ANSs do. Among different types of internal mitigation devices, understates were the most preferred strategy used by ANSs. Neither group used a number of internal mitigation devices such as appealers and upgraders (time intensifiers, expletives, intensifiers, and lexical uptoners). In general, ANSs were more diverse and use more internal and external mitigation devices than SNSs. Both groups used internal and external mitigation devices in a single response. For example, an ANS requests a postponement for submitting a project by saying:

“Professor X, Greetings! I have been working through the X project from your course and I am having a hard time getting it completed in time. The project itself is clear to me and I am passionate about doing my best work on this assignment. At this point, though, if I were to submit it by the deadline I know the work I will produce will be of lower

quality than I would like. I really want to make this project as high quality as possible because the content is so inspiring to me. Is there any way you could give me an extra week to complete the project? If so, it would allow me to craft much more thorough and significant work. Thank you and all the best, X.”

In contrast, a SNS says: "Dr. X, I have been swamped with projects this week and working later shifts. As a result, I haven't been able to work as diligently as I would have liked on the report for X600. Could I have an extension until next Friday to turn it in?"

As illustrated in Figures 5-7, it is obvious that instances of non-conventionally indirect strategies (e.g, hints) were less frequently observed and were the least preferred strategy amongst the two groups. In addition to conventionally indirect strategies. Neither of the groups opted for direct strategies regardless of the relationship between the speaker and the listener, though SNSs, are more direct than ANSs in lower and higher social status situations. Note that when SNSs use direct strategies in this study, they are accompanied with politeness modifiers to mitigate the imposition of the request.

Amongst all the requestive strategies, SNSs and ANSs favored using conventionally indirect strategies and sub-strategies. Ellis (1994) suggests that the conventionally indirect strategy might be a universal method of making requests. SNSs and ANSs were found to opt for conventional indirectness, even when they were addressing their inferiors. There are a number of possible reasons behind the groups' preference for conventional indirectness. One reason may be that all the DCT situations were in an academic setting and answered by homogeneous mature educated individuals which calls for more formality and indirectness. Another reason may refer to the SNSs group advanced level learners who carry cultural awareness of American tendencies from being exposed to similar situations in their academic lives in the U.S. This reason is in line



with the findings of other interlanguage studies such as Byon (2004) where advanced ESL learners develop a greater sensitivity to the use of more polite strategies in requesting. SNSs and ANSs implied similar amounts of conventionally indirect strategies in the equal and low social status groups but used more conventionally indirect strategies when requesting an interlocuter with a higher social distance.

As for mitigation sub-strategies, ANSs differed significantly from SNSs in all three social status situations, and ANSs applied more modifying devices. Both groups preferred using external mitigation devices, instead of internal mitigation devices. A study Yazdanfar and Bonyadi (2016) conducted on native English speakers and Persian speakers held the same result. Yazdanfar and Bonyadi (2016) report that "Native English speakers used more mitigating devices to decrease the imposition of the requests which was evidence to their individualist culture that suggests an importance they give for others' autonomy and the employment of the negative politeness strategies" (p.9).

## **5.2 Refusal results and discussion**

Analyses fail to reveal a statistically significant difference between the mean number of the total number of responses divided by the number of SNSs respondents ( $M = 13.67$ ,  $SD = 2.664$ ) and the total number of responses divided by the number of ANSs respondents ( $M = 14.73$ ,  $SD = 3.674$ )  $t(28) = -.910$ ,  $p = .370$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ .

It is important to investigate the main effect to find significant differences between the total number of refusals used across varied statuses SNSs and ANSs. Investigating pairwise comparisons is important as well. Pairwise comparisons indicate if the results are consistent throughout the different social variables or not. See Table 14-16 for means and standard deviations between the two groups.

Tables 14-16 include the three refusal strategy types: *direct strategies*, *indirect strategies*, and *adjuncts to refusals*. To be direct, a respondent would use performatives such as saying, “I refuse”, nonperformative strategies where a speaker would say “no”, and negative willingness by saying “I can't,” “I won't,” or “I don't think so”. A respondent could also refuse indirectly. There are 11 indirect refusal strategies in the Beebe et al. (1990) taxonomy. To be indirect a respondent could use anyone of these strategies e.g., providing an explanation or an alternative solution. Adjuncts to refusals accompany the refusal strategy. They can occur before or after a refusal e.g., pause fillers or statements of gratitude.

Table 14

*Means and Standard deviations for SNSs/ANSs Refusals in equal status situations*

Strategy	Respondent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Direct	1	.93	.799
	0	1.00	.655
Indirect	1	3.53	1.060
	0	3.27	.799
Adjuncts	1	.27	.458
	0	.27	.594

*Note.* 1= SNSs, 0=ANSs

Table 15

*Means and Standard deviations for SNSs/ANSs Refusals in low status situations*

Strategy	Respondent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Direct	1	.47	.516
	0	.87	.834
Indirect	1	3.40	.632
	0	3.93	1.710
Adjuncts	1	.40	.632
	0	.40	.632

*Note.* 1= SNSs, 0=ANSs

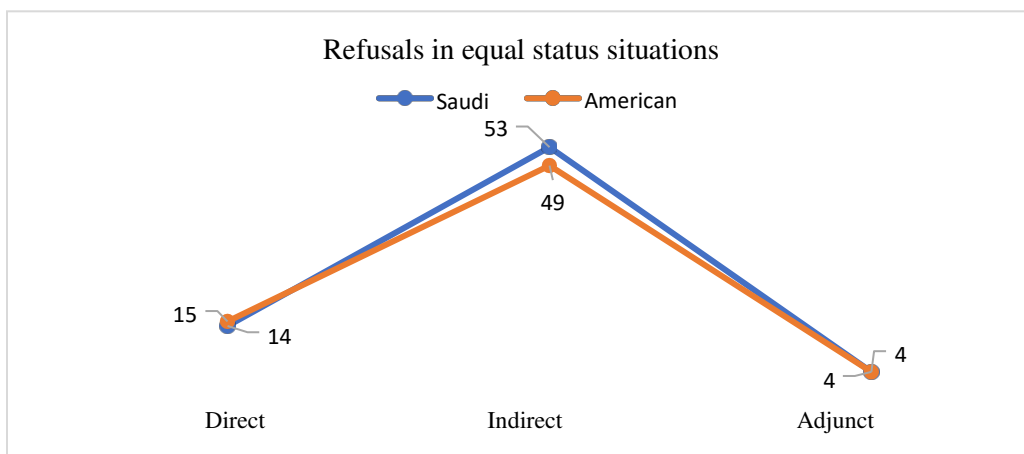
Table 16

*Means and Standard deviations for SNSs/ANSs Refusals in high status situations*

Strategy	Respondents	Mean	Std. Deviation
Direct	1	.53	.516
	0	.53	.743
Indirect	1	3.53	1.125
	0	3.40	1.724
Adjuncts	1	.60	.737
	0	1.07	.704

*Note.* 1= SNSs, 0=ANSs

Figures 8-10 illustrate the respondents' data in line graphs. The line graphs in figures 8-10 visually indicate that SNSs and ANSs are very similar in the total amount or refusals used in equal, low, and high social status situations. For more assurance, three independent *t-tests* were run for pairwise comparisons between SNSs and ANSs. The alpha level was set on 0.05. The *t-tests* resulted with a *p* value of  $p=0.78$  for responses in equal status situations,  $p=0.08$  for responses in low status situations, and  $p=0.62$  for responses in high status situations. All results indicate that SNSs and ANSs are consistent throughout the three social status situations, in which they all failed to reveal statistically significant difference.



*Figure 8 Line graph for SNSs and ANSs refusal responses for equal status situations*  
*Note.* The numbers refer to the total number of direct, indirect strategies refusal and adjuncts participants used

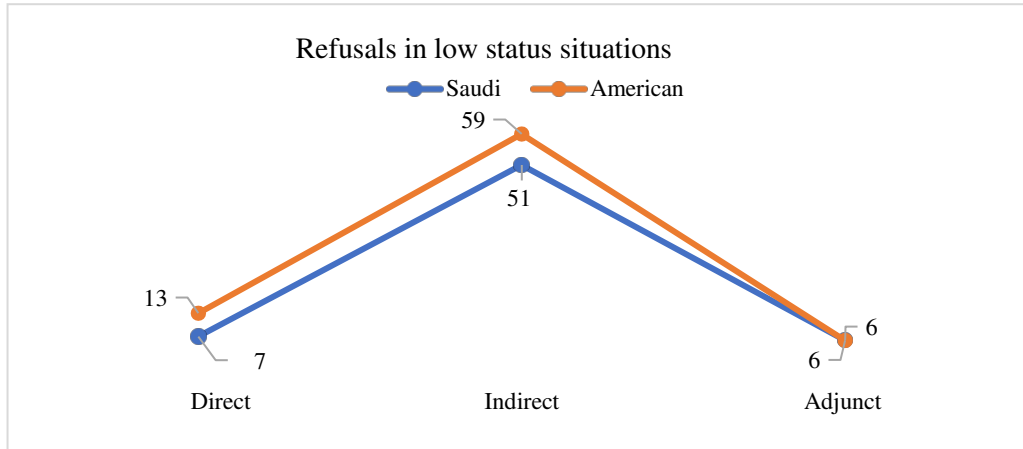


Figure 9 Line graph for SNSs and ANSs refusal responses for low status situations  
 Note. The numbers refer to the total number of direct, indirect strategies refusal and adjuncts participants used

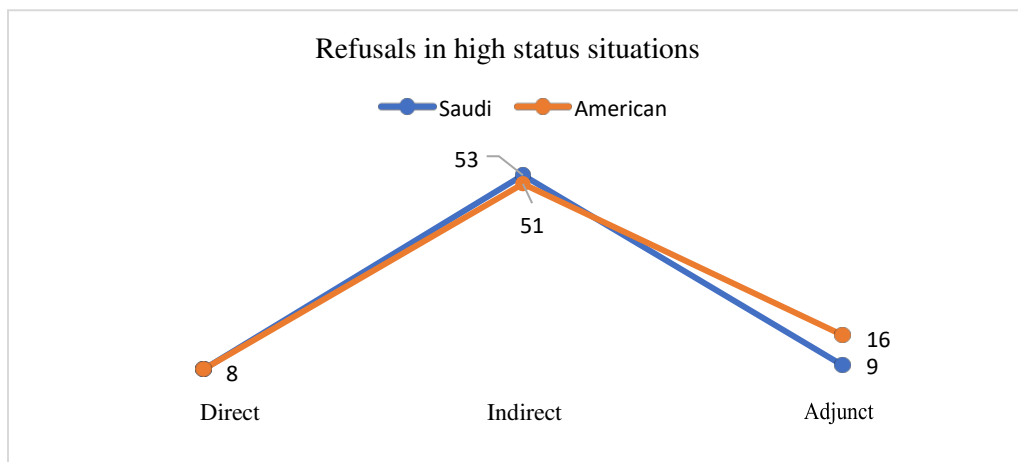


Figure 10 Line graph for SNSs and ANSs refusal responses for high status situations  
 Note. The numbers refer to the total number of direct, indirect strategies refusal and adjuncts participants used

The absence of significant difference between the two groups does not imply that participants responded identically to the DCT, it implies that the amount of variance between SNSs and ANSs is not statistically significant. For more insight on the variations between the groups see Table 15 for percentages of frequency of each refusal semantic formula in different social scale situations.

The percentages on the table following inform the reader of the percentage a refusal semantic formula SNSs and ANSs use in equal, high, and low social status situations. The frequencies of refusal strategies vary between SNSs and ANSs. Figures 11-12 are bar graphs of the percentages on Table 17.

Table 17

*Frequency of semantic formulas in refusals for different social scale situations*

semantic formulas	Respondents					
	SNSs			ANSs		
	Social status scale					
	Equal	Low	High	Equal	Low	High
<b>Direct refusal</b>						
Performatives	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Non-performative	17%	10%	7%	27%	20%	13%
Negative willingness	30%	13%	23%	23%	27%	7%
<b>Indirect refusal</b>						
Regret	60%	40%	23%	50%	27%	27%
Wish	3%	0%	0%	3%	7%	0%
Explanation	40%	33%	40%	43%	53%	47%
St. alternative	10%	13%	23%	23%	37%	27%
St. principle	17%	20%	17%	30%	27%	10%
St. philosophy	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	20%
Con. past acceptance	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Con. future acceptance	13%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Promise	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Dissuade interlocutor	10%	20%	7%	10%	30%	17%
Acceptance as a refusal	10%	10%	20%	0%	0%	3%
Avoidance	10%	0%	17%	10%	17%	40%
<b>Adjunct</b>						
St. positive opinion	10%	7%	17%	0%	3%	7%
Pause filler	3%	10%	13%	0%	10%	30%
Gratitude	0%	3%	7%	10%	3%	10%
Alerts	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%

Note. St. = statement, Con. = condition

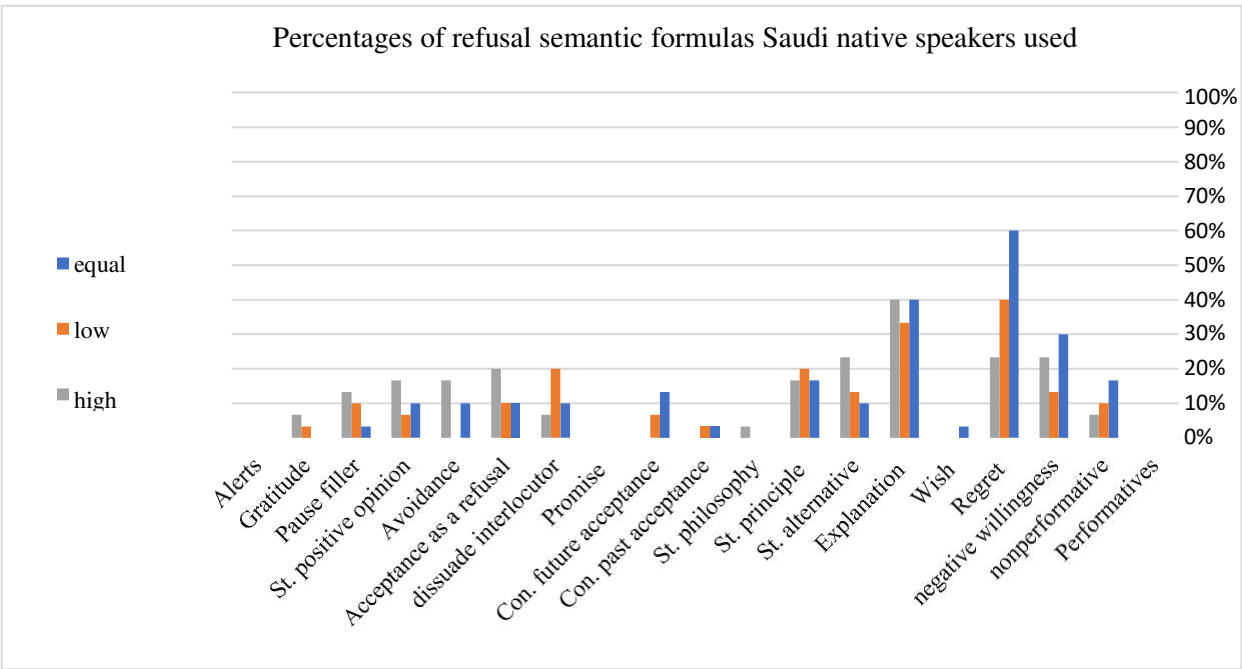


Figure 11. bar graph for SNSs refusal responses in equal, low, and high status situations  
 Note. St. = statement, Con. = condition

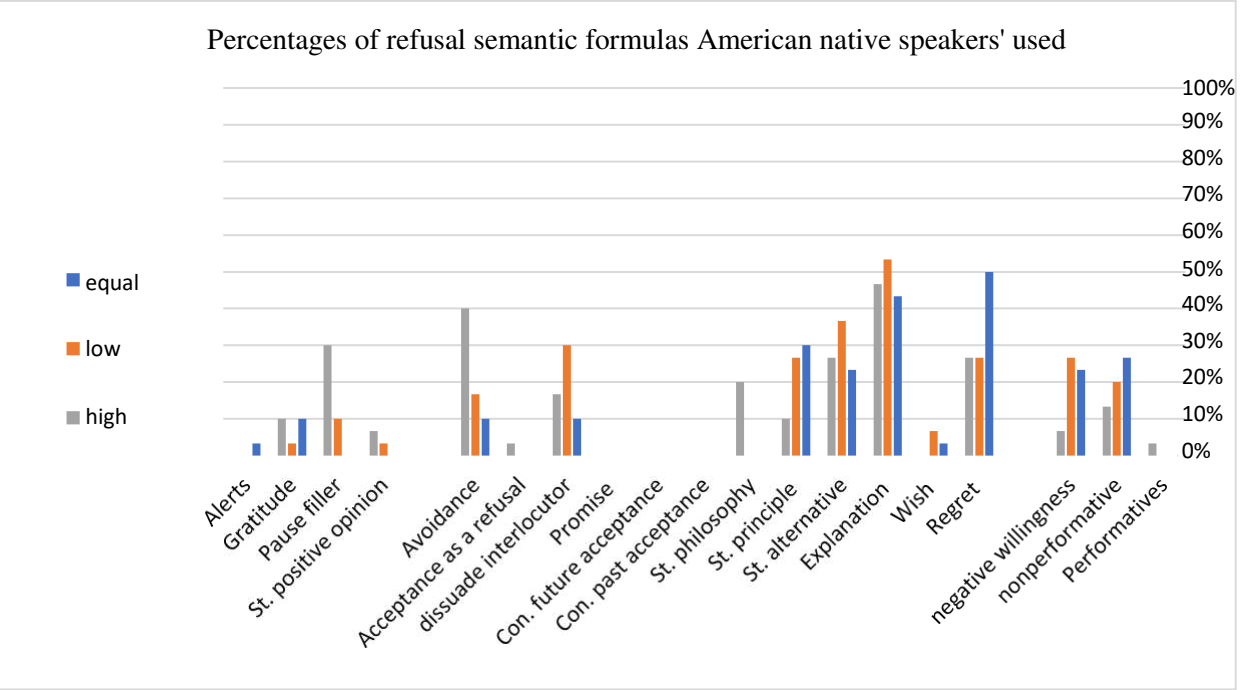


Figure 12. bar graph for ANSs refusal responses in equal, low, and high status situations

Figure 11 illustrates the results of SNSs' frequency use of semantic formulas. Saudi Native speakers use a wider variety of strategies than American native speakers. In equal (60%) and low (40%) status situations SNSs prefer using regrets with their inferiors more frequently. Whereas in high status situations, SNSs preferred using explanations (40%) with their superiors to modify the face threatening act. The least preferred semantic formulas SNSs applied throughout the varied social statuses were wishes, setting a condition for a past acceptance, statement of philosophy and promises. Responses with direct performatives (0%) and alerts (0%) in adjuncts were neglected in all the situations. SNSs favor indirect responses when refusing compared to direct strategies and adjuncts to refusal. This goes along with Hergüner & Çakır (2017) findings with Turkish participants who generally preferred indirect refusal strategies since they were sensitive to the status of the person making the request. Morkus (2012) lists general characteristics in Arabic communication style, such as their preference for indirectness especially when interacting with someone higher in status. Morkus (2012) also found the Arabs are direct when interacting with someone equal or lower in status (p. 88). SNSs use negative willingness frequently in equal (30%), low (13%), and high (23%) social status situations. Usually, when SNSs are direct, they modify their directness with adding indirect semantic formulas and adjuncts in a single response. For example, "It is a good idea but sorry I can't change the project now, as we are at the end of the term, we can do that next term though". This is a participant's response to a student who suggests a change in the final project, The response started with an adjunct using a statement of positive opinion, followed by a direct refusal using negative willingness and finally modifies the directness with three indirect strategies, regret "sorry", explanation "we are at the end of the term", and setting a condition for future acceptance "we can do that next term though"

Mirzaei & Esmaeili (2013) note that “Advanced EFL learners may use language inappropriately and suffer from pragmatic failures” (p.3). The results in Hamouda's study (2014) state that 54.55% of the Arab participants used the direct refusal ‘No’ in most situations, especially when the interlocutors were of equal or lower status. Granting that there wasn't a statistically significant difference between SNSs and ANSs in my study, pairwise comparisons indicate that there are variances between the two groups. SNSs did not always use modifying strategies to reduce the imposition of the face threatening act. For example, in instances with high status situations participants responded with "No", "No, I can't" or with little modification by saying: "No, sorry". Being direct may be caused by participants' lack of input and expositor to refusal situations. Alcon & Martinez-Flor (2005) believe that learner's awareness can be developed by introducing "pragmatic input through classroom interaction, conversations with native speakers and authentic media" (p.68)

Figure 12 illustrates the results of ANSs' use of semantic formulas in equal, low, and high social status situations. American Native speakers did not use a big variety of semantic formulas compared to SNSs, but they use refusal strategies extensively. ANSs prefer using explanations with their inferiors (53%) and superiors (47%), whereas in equal status situations, ANSs preferred using regrets (40%). Other frequent refusal strategies ANSs opt for in all social status situations are statements of alternative solutions, statements of principle, and negative willingness e.g., "I can't really let you use my notes, I need to study from them. I can make you copies though". The least preferred semantic formulas ANSs applied, were direct performatives, alerts, and accepting in a form of a refusal by using an indefinite replay or by lack of enthusiasm. Accepting in a form of a refusal is a difficult strategy to measure in written responses.



Across the DCT refusal situations, ANS did not use a number of semantic formulas such as setting a condition for a past or future acceptance and promises. ANSs favor indirect responses when refusing compared to direct strategies and adjuncts. This finding is in line with Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1991) study, which found that American students opt for indirect responses, such as explanations using alternative solutions and avoidance through hedging. In contrast, Morkus's (2014) results show Americans were more direct than Arabs.

ANSs are highly context-sensitive in choosing refusal strategies for different social situations. Notice the responses shift in three situations depending on the status of interlocutors. In all the three situations the same participant is asked to refuse sharing her class notes to the requester.

1. Responding to a requester in an equal social status e.g., "I'm sorry, but I'm going to need my notes to study. I wonder if you can get notes from the professor or someone else in the class."
2. Responding to a requester in a low social status e.g., "I think it would be good for you to learn to attend class regularly and take notes. I'm sorry, but this time I'm not going to give you my notes."
3. Responding to a requester in a higher social status e.g., "I'd love to help out and I appreciate that you're asking me to do this. But, I just don't know how we could work this out. You see, I'll need my notes to study over the weekend and there's no way I could get them from you before then. Is there any other way I could help?"

In equal status situations, the participant apologizes and explains why she cannot lend her notes to the requester and suggests an alternative solution, whereas in the low status situation the participant is more comfortable with refusing directly, though with an explanation for the refusal. As for the last response, it illustrates the refusers' context-sensitivity and high shift by

implementing a considerable number of refusal semantic formulas without having to refuse directly.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The present research attempts to contribute to the existing literature on learner-centered linguistic speech act research by investigating pragmatic variations in performing requests and refusals among Saudi English language learners and American English speakers with respect to such parameters as language proficiency and the status of interlocutors. The purpose of the research is to observe request and refusal strategies from two cultural viewpoints. A DCT was designed and used to elicit data. The data were coded according to a request and refusal scheme and analyzed in terms of the presence of statistically significant difference between the groups in forming requests and refusals. In addition to investigating differences, the research analyzed the participants' request and refusal strategy use.

The study found statistically significant differences in participants requests. In contrast, there were no statistically significant differences between the groups in making refusals. The findings highlight the complexities of social interactions, politeness, and face. The results support Wierzbicka's (1985) claim that conceptualization and verbalization of the speech acts vary to a great extent across cultures and languages (p. 154). Vaezi et al. (2014) state that "even though speakers may have access to the same range of speech acts and realization strategies as do native speakers, but they differ from native speakers in the strategies they use" (p.170). The results also show that the SNSs have the acquired awareness to modify their responses by combining speech act strategies in a single response. Nonetheless, SNSs do not always choose the strategies ANSs prefer, but in this study SNSs and ANSs agree on two strategies (1) utilizing conventional indirect request strategies when forming requests, and (2) frequently using regrets

and explanations as indirect refusal semantic formulas. The findings of this research reveal that SNSs demonstrate closer performance to ANSs in social dominance situations. Yet, in terms of social distance, their request and refusal strategies differ between the groups.

The analyses indicate that SNSs responses are pragmatically appropriate because they mostly integrate indirectness in their requests and refusals. The perception of politeness participants embrace in this study seems to agree with Brown and Levinson's (1987) view of politeness where the key of politeness is being indirect. The results of this study contrast with the outcomes of El Hiani (2015) where Moroccan EFL learners failed to appropriately produce many speech acts, among them were refusing and requesting.

Social distance and degree of imposition are recognized pragmatic aspects that constrain the appropriateness of a speech act. Jalilifar (2009) argues that even though these aspects are universal, a second language speakers' "Assessment of the weight and values of universal context factors varies substantively from context to context as well as across speech communities" (p.54).

#### **5.4 Limitations**

This study has a few limitations such as not having a co-coder to assure accuracy of the data coding and analyzing process, which led me to revise the coding many times for accuracy, so it would not affect the findings. The next limitation refers to the data collection tool, since there was no immediate interaction with participants when responding to the situations I could not measure non-verbal refusal and request strategies in my coding from the written DCT tasks, which might have led to changes in the results. Another limitation for the collection tool is its unauthenticity. DCT's are not the most accurate tools for authentic responses but are the most accessible to collect as much responses as possible in a limited time. For further research I

recommend collecting responses through observing real-life academic settings from classrooms or libraries.

## **5.5 Implications**

After investigating requests and refusals, I have found that the area lacks pedagogical development on how to instruct refusals in the classroom. Many textbooks do not include instruction in pragmatics and instructors find it difficult to teach. Consequently, I suggest some teaching implication to encourage fostering intercultural understanding and a critical look at the students' native language and their second language. Students can learn pragmatics through noticing authentic requests and refusals selected from an American Academic spoken corpus, then underline these refusals and discuss their answers with their peers. Students can also identify requests and refusals that target an academic setting by identifying some request and refusal situations in the MICASE corpus. MICASE provides authentic spoken American English in academic settings whereas other corpuses provide English incorporated in general situations. Students could also read hypothetical request and refusal situations that have multiple responses and choose one or two potential request or refusal responses that are appropriate to a given context. Moreover, students could apply rehearsal communication and cover strategies by practicing request and refusal situations in pairs and having a brief conversation or roleplay about hypothetical situations and how each would respond to them.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

Name (optional):

Nationality:

Gender:

Age:

Read the following situations and think of a way to **refuse** them.

- 1- You are a graduate student who attends classes on a regular basis and takes detailed notes.

**A: You have a classmate who is not close to you and occasionally misses class, but there is a midterm soon and he wants to borrow your notes.**

Classmate: Hey! Did you know that we have an exam tomorrow! I didn't take notes the last two weeks. I'm sorry to ask, but could I borrow yours?

You: .....

**B: You have a classmate who is a close friend to you and occasionally misses class, but there is a midterm soon and he wants to borrow your notes.**

Classmate: Hey! Do you know we have an exam tomorrow! I didn't take notes the last two weeks, can I borrow yours?

You: .....

**C: You have a midterm soon and your professor asks if you could share your notes with a weaker student in class.**

Professor: I hope your studying well for the midterm next week. I was wondering though if you could help out. I know you take good notes in class, would you mind lending them to David?

You: .....

- 2- You are a faculty member in a University where you teach students in the preparatory year (the year provided to all undergraduate students before enrolling in a specific specialty)

**A: One of your students approaches you with a suggestion towards the end of the semester.**

Student: My classmates and I were wondering if we could do intensive homework instead of the final project if that's ok by you.

You: .....

**B: Your colleague who is also a faculty member and teaches preparatory year students, makes a suggestion to change the curriculum plan.**

Colleague: I am so tired of correcting all these papers. Why don't we cancel the final project and let students do homework instead?

You: .....

**C: The preparatory year coordinator has gotten many complaints from the students that you are giving them too much work so she makes a suggestion.**

Coordinator: You know, pushing students to do their best is crucial but we have to be careful not to go overboard. Have you considered canceling the final project and figuring out another way for students to acquire marks?

You: .....

Read the following situations and think of a way to make a **request**.

- 1- You are a first year graduate student and struggling to finish your final report paper for one of your classes.

**A: You want to ask a second year graduate student if he could send you the project he did for the same course last year, so you could get a better understanding of the project.**

You: .....

Student: Sure, no problem!

**B: You want to ask your friend with the same major but from a different university and had done a similar project to help you with finding some resources for your paper.**

You: .....  
.....

Friend: I'll email you what I've got after class.

**C: You want to request your professor for more time to finish your paper and possibly submit it a week later.**

You: .....  
.....

Professor: Sorry, but I have to be fair, If I give you an extension I'll have to give it to all the class and that will burden me with more work.

2- You and your classmates are leaving class. You are talking with several classmates as you walk out. It is raining and you do not have a ride home.

**A: You know that one of your classmates has a car and lives near you, and you want to ask for a ride home.**

You: .....  
.....

Classmate: Of course. Where's your apartment?

**B: Your friend doesn't have a car but her husband picks her up and you would like her to check with him to see if you could join them.**

You: .....  
.....

Friend: Ok, I'll call him right now.

**C: You see your professor walking to his car and he has offered another student a ride and you wanted to ask if you could join them too.**

You: .....  
.....

Professor: Yes, there is still room for one more.

## Appendix B

Dear Participant,

My name is Nahlah Alqarawi and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the English department. We are conducting a research study on the production of English requests and refusals by advanced English learners whose native language is Arabic and American speakers whose first language is English, to indicate if there are differences between the two groups in terms of speech act production. The title of our project is the cross-culture study in forming American English requests and refusals between Non-Native Speakers (NNS's) & Native Speakers (NS's). The Principal Investigator is Gerald Delahunty, professor in the English department and I am the Co-Principal Investigator.

We would like you to take a survey. Participation will take approximately five minutes for each activity. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty. We will be collecting your nationality, gender and age. When we report and share the data to others, we will combine the data from all participants. We will keep your data confidential; your name and data will be kept separately in a secured file on a personal OneDrive account on a password protected computer accessible only to the research team.

While there are no direct benefits to you, we hope to gain more knowledge on the cross-cultural differences between Saudi and American speakers in forming refusal and requests to bridge the misunderstandings that result between the two cultures and to obtain pedagogical modules and activities to help with the development of the pragmatic competence of the NNS's. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential (but unknown) risks.

To indicate your willingness to participate in this research and to continue on to the survey, click here to access the two page survey:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GNHGYQ9> .

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Nahlah Alqarawi at 971-231-7100, [naziz20@colostate.edu](mailto:naziz20@colostate.edu) or Professor Gerald Delahunty at [gerald.delahunty@colostate.edu](mailto:gerald.delahunty@colostate.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: [RICRO\\_IRB@mail.colostate.edu](mailto:RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu); 970-491-1553.

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