

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the literature on speech acts, and refusals with reference to the two commonly discussed social variables ‘power’ and ‘distance’ is reviewed. Also as the study aims at looking at refusals in the context of Persian language and culture, some of the relevant socio-cultural aspects of Iranian society are introduced.

#### **2.2 Indirect Speech Act**

According to Searle (1969) speaking a language is performing speech acts, including giving commands, asking questions, offering something, etc. Performing speech acts therefore are realized as a means of communication. Searle argued that any type of speech act can be used and performed indirectly; therefore indirectness is another means of communicating intention and purposes. In fact, most of the speech acts are uttered indirectly in the society. Indirect speech acts are those in which the speaker means more than what he/she says and conveys a message that must be read from his/her lines by the hearer. It is therefore up to the hearers to infer the communicative intention of the speaker by using their shared knowledge and information (Searle, 1975).

In other words, indirect speech acts are those whose literal meaning is different from the intention of the speaker. For example "let's stay at home tonight" is an indirect refusal response to an invitation. The identification of the force of illocutionary act depends on the hearer's interpretation of the suggestion as an indirect refusal.

Despite the fact that theory of speech act has been applied to a variety of research (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Blum-kulka, et al., 1989) to date, it suffers many major limitations. It should be noted that the theory is restricted to the level of the utterance. Furthermore, the authors applied their rules and conventions to their own speech conventions namely Anglo-Saxon speech conventions. They went to claim that speech acts operate by universal features (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1977; Leech, 1983). Later research, however, found that despite some universal pragmatic features of speech acts, they are also subject to culture-specific variations (Green, 1975; Wierzbicka, 1985). Blum-Kulka et al. write “If claims for the pragmatic universality are to approximate any type of validity, they should be based on the empirical investigation of many more and diverse languages” (1989:8). They propose investigating speech acts in a variety of languages and cultures other than English.

The present research responds to such a proposal. It examines a speech act of refusal in a non-Western language and culture, Persian, to show the aspects of universality and culture-specificity of this speech act in Persian.

Furthermore, it looks at refusal speech act beyond utterance level; that is in the discourse, using natural data to avoid the generally-held criticism of speech act theory that it is limited to the utterance/sentence level.

### **2.2.1 Speech Act, Face and Politeness**

Indirect speech act has been associated with politeness in many early studies in Pragmatics. Brown and Levinson (1978-1987), Leech (1983), and Searle (1976) postulated indirectness as a feature of politeness. Searle (1976) concluded that people tend to be indirect and use indirect speech acts such as refusal to be polite in their

conversation. Similarly, in explaining the violations of Grice's maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner, Leech (1983) linked indirectness with politeness.

However, it was in the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson in 1978 that speech act theory came to the fore as closely related to politeness. In fact Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, used speech act theory as its underlying notion. The second underlying notion of their theory was the notion of 'face'.

According to Brown and Levinson (1978/87), some speech acts are intrinsically "face threatening". They are called "face threatening acts" and abbreviated as FTAs. They may threaten the 'face' of the speaker, the hearer or both. Thus production of these kinds of acts brings about more challenge for language users in different cultural settings. Refusals belong to such category. They are known as dual face-threatening acts since they threaten the "face" of both speaker and hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987:61).

Brown and Levinson (1987) define "face" as "the public self image that every individual wants to claim for him/herself" (p. 67). They borrow this term from Goffman (1967) and use it in their introduction of "politeness" theory. Brown and Levinson then divide face into two aspects: positive and negative. Positive face is defined as "the individual's wants of admiration and approval" and negative face is the individual's "wants of freedom from imposition" (p. 61).

Certain linguistic realizations of speech acts are very sensitive to the 'face' of the addressee and even the speaker. For example, a direct refusal has the possibility to offend the addressee and hence threaten his/her face. Realizations of speech acts in inappropriate ways may be taken as 'impolite' and damages the speaker's face. To avoid threat to each other's face, people try to 'mitigate' their production of FTAs by

using certain strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson call these strategies as “politeness strategies”.

Face threatening acts are also determined by context. Based on the three social factors ‘power’, ‘distance’, and the degree of imposition of a given act in a particular context, an individual evaluates the degree of FTA and then chooses the most appropriate strategy to produce that speech act (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Depending on the degree of the threat the speaker has calculated, he/she may produce a speech act using one of the following strategies:

1. *Bald on-record*: these strategies are usually put into practice via direct speech acts, which have clear illocutionary force, as in ‘shut the door’.
2. *Off-record*: Using these strategies, speakers are vague in conveying what they mean. They might for example beat around the bush or may indirectly produce an utterance. This kind of utterance is supposed to be implied by the hearer. For example, in saying ‘it’s a bit hot outside’ the speaker might be requesting the addressee to open a window or turn on the air condition, but leaves it open to the addressee to imply this request and comply with it. If the addressee understands the request, but does not comply with it, for example saying that the air-condition is out of order, then the speaker can say that he/she just meant that it was hot outside as a declarative sentence.
3. *Positive politeness*: these strategies are applied to fulfill the hearer’s desire to be liked or acknowledged. For example, the endearment ‘honey’ in the refusal ‘I’m very busy today honey’ is a positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 75)

4. *Negative politeness*: this group of strategies is used to satisfy the hearer's desire to be respected or recognized. An interesting point about negative politeness strategies is their inclination to go on-record (as a prerequisite to being seen to pay face) on one hand and the desire to go off-record (to avoid imposing) on the other. Consequently, a compromise is attained in conventional indirectness to fulfill the two goals. For example "Can you open the window?" is recognized as a request by all hearers except in very special circumstances (for instance, you ask your friend to open the rusty window that you were not able to open).
5. *Don't do the FTA*: Sometimes speakers find some speech acts too face threatening to be produces. Therefore, they prefer to remain silent and do not produce the FTA at all. (Brown & Levinson, 1987: pp. 68-75)

### **2.2.2 Speech Acts in Persian**

A few scholars (Eslami Rasekh, 2004, 1993; Koutlaki 2002; Nanbakhsh, 2009, Izadi & Zuraida, 2010) have investigated speech act realizations in Persian. The majority of these studies have aimed to examine linguistic politeness through the realization of speech acts in Persian (Eslami Rasekh, 2004, 1993; Koutlaki 2002; Nanbakhsh, 2009, Izadi & Zuraida, 2010; to name a few). These studies have sought a variety of purposes; some have made cross-cultural comparisons (e.g. Eslamirasekh, 2004), while others have focused on the production and reception of speech acts by Iranian learners of English as a foreign language (Izadi & Zuraidah, 2010; Shokouhi and Khalili, 2008).

However, there are studies which have only described the realization patterns of these speech acts by the monolingual Persian speakers (Afghari, 2007; Shariati and Chamani, 2009 on apology; Koutlaki, 2002, on offers and expressions of thanks).

Generally, requests (Eslamirasekh, 1993), compliments, apologies (Shariati and Chamani, 2009; Afghari, 2007; Eslamirasekh, 2004), refusals (Izadi & Zuraidah, 2010; Shokouhi and Khalili, 2004), favor asking (Yarmohammadi, 2003), complains (Yarmohammdi, 2003), offers and thanks (Koutlaki, 2002) are among some speech acts which have been under the focus of the pragmatic studies in Persian.

Eslami Rasekh (1993) compares the realization of speech act of requests between Iranian Farsi speakers and American English speakers. Using DCT as a method of data collection, and Brown and Levinson's theory as theoretical framework, Eslami Rasekh (1993) finds that Iranian speakers of Farsi are more direct in the production of requests compared to the American English speakers. However, Iranians use more attention getters (e.g. excuse me), supporters (e.g. it's too cold in here) and internal modifiers (please).

She proposes that there is a higher level of directness in Iranians' linguistic behavior concerning requests compared to Americans which cannot be associated with Iranian impoliteness. Her findings reinforce the suggestions by Blum-Kulka (1987) that politeness and indirectness are not necessarily the same. Eslami Rasekh's (1993) justification for the directness found in her data was that Iranian society has orientation to positive politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987) or solidarity politeness (Schollon & Schollon, 1983). And solidarity politeness has its roots in group-orientedness in Iranian culture. "Individualism", as it is repeatedly attributed to Western culture, has no place in Iranian culture.

What is relevant from the findings of the above mentioned studies in Persian is that generally they have reported that Iranians prefer more indirect strategies to produce different speech acts compared with direct ones (Afghari, 2007; Shariati & Chamani,

2009; Shokouhi and Khalili, 2008), which could be attributed to their orientation to politeness.

Studies on Persian refusals (Shokouhi and Khalili, 2008; Izadi and Zuraidah, 2010) have also supported the findings of other studies on refusals that a variety of indirect strategies are preferred in order to make refusals. Reasoning has been found to be the most frequent strategy. However, these studies have focused on learner language and the possibility of pragmatic transfer and have used DCT for data collection. The present research, however, takes a deeper look at refusals in context and beyond the sentence level.

### **2.2.3 Methodological Concerns in Speech Act Research**

Methodology has always been the concern of pragmatic research, especially speech acts. The most common method of data collection in speech act research has been ‘questionnaires’ of different types: open ended, closed ended, etc. A very common type of these questionnaires is discourse completion Task/Test which is abbreviated as DCT.

DCTs have been used by many researchers for they give the opportunity to provide large samples in a short time. They also enable the researchers to control the variables like gender, social class, etc. and also to make comparisons between speech acts produced by native and nonnative or native speakers of two or more languages.

The DCTs, however, suffer from important shortcomings. Rose (1994), for instance, criticizes DCTs for the lack of contextual variation. DCTs have also been criticized for simplifying complex interactions. The imaginary interactional settings are another problem of DCTs. As Nelson et al. (2002:168) say “what people claim they would say in a hypothetical situation is not necessarily what they actually would say in a real

situation”. That the collected data via this method is not a reflection of natural data is a problem of other forms of elicited data too (Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Rose, 1992). The present study subscribes to the point that DCTs and other instruments which collect hypothetical situations cannot be valid for pragmatic investigation of speech acts in real context.

In a study, Sadler & Eröz (2001) pointed out that a few of the situations in the DCT developed by Beebe et al. (1990) were difficult to refuse even for the English native speakers. They mentioned the situation where the boss invites the employee to a party at his home. They believe that it would be difficult for employees from any country to refuse such an invitation. In a recent study by Izadi and Zuraidah (2010) in Persian language the participants verbally reported that they would never refuse in some of the hypothetical situations in the DCT, especially when the power of the addressee is high and there is a high risk in refusals. A refusal by a student may offend a teacher and brings about negative consequences of marking down or any other prejudice against the refuser. These students said that they would realize the high risk of refusing someone in power and thus try to avoid the probable repercussions. They went on to say that they try not to refuse at all at that moment, but later they would evade the responsibility of doing the task. They asserted that they would unwillingly accept the request to avoid the repercussions (pp. 13-14). A student reported that refusing a teacher may bring hostility of the teacher and this might have negative results in the teacher’s decision about her. The safest action is, therefore, to promise to comply with the request at the moment that the request is being made but later on find ways to evade the task.

Some studies (Felix-Brasdefer 2004, 2006) have tried to use role play scenarios to allow the data to be more similar to natural data, or to triangulate the data which means using more than one single method for data collection.



The best data for pragmatic analysis is natural data. Collection of naturally occurring data in pragmatic research was first proposed by Wolfson (1983). She emphasized that using “ethnographic field work” as the only reliable method of data collection. Wolfson (1981) suggested that “patterns of speech behavior are part of communicative competence of the native speaker, and must be observed in naturalistic settings in order for any analysis to be valid”.

This method was employed successfully by Manes and Wolfson (1981), as well as Holmes (1990). Olshtain and Cohen (1983) to study the speech act of ‘apology’ in English. They also noted that during recording of naturally occurring data the specific speech act under study may not occur sufficiently in natural context and it may take a long time to record sufficient instances on the speech act.

Cohen (1996) has summarized advantages and disadvantages of the natural data gathering. Some of the advantages Cohen pointed to are 1) the data are spontaneous, 2) the data reflect what the speakers say rather than what they think they would say, and 3) the speakers are reacting to a natural situation rather than to a contrived and possibly unfamiliar situation. There might, however, be some disadvantages, such as difficulty in controlling the variables and insufficient number of naturally occurring speech acts under focus (Bardovi- Harlig and Hartford, 1993 cited in Cohen, 1996).

Despite the above-mentioned disadvantages ethnographic observation of speech acts may give the perceptions on how people refuse in natural communication (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Trosborg, 1987; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Holmes, 1990; Rose, 1994).

However, as Wolfson et al. (1989:194) declared, “an ideal way for data collection for the study of speech acts is based on both systematic observation and elicitation procedures and analysis”. The very first steps to observe and collect naturally occurring speech act under investigation is for the researcher to observe as wide a range

of situations as possible to acquire ideas, frequencies, distributions and combination of strategies that are used. This careful observation helps the researcher to understand the speech act in focus (in our case refusal) in its wider context of use and the conditions which regulate it.

Although this data collection method is introduced as an ideal methodology, very few research has used this method. Kasper and Dahl (1991) referred to two studies which used natural data in interlanguage pragmatics (Bardovi- Harlig and Hartford 1990; Wolfson 1989). The present study uses naturally-occurring refusals where part of the refusals is selected from audio-recorded conversations, while the other part of the data is field noted.

### **2.3 Research on Refusals**

Studies have addressed refusals from three different perspectives: The first category of studies includes those studies which have attempted to compare and contrast the realization of refusals in two or more languages. These studies are in line with cross-cultural pragmatic research. Among such studies are refusal studies by Kwon (2003) on Korean and American English, Liao and Bresnahan (1996) on Mandarin Chinese and American English, Nelson et al (2002) on Egyptian Arabic and American English and Al-Shalawi (1997) on English and Arabic.

The second group of researchers was concerned about reception and production of refusals by language learners. The majority of the studies in this category which is known as ‘interlanguage pragmatics’ have focused on the comparison of learner refusal with native speaker refusals and have looked for evidence of pragmatic transfer as the source of similarity and dissimilarity between the learner language and the native speaker of the target language (mainly English). Interlanguage pragmatics deals with the

learner language and looks at the pragmatic features of the language of learners (Kasper, 1990). Examples of these studies are the groundbreaking study of Beebe et al. (1990), Takahashi and Beebe (1987), Wannaruk (2008) and Al-Eryani (2007). Some of the studies in this category have also addressed cross-cultural comparison of the learners' first and target language (Wannaruk, 2008; Beebe, 1990) on refusals.

The third group of research deals with refusals in monolingual/monocultural settings. This group of studies has more relevance to the present study which attempts to look at refusals in one language, Persian. The most important of these studies are Felix-Brasdefer (2006) in Mexican Spanish, Kuang (2009) in Malay, Oktoprimasakti (2006) in Indonesian, Garcia (1999) in Spanish and Beebe and Cumming (1996) in American English.

As in research on other speech acts, the variables 'power' and 'distance' have almost always been a concern in refusal research since they influence the choice of refusal strategies greatly. Refusals are usually studied in three levels of social status: higher, equal and lower. The results of these studies have shown that the degree of indirectness in strategy use is conditioned by the interlocutors' social rank and differs from one language society to another (Beebe et al. 1990; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; and Nelson et al., 2002; Felix-Brasdefer, 2004, 2006). All these studies have proved that maintaining unequal social status with speaker and the hearer influences the use of refusal strategies.

In the next paragraphs, some of the most relevant studies will be reviewed with reference to the social variables power and social distance, as they are the concern of the second research question of the present study.

An influential study on refusals is that of Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Wells (1990). The results of the study revealed that there is an interaction between the status of the participants and the directness of refusals. Americans usually employ indirect strategies in refusing regardless of the status of the interlocutor, whereas the Japanese tend to use more direct strategies when addressing a lower status person and more indirect strategies when refusing persons of higher ranks.

Beebe et al (1990) also created a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and a comprehensive categorization of refusals which have been used in many later studies carried out on refusals (e.g. Felix Brasdefer, 2004, 2006; Von Canon, 2006). The present study adopts their classification of semantic formula used in refusals which are known as 'refusal strategies' (appendix A) in refusal research. This classification of refusals includes the following categories: direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjuncts to refusals. Two major classes of refusals are direct and indirect which have their own sub-classes. Also, there are strategies which are not considered as part of refusals, but are adjuncts to them. Adjuncts to refusals may be preceded or follow the main acts of refusals.

The work of Chen, Ye & Zhang (1995) investigated Chinese native speakers' refusal strategies. Fifty male and the same number of female speakers of Mandarin Chinese who had lived in the U.S. for 2.4 years on average at the time of the research performed refusals to requests, suggestions, invitations and offers. A questionnaire consisting of 16 questions was used as the data collection device of the study. The first part of the data analysis involved studying the relationship between subjects and addressees in terms of social status. The second part of the analysis described the subjects' strategies used to interpret and respond to offers. The findings of the study revealed that Chinese people consider refusals as acts having a potentially negative influence on future interaction.

As a result they use implicit, indirect strategies to avoid threatening the face of the ones involved in the interaction.

Beebe and Cummings (1996) studied refusal responses collected with two different data collection procedures. Eleven ESL teachers completed a questionnaire while another eleven teachers were asked the same questions on the phone to be answered verbally. The comparison of oral answers and DCTs indicated that DCTs are an efficient data-eliciting device for quick collection of a large amount of data. The oral data, however, resulted in more lengthy responses that were also deeper emotionally and psychosocially. For example, role plays allow the researcher to extend the turns of the interaction so that a speech act is finally accomplished. The methodological comparison in this study suggests that oral data like role plays and naturally occurring data should be privileged in pragmatic research.

Nelson et al. (2002) applied a modified version of the DCT for studying similarities and differences between Americans and Egyptians in making refusals. Arabs tend to show more awareness of status differences in refusing of a person in higher status than Americans do. They found refusals in Arabic language and culture even more 'face' threatening than what is perceived in American culture. In hierarchical societies in general and Iranian society in particular, people tend to be more aware of status differences, as these differences are more vivid. Also similar to Arabic culture, refusals in Persian are very likely to cause offense and communication breakdown. As people rely a lot on group membership (Eslamirasekh, 1993), they do not like to be refused.

Kwon (2003) examined the use of the refusal strategies among Korean speakers and American English speakers. Kwon has also used Beebe et al. (1990) classification of refusals. The data were gathered by using Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The results revealed that despite the fact that both groups have used similar refusal strategies

in their languages, cross cultural differences were obvious. Kwon suggested that negative pragmatic transfer is indeed a potential source of miscommunication due to the inadequacy of ESL learners' knowledge of sociolinguistic rules.

Kuang's (2009) study used naturally occurring refusals gathered through field observation. This study shows more complexities of refusal strategies used by different ethnic groups of Malaysian society. The present study agrees with this study in that natural data gives more opportunity to observe the linguistic complexities of strategies used in refusals.

Felix-Brasdefer's (2006) study is another relevant study to the present research in that it used Beebe et al.'s classification of refusal strategies as an analytical tool, and focused on 'social distance' and 'power'. The study explored refusals only in one language which is Mexican Spanish. It was, however, different with the present research in that it used open role plays complemented with retrospective verbal report for data collection. In her study, too, social power and social distance played an important role in selecting the linguistic strategies by Mexican speakers of Spanish.

There seems to be a consensus among previous studies on refusals that 'reasoning' is the most frequent strategy universally. However, the above reviewed studies have not provided a detailed description of refusal strategies based on the selected initiating acts (e.g. request, suggestion, etc.). The strategies which are employed in refusing a request might not be the same as strategies which are required to refuse an offer. The present study considers the choice of strategies by Iranian Farsi speakers as influenced by the act which projects refusals to fill this gap in the research.

## 2.4 Classification of Refusal Strategies

Beebe et al (1990) divided refusal strategies into three main categories: direct, indirect and adjuncts to refusals. These strategies are introduced and explained in this section.

### 2.4.1 Direct Strategies

Most of the studies on speech acts are based on the degree of directness and also the different coding categories to refer to the form, semantic content, or primary illocutionary force (cf. Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). For the present study, the continuum of directness consists of four sub group as performative, non-performative statement, 'No' and, negative willingness/ability. Examples and explanations are as follows:

#### a. Performative

Performatives are “self-naming utterances, in which the performative verb actually refers to the act in which [the speaker] is involved at the moment of speech” (Leech 1983). For example, in a refusal to a request, the expression of, “I refuse”, will be used.

#### b. Non-performative

##### 1. 'No'

'No' without any modification is another strategy to perform the refusals. This strategy as Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-weltz (1990) stated is a non-performative expression.

## 2. Negative willingness/ability

This strategy contains any word that provides the negative ability or willingness of the refuser. Some examples from the current study are:

### **English**

'I can't'

'I won't'

### **Persian equivalence**

'*nemitoonam*'

'*nemikham*'

### **2.4.2 Indirect strategies**

On the degree of indirectness and its relationship to speech acts, Leech (1983) stated that "illocutions are ordered with respect to the path (in terms of means-end analysis) connecting the illocutionary act to its illocutionary goal" (p. 123). The indirectness continuum consists of 12 strategies used for the present study and the explanations and examples from this study are presented below.

#### a. Statement of Apology / Regret

According to Leech (1983), apologies "express regret for some offence committed by s[peaker] against h[earer] – and there is no implication that s[peaker] has benefited from the offence". In order to mitigate the indirectness of refusal, the expressions of regret, employing apology, or asking for forgiveness will be used. Examples below show this type of strategy. Some examples from the current study are:

### **English**

'I apologize'

'I'm really sorry.'

### **Persian equivalence**

'*Ozr mikham*'

'*Vaghean moteasefam.*'



b. Wish

The speaker expresses the desire or wish to accept the invitation, suggestion, offer or request. Some examples from the current study are:

**English**

'I wish I could stay.....'

**Persian equivalence**

*'Kash mitoonestam bemoonam ....'*

c. Excuse/ Reason/ Explanation

In this strategy, by providing an excuse, the refuser indirectly refuses a request, suggestion, invitation and an offer. It has been shown in many studies on refusals (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Felix-Brasdefer, 2002; Garcia, 1999; Gass & Houck, 1999; King & Silver, 1993; Margalef-Boada, 1993), that excuses, reasons or explanations may be general or specific. A general reason does not provide specific or detailed information; on the other hand, a specific reason provides very detailed information to mitigate the refusal. Some examples from the current study are:

**English**

'I have a commitment.'  
'I have exam tomorrow and  
I have to study hard tonight.'

**Persian equivalence**

*'Gharar dalam.'*  
*'Farda emtehan dalam emshab va  
bayad kheyli bekhoonam.'*

d. Statement of alternative

The other indirect strategy which is used to reduce the face-threatening nature of refusal is alternative. This strategy allows the refuser to suggest other alternatives or possibilities to maintain positive face with the interlocutor and to negotiate the refusal response.

According to Rubin (1983), an alternative is used "in order not to offend or to direct the conversation away from the request". Beebe et al. (1990) provided some examples to illustrate this coding category, they introduced two types of alternatives first those that include the refuser ("I can do X instead of Y,") and those that direct the requester to someone or something else ("Why don't you do X instead of Y,"). Some examples from the current study are:

**English**

**Persian equivalence**

'Why don't you ask the lecturer? '  
'If you want let's study together'.

*'chera nemiri az ostad beporsi?'*  
*'Age bekhay mitoonim ba ham dars bekhoonim.'*

e. Set condition for future or past acceptance

This type is an indirect response by using a hypothetical condition as a reason for refusing to different situations. Some examples from the current study are:

**English**

**Persian equivalence**

'I'll do it next time.'  
'If you had asked me earlier,  
I would have accepted. '

*'Dafe dige anjamesh midam.'*  
*'Age zoodtar gofte boodi  
hatman ghabool mikardam.'*

f. Promise of future acceptance

The refuser doesnot refuse on the spot, but promises to accept in future which functions as a refusal. An example from the current study is:

**English**

**Persian equivalence**

'I'll do it next time.'

*'Dafe dige anjamesh midam.'*

g. Statement of principle

By using this type of strategy, the refuser tries to make a general attitude or belief about the situation. The statement of principle makes the interlocutors feel more distance in their relationships. Some examples from the current study are:

**English**

**Persian equivalence**

'I usually study alone.'

'*ma'amoolan tanha dars mikhoonam*'.

'I don't drink tea after my main meal.'

'*Ba'ad azghazay aslim chay nemikhoram*'.

h. Statement of philosophy: By this strategy, the refuser uses a general rule or a philosophical statement. An example from current study is:

**English**

**Persian equivalence**

'One can't be too careful'

'*adam nemituneh inhame movazeb bashe*'

i. Attempt to dissuade the interlocutor: This strategy is divided into five substrategies: 1) Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester to refuse an invitation (e.g., 'I won't be any fun tonight'), 2) Guilt trip (e.g., 'I can't make a living off people who just order coffee'), 3) Criticize the request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or opinion); insult/ attack as in 'That's a terrible idea', 4) Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping a request, 5) Let the interlocutor off the hook as in 'Don't worry about it', and 6) Self-defense as in 'I'm doing my best'.

j. Acceptance that functions as a refusal: This strategy is divided into two substrategies: 1) Unspecific or indefinite reply and 2) lack of enthusiasm: In the former, the refuser's response is unclear, vague, uncertain, or undecided. The speaker/ refuser in this strategy is trying not to make any commitment thus the

response is left open or indefinite. In the latter, the refuser shows lack of interest in complying with the act. Some examples from the current study are:

<b>English</b>	<b>Persian equivalence</b>
'I'll let you know'	<i>'Behet khabar midam'</i>
'If I can, I'll be there'	<i>'Agar toonestam meyam'</i>
'I'll try but I can't promise anything'	<i>'Saay mikonam vali ghol nemidam'</i>

- k. Avoidance: In this strategy, the refuser avoids linguistic refusing either verbally or non-verbally. Some verbal avoidance strategies are topic switch, joke, repetition of part of request, and Postponement. Nonverbal avoidance may be done through silence, hesitation, do nothing, physical departure. In the next example, the refuser uses postponement to avoid refusal. An example from the current study is:

<b>English</b>	<b>Persian equivalence</b>
'I can come tomorrow and do that together.'	<i>'Mitoonam farda sobh beyaym va in kar ra anjam bedahim.'</i>

#### **2.4.3 Adjuncts to Refusals**

Adjuncts are considered as external modifications to the refusal. They may appear before or after the main refusal, and do not count as refusals. If they appear without an excuse for example they sound like acceptance to the requests, offers, suggestions or invitations. Therefore, they 'support' a given refusal in some way. These include statement of positive opinions/ feeling or agreement, statement of empathy, pause fillers, gratitude/ appreciation.

1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement

In this adjunct speaker expresses positive expressions in response to refuse an invitation, suggestion, offer or request before or after the main refusal. These expressions include the expressions of well-wishing.

**English**

**Persian equivalence**

'Congratulations to pass  
your exam, but.....'

*'tabrik migam ke emtehanet ra  
ghabool shodi vali .....*

I would love to stay and help out but... *Doost daram beyam va komak konam vali ...'*

2. Statement of empathy

In the statements of empathy, another type of adjunct, the response to refuse offers, suggestions, invitations or request is accompanied by showing identification with and understanding of other part's situation, feelings and motives. This strategy shows and builds up the solidarity with the refusee. An example from the current study is:

**English**

**Persian equivalence**

'Well the thing is I understand  
you perfectly but....'

*'Khob masaaleh ine ke khoob  
darket mikonam vali...'*

3. Pause fillers Some examples from the current study are: (e.g., “Uh”, “Well”, “Umm”, “oh”).

4. Gratitude / Appreciation:

Like other adjuncts to refusals, these expressions can be used at the beginning or at the end of main refusals. Some examples from the current study are:

## English

## Persian equivalence

'Thanks for the invitation but...'  
'I appreciate the suggestion but....'

'Az daavatetoon motshakeram ama...'  
'Vaghean az pishnehadetoon ghadrdani  
mikonam ama....'

### 2.5 Sequences of Refusal

The sequences of a refusal strategy are in 3 phases (Beebe, Takahashi, Uliss Weltz, 1990): Pre-refusal, Head act or Main refusal, and Post- refusal. So according to them the addressee prepares the speaker for the upcoming refusal by the first phase, then he/she produces the main refusal, and at the end, the addressee will do the post refusal strategy to justify, mitigate or emphasize the main refusal. For example, a refusal sequence of someone to his friend's invitation for dinner would be: "uhm, I'd really like to, but I can't. I'm sorry. I have a difficult exam tomorrow.

Table 2.1: Refusal Sequences

Linguistic utterances	Refusal sequences	Strategy
Uhm,	(pre-refusal)	(adjuncts to refusals) pause filler
I'd really like to	(pre-refusal)	(adjuncts to refusals) willingness
But I can't	(main refusal)	(direct) negative ability
I'm sorry.	(post- refusal)	(indirect) statement of regret
I have a difficult exam tomorrow	(post- refusal)	(indirect) reason/ excuse/ explanation

According to the previous studies on refusals (Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-weltz, 1990; Garcia 1992, 1999; Gass & Houck 1999; Rubin 1993; All-Issa 1998; Felix-Brasdefer 2002, and Von Canon 2006) the refusal strategies obtained from the data for the present study were analyzed in terms of their frequency in all situations, and across the full interaction. The analysis of the speech act of refusal in terms of refusal

sequences allowed the researcher to examine the full refusal interaction and the discourse structure of the speech act of refusals.

## **2.6 Socio-Cultural Norms of Persian**

Politeness is highly valued in Iranian culture. Persian language is a manifestation of the great value its speakers assign to polite verbal and nonverbal behaviour. A rich variety of lexicon and syntactic form referring to and reflecting the speakers' respect toward the addressee is a reason for this claim. According to Jahangiri (2000), "the polite form [of Persian language] reflects a part of the cultural identity of the Iranian people and the social structure in which they live" (p. 176).

Power and solidarity are two important social elements which are reflected in the linguistic forms of the interaction in Persian language. The two major aspects of the politeness form in Persian are considered to be general humility and respect and its relationship to power and solidarity (Jahangiri, 2000: 176). Variation in lexicon is used as a means by Persian speakers to project and emphasize the hierarchical nature of the social interactions. For example, in Persian the substitution of second person singular pronoun /to/ for the plural pronoun /shoma/ and the word /jenab (e) ali or hazrate ali (meaning your Excellency), in a typical interaction, when irony, sarcasm and the like are not intended, reflects the humility of the speaker while respecting the addressee (Jahangiri, 2000: 182-185).

Iranian society is a more group-oriented society and puts more emphasis on the importance of society, family, solidarity, and common ground as opposed to individual, privacy, individual rights, and autonomy of individuals (Eslami Rasekh, 2004; Koutlaki, 2002). As it has been noticed by Wierzbicka, "in Anglo-Saxon culture, distance is a positive cultural value, associated with respect for the autonomy of the

individual" (Wierzbicka, 1985:156). By contrast in Persian culture, it is associated with aloofness, emotional coolness and indifference (Eslami Rasekh, 2004).

'*Taarof*' has been addressed as a backbone of Persian politeness system (Koutlaki, 2002, Nanbakhsh, 2009; Sahragard, 2003, Sharifian, 2007,) and seems to be dominant in a majority of interactions between Iranians in different settings. The meaning and the concept of *Taarof* is broad and multidimensional one. Functionally, ostensible invitations, genuine invitations, ostensible and genuine repetitive offerings, a particular kind of refusal rejoinder to an offer along with expression of thanks, and let the companion go ahead as a kind of respect are all encompassed in the functional meaning of "*taarof*" (Koutlaki, 2002).

Offers and expressions of thanks, as two aspects of *taarof* have been investigated by Koutlaki (2002) as the main manifestation of Persian ritual politeness (pp. 1740-42.). Taking the role of a researcher as well as a member of a group of the participants in her study, through natural data, she observes that expressions of thanks are often used to respond to offers. The thanking functions as refusal but they are not often taken as face threatening because they are part of ritual politeness (*taarof*) and they are a response to another aspect of *taarof*, which is offer.

In another study, however, Nanbakhsh (2009) considers the potential threat of *taarof* to the addressee's face, especially when overdone and exaggerated. She argues that '*taarof*' can be taken as "overly polite" and inappropriate behaviour in certain contexts. Many a time, speakers of Persian criticize and express their negative attitude towards *taarof*, in that it is tedious, pneumatic and spurious (sahragard, 2003). Beeman (1976) reports that "Iranian youth cry in despair and its [*taarof*'s] pervasiveness, but they are powerless against it, and practice it themselves even while complaining about it." These two studies on *taarof* suggest that the degree of face threat or face keeping involved in



*taarof* depends on the context and the mutual expectations of participants who are involved in the interactions.

## **2.7 Summary**

Studies on speech acts and particularly on refusals suggest that refusals are among the speech acts which are not easy to produce. This difficulty is also added when we are involved in a situation to refuse a person who is socially higher than us. Or we have to refuse someone with whom we have had ongoing relationship and we know that our refusals will hurt her/him and may even cause communication breakdown. That is the reason why people in different cultures normally look for ways to minimize the probable negative effects of their refusal when they care for their relationship with others or they are entangled with a situation of refusing a powerful person. The studies reviewed in this chapter all reported the general preference of indirect refusals over direct ones. Based on the previous studies on refusals in different languages and some speech acts in Persian it is hypothesized that Iranian speakers of Persian will use more indirect refusals and will be very cautious while refusing a more powerful interlocutor.