Cross–linguistic Comparison of Refusal Speech Act: Evidence from Trilingual EFL Learners in English, Farsi, and Kurdish

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Abstract

To date, little research on pragmatic transfer has considered a multilingual situation where there is an interaction among three different languages spoken by one person. Of interest was whether pragmatic transfer of refusals among three languages spoken by the same person occurs from L1 and L2 to L3, L1 to L2 and then to L3 or from L1 and L1 (if there are more than one L1) to L2. This study aimed to investigate the production of refusals in three languages and to specify the impact of linguistic knowledge on pragmatic transfer of refusals. To this end, 161 participants in 5groups filled out a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Data was coded and analyzed according to semantic formula sequences. The data obtained from Kurdish learners of English who were also fluent in Farsi (Trilinguals) were compared with those in other four groups: 1)Native English speakers; 2)Monolingual speakers in Farsi; 3) Monolingual speakers in Kurdish; and 4) Bilingual Farsi learners of English. The results revealed that pragmatic transfer exists in choice and content of semantic formulae. It was also found that the sociocultural norms of English, Farsi, and Kurdish languages differ with respects to the refusal speech act and that individuals' social power and relative distance play a critical role in performing such a speech act. This research suggests that, in spite of the norm differences existing among these languages, transfer of refusals mostly occurs from Kurdish as L1but not from L2 (Farsi) to L3 (English).

1. Introduction

Communication with speakers of other languages is a complex behavior, which requires both linguistic and pragmatic competence. Up to a few decades ago, it was taken for granted that perfect mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation would lead to proper use of language. However, the language use (pragmatic meaning) is different from language usage (semantic meaning) (Cook, 1989). Communicative competence includes knowledge of vocabulary, knowledge of speaking rules, knowing how to use and respond to different types of speech acts, and knowing how to use language appropriately (Richard, Platt & Weber 1985, cited in Nunan, 2001).The function of an utterance must be established pragmatically. Lacking knowledge of pragmatic rules of the target language, learners may simply transfer pragmatic norms from their own native language. Most of cross-cultural communication breakdowns of EFL learners are mainly occurring due to pragmatic errors. Over the past five decades, pragmatic competence has been one of the phenomena which have come under the spotlight of many involved in the field of language teaching. Learners with not-well-established pragmatic competence are open to pragmatic failure where a hearer misinterprets the force of an utterance as something other than what the speaker intended it to be.

Transfer is a general term describing the carryover of the previous knowledge to subsequent learning situations. Many studies (Barron, 2002; Berns, 1990; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Eslami-rasekh, Eslami-rasekh, & Fatahi, 2004; Koike, 1996; Nakamura, 2005; Palma Fahey, 2005; Esmaeili, 2015; Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016) were carried out to examine different facets of this issue. Transferability studies have mostlyfocused on determining how, why, and when L1 features can be transferred to an L2. In this regard, EFL and ESL learners' pragmatic transfer has been of interest for a

few recent decades. Considering transferability, speech acts have been the most of the researched issues. Transferability of speech acts has moreover become a center of excellence to research cross-cultural training due to their relationship with politeness strategies (see Akbari, 2002; Felix-Brasdefer, 2006; House & Kasper, 1981; Koike, 1989). Failure in communication sometimes causes serious problem like bringing up the feeling of incursion to one's territory. An incursion into other's territory not only is not welcome but also may be considered as an offense. It involves a threat to face or self-esteem and reflects in a threat to one's own face.

Refusal speech acts potentially have the capacity of becoming high-risk face threatening acts. The refusal speech act, as the focus of this study, occurs when a speaker directly or indirectly says 'no' to a request, invitation, suggestion or offer. It is often realized through indirect strategies, and therefore, unlike acceptance, it requires a high level of pragmatic competence (Cohen, 1996). Miscommunication may occur if the non-native speaker does not know how to make refusals in the target community. Accordingly, refusals are known as a 'sticking point' in cross-cultural communication (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990). Refusals usually contain various strategies to avoid offending interlocutors, varying across languages and cultures (Al-Eryani, 2007). The interlocutors should be cognizant of appropriate forms and their function, the speech act and its social components depending on each group and their cultural-linguistic values (Al-Kahtani, 2005, p.36).

Although there are several studies (Beebe et al., 1990; Chen, 1996; Kitao, 1996; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996; Robinson, 1992; Shigeta, 1974; Allami & Naeimi, 2011; etc.) on transferability in bilinguals, to the best knowledge of the researchers, a few, if not any, studies have been carried out on transferability of speech acts in trilingual speakers. The present study was to investigate

pragmatic transferability in trilingual speakers' refusing given scenarios. The implications of these findings are obviously important for foreign language researchers, instructors, learners and teachers, enabling them to anticipate, interpret, and produce sequential patterns which are cross-culturally different. Consequently, cross-cultural miscommunication may be effectively reduced by means of classroom teaching.

2. Review of Literature

Literature abounds with studies on the concept transferability, concerning bilingual EFL/ESL learners. In 1980s, the studies focused on L1; however, L2 and cross–cultural variations later caught the attention of researchers. Although investigating transferability of speech acts has been of great interest among researchers over last decades, the speech act of refusals as the most face threatening act has been permanently of concern.

Many researchers (Al-Kahtani, 2005; Wannaruk, 2008; Markus, 2014; Abed, 2011; Han & Burgucu-Tazegül, 2016; BabaeiShishavan & Sharifian, 2016; to name a few) compared and investigated refusal strategies. Shigeta (1974) conducted a comparative study on the use of refusal strategies by the Japanese and Americans in six different scenarios and observed that the Japanese were concerned about interlocutors' relative status while their American counterparts paid more attention to personal relations or familiarity. Additionally, the Japanese were more unclear in their responses. Beebe et al. (1990) compared the refusal strategies produced by Japanese speakers of English and native speakers of English through using DCT. They came to the conclusion that Japanese speakers of English and native speakers differed in three areas: the order of the semantic formula, the frequency of the formula,

and the content of the utterances. For example, American participants provided specific details when giving explanations; however, the Japanese often produced explanations that might be interpreted as ambiguous.

In another comparative study investigating native speakers of Korean and American English individuals, Lyuh (1992) reported that native speakers of Korean normally used more semantic formulae and more polite strategies per response than native speakers of American English. Korean speakers also used more avoidance and gratitude formula than native speakers of American English. The latter one referred to their personal decisions and preferences for excuses whereas the former resorted to circumstances beyond their control, de-personalizing their explanations (Lyuh, 1992). Furthermore, plain refusal statements such as "no" and "thank you" were rarely used by Korean speakers because, according to Lyuh, they were highly face-threatening. Finally, regarding the content of formulae, excuses were present for all groups; however, they were less specific for Japanese and Korean speakers alike. Korean refusals were more elaborated, indirect, and accommodating to face needs. The frequent use of these indirect, mitigated and less transparent refusals (Beebe, et al., 1990; See Appendix B) such as "I am sorry" (Regret), "Do not worry" (Letting the interlocutor off the hook), "I am not sure" (Hedging) or "If I do not show up on time, my wife will kill me" (Elaboration on the reason) lies in the fact that they contain a strategy that softens and cushions the blow of the refusal.

Yamagashira (2001) replicated Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz's (1990) study to examine whether or not the L2 proficiency, time spent on statements, and explicit instruction provided to promote pragmatic knowledge affect the Japanese speakers' pragmatic transfer. The results suggested that pragmatic

transfer in refusal situations does occur most frequently in a request situation when the requested were higher in status than the requester(s).

Bella (2011) investigated the effects of residence length and interaction intensity on the performance of non-native speakers of Greek when refusing an invitation. Specifically, he examined the strategies and mitigation devices used by learners with higher length of residence but restricted opportunities for social contact with native speakers and learners with lower length of residence having more opportunities for interaction with native speakers when performing this particular speech act and compared them to those employed by native speakers for the same situation. The finding showed that Greek speakers preferred lexical/phrasal mitigation devices which were to protect the interlocutor's positive face and avoided strategies that would cause distance between interlocutors. On the other hand, Han and Burgucu-Tazegül (2016) stated that L1 pragmatic transfer for Turkish EFL learners was indirectly related to EFL proficiency; the frequency of L1 pragmatic transfer decreased in higher levels of EFL proficiency. Kwon (2003) also studies pragmatic transfer of refusals among Korean EFL learners with different proficiency levels. The final pool of the participants in this study was distributed in three groups: native speakers of Korean, native speakers of English, and Korean EFL learners. There was a positive correlation between pragmatic transfer and learners' proficiency. Beginning and intermediate learners were not as direct as native speakers of English but they sounded more direct than advanced learners and native speakers of Korean.

In BabaeiShishavan and Sharifian's (2016) study entitled "The refusal speech act in a cross-cultural perspective: A study of Iranian English-language learners and Anglo-Australian speakers", the findings revealed that both groups of participants more frequently adopted indirect strategies while

addressing interlocutors of higher social power. The performance of the Iranian and Australian participants, however, differed while refusing interlocutors of equal status, resulting in intercultural miscommunication. They also claimed that the refusals made by Iranian students were highly affected by their L1 cultural schemas of *tă'ărof* (ritual politeness) and *ru-dar-băyesti* (state/feeling of distance-out-of-respect).

All aforementioned studies highlight the importance of conducting more and more detailed cross-cultural studies on refusals as a face threatening concept. Considering the dearth of research on the use of refusal speech acts among trilingual speakers, the purpose of this study was to look for cross-cultural differences and commonalities among trilingual speakers' use of refusals strategies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The study participants consisted of161 males and femalesclassifiedinto5 different groups (namely monolinguals: Iranian Kurdish speakers, Iranian Farsi speakers, and English speakers in California; Bilinguals: Farsi learners of English; and Trilinguals: Kurdish Farsi learners of English). In order to provide reliable findings, participants in all groups were randomly selected from those who had taken no course on pragmatics and had never travelled to English countries. The number of participants in each group was about 30. Control variables were as follows: Participants' age, language proficiency level, and length of residence in English countries. All participants except for

monolingual Kurdish group[1] aged 20-30 years (with the mean age of 24.3 years) and were university students. Only advanced trilingual and bilingual EFL learners (as determined by an IELTS sample test) were included.

3.2. Discourse Completion Test

Research data was gleaned out through a Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT) in the form of productive questionnaires developed by Beebe et al. (1990). The Farsi and Kurdish versions of this questionnaire were also administered but several necessary changes were made to make the situations more tangible for the participants. All versions were to be equivalent in terms of format and content. Controlled elicitation ways of gathering data and large quantity of data collected are considered as the advantages of DCTs. It consists of 2 sections: The first part involves demographic information such as sex, gender, length of residence in a foreign country, etc. The second part contains12 fixed discourse scenarios (3 suggestions, 3 invitations, 3 offers, and 3 requests which were different in terms of in social status (varying from high to equal and to low)). The blank part under each situation was to be filled out with one refusal statements (the one sparked first).

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[1]As one of the limitations of this study, age, as one of the control variables, had to be ignored in the case of monolingual Kurdish group due to the fact that educational system and media are in Persian in Iran and we had to select participants for this group from old women and men in one of the villages in Mahabad, Iran. These villagers had slight familiarity with Farsi language.

4. Procedure and Data Analysis

The DCTs were administered among participants. Monolinguals just received one of the versions of Farsi, Kurdish, or English DCTs, depending on their language proficiency. English monolinguals, Bilingual learners of English, and trilingual learners of English received the DCT score responding to number of languages they knew in order for their behavior to be assessed in the target language. The participants were encouraged to respond spontaneously. It took 15-20 minutes for them to complete the questionnaires in the presence of researchers. As another limitation of this study, Kurdish language has a written system which is mostly unknown even among Kurds. Accordingly, the researchers had to read aloud the scenarios and audiotape the responses provided Kurdish monolingual participants. Then, the collected data were analyzed for refusal speech act components present in the responses. The responses were coded based on semantic formulae developed by Beebe et al. (1990). In this classification, the refusal strategies are divided into two categories possessing some subcategories: direct and indirect. Direct strategies are performative, direct no, and negative willingness or ability. Indirect strategies involve a wider range of semantic formulae (including statement of regret, wish, excuse, statement of alternative, set condition for future/past acceptance, promise of future acceptance, statement of principle, statement of philosophy, attempt to dissuade interlocutor, acceptance that functions as a refusal, verbal/nonverbal avoidance, and adjuncts to refusals). In order to enhance the inter-coder reliability, the responses were coded by three other colleagues since there were disagreements on how to classify certain responses. Therefore, any coding inconsistency was discussed by raters to enhance the agreement level. Totally, the collected responses were coded and further

analyzed at two different levels: Direct/indirect strategies analysis and Content analysis. It is worth noting that some responses contained more than one simple refusal utterance. For example, consider the following scenario (Example1):

Example 1: *You arrive home and notice that your cleaning lady is extremely upset. She comes rushing up to you.*

Cleaning lady: *Oh God, I'm sorry! I had an awful accident. While I was cleaning I bumped into the table and your china vase fell and broke. I feel just terrible about it. I'll pay for it.*

You: *(Knowing that the cleaning lady is supporting three children.)*

You: *. . . . . No need, not a big deal, do not bother yourself!* . . . .

The response uttered not only consisted of refusing an offer (*no need*) but also let the interlocutor off the hook *(not a big deal, do not bother yourself).*

5. Result

The analyses focused on the refusal speech act used in 4 different speech situations by the invitee/refuser. Chi-square test was run to statistically examine significant differences in refusal strategies and to determine the frequency of trilingual speakers' transfers. The frequencies of direct and indirect strategies in given responses were counted. Table 1 displays the frequencies and percentages of the counted strategies.

Table 1.Frequencies and Percentages of Direct and Indirect Speech Acts of Refusals in Five Groups

GROUPS	SPEECHACT		Total
	Direct	Indirect	
Kurdish Speakers	293	815	1108
Count Expected	295.0	813.0	1108.0
Count% within Group	26.4%	73.6%	100.0%
Persian Speakers	200	821	1021
Count Expected	233.7	787.3	1021.0
Count% within Groups	19.6%	80.4%	100%
English Speakers	150	1111	1261
Count Expected	225.9	1035.1	1261.0
Count% within Group	11.9%	88.1%	100%
Bilingual Speakers	157	837	994
Count Expected	176.1	817.9	994.0
Count% within Group	15.8%	84.2%	100%
Trilingual learners	228	621	849
Count Expected	226.0	623.0	849.0
Count% within Group	26.9%	73.1%	100%

Although the use of indirect strategies by trilingual learners is nearly consistent with their use in their first language (Kurdish), such an agreement is not observed for the first language (Farsi) and second language in bilinguals (Table 1). Bilingual speakers employed indirect strategies of refusals in 84% of scenarios which reveals a 3.8% increase from 80.4 % use of indirect strategies by Farsi monolinguals. Since the participants in the current study were remarkably homogenous in their English learning background (the researchers, by inserting some questions in DCTs, ensured that none of the participants had been living in an English–language country and also none of them had received explicit knowledge on speech acts), the increase (3.8%) may be caused by

learning such strategies in L2. This increase indicates the absence of transferability of indirect refusal strategies from L1 to L2 for Bilinguals. Regarding trilingual speakers, the situation is not the same. The equal values obtained for using indirect strategies by Kurds and Trilinguals might indicate that, even though learning didn't have any impact on Kurdish–Farsi English speakers' use of indirect strategies of refusals, such a similarity can noticeably be a proof of the presence of transferability from L1 to L3. One possible justification for this may be explained by a strong sense of belonging and solidarity among Kurds and therefore the powerful influence of L1 on their successive languages (Farsi and English respectively). Another reason is related to the fact that Kurdish people have been hardly striving to maintain and spread their mother-tongue language over the past decades. Kurds' eagerness to maintain their L1 as a sign of their ethnicity can be explained based on Schmidt (2002) stating that language can be considered as a framework for ethnic identity and a constitutive factor of a concept of ethnicity. Carson's (1992) idea on the influence of L1 on other languages and learning as a sign of maintaining L1 is also in line with the findings of this study.

Based on the information displayed in Table1, six different comparative analyses of chi-square (Table 2) were run in order to examine whether the differences displayed in Table 1 are statistically significant or not.

Table 2. Chi-square Tests Results

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square (Bilingual Speakers & Persian Speakers)	4.973[a]	1	.026
Pearson Chi-Square (Bilingual Speakers &English Speakers)	7.187[b]	1	.007
Pearson Chi-Square (Trilingual Speakers &Persian Speakers)	13.868	1	.000
Pearson Chi-Square (Trilingual Speakers &Kurdish Speakers)	.042[d]	1	.838
Pearson Chi-Square (Trilingual Speakers &English Speakers)	77.218[e]	1	.000
Pearson Chi-Square (Persian Speakers &English Speakers)	25.716[f]	1	.000

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 176.11.

b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 135.33.

c. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 194.32.

d. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 226.02.

e. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 152.10.

f. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 156.60.

As shown in Table 2, the observed significance value for trilingual speakers comparing with the value observed for Farsi speakers, English speakers, and Kurdish speakers was 77.21 versus .000, .838, and .000 respectively. Hence, it was revealed that there were statistically significant differences between trilingual speakers and Farsi speakers on the one hand and between trilingual speakers and English speakers on the other hand. Nevertheless, the same result could not be maintained for Kurds. The observed significance value for the comparison made between trilingual speakers and Kurdish speakers was equal to .838, suggesting no significant difference with regard to the employment of direct and indirect refusal speech act. The results also confirmed that trilingual speakers in their interlanguage development used the patterns similar to their L1 patterns; therefore, transfer may occur from their L1 not L2.

Analyzing the bilinguals' data, Table 2 presents that the hypothesis concerning pragmatic transfer among bilinguals did not support the

transferability either from L1 or L2 with significance values of .026 and .007, considering the significant difference (x^2=25.716>x^2_{obs}=3.84,*df*=1) between English and Farsi speakers' use of refusal strategies. There was no evidence of significant difference; however, the same trace of using direct/indirect refusals was mostly from L1 than from L2 to learners' developmental interlanguage. Such finding is not somehow consistent with what has been mentioned in the literature on the issue of transferability among bilinguals. For example, Eisenstein and Bodman (1993) reported that pragmatic transfer was from L2 to native language in the case of Puerto Ricans who were residents of the United States for many years.

Table 2 does not reject the findings shown in Table 1. To put it in a nutshell, significant differences in employing refusal strategies existed in comparisons made between all paired groups but Trilinguals and Kurds and this reflects the presence of transferability from L1 to L3.

5.1. Content Analysis

Content analysis was typically done in order to investigate employing specific semantic formulae of refusals in depth. It is through this kind of analysis that pragmatic transfer becomes most evident. Running analyses for all the specified and counted codes in responses would be a dead-end job and would offer a bulk of nonsense information which hinders comprehending transferability. Subsequently, researchers decided to conduct comparative analyses on code(s) which were significantly distinguishing among groups. Another rational for specifying code(s) was that researchers figured out that previous studies had no strong foundations for selecting some specific codes to be discussed and only used numerical values and the frequency of occurrences, ignoring this fact that whether numerical values were significantly of essential

difference or not (e.g., Allami & Naeimi, 2011).Researchers tried to remedy the gap. To this end, all of the given responses in each group were coded separately. In order to identify significant codes and to put the analyses on a strong base, the Proportion Test was conducted. This formula made it possible to set up a criterion for choosing specific code(s). In this test, two hypotheses were specified for a code to be considered statistically significant and consequently be included in data analysis:

$H_0 : p \leq 50\%$: The response to a specific code is not statistically significant,

$H_1 : p > 50\%$: The response to a specific code is statistically significant.

Based on the distribution of standard score, the following formula was used. The estimated Z-score minimally should be equal to 1.96 for the null hypothesis to be rejected with 95 percent of confidence.

$$Z = \frac{p_1 - p_0}{\sqrt{\dfrac{p_0 . q_0}{n}}}$$

$P_1$is the proportion of the given answers to a specified code in samples, $P_0$is equal to base proportion (normally equal to 50%), q_0 is 1-P_0, and n is the number of participants in groups. If and only if the observed Z score is $Z \geq 1.96$ with probability level of 95%, the given code can be accepted as statistically significant and has been answered as much as needed. The observed value for n=30 is equal to:

$$p_1 = Z \times \sqrt{\frac{p_0 . q_0}{n}} + p_0 = 1.96 \times \sqrt{\frac{0.5 \times 0.5}{30}} + 0.5 = 0.679$$

The equivalent frequency for this valueis:

$$0.679 \times 30 = 20.37$$

Accordingly, for a specific code more than *21* responses are needed in order for that code to be statistically considered significant and be included in the following steps of data analysis. As it can be observed in Table 3, the only significant semantic formula to be considered for further analysis was *excuse/reason*. As a result, this semantic formula was worthy of analysis for the following steps to shed some light on the concept of transferability among Trilinguals. Thus, the researchers put *excuse/reason* as a base for next comparisons among different groups.

Table 3. Frequency of the Responses to Given Codes among Trilingual Learners

Semantic formulae	REQUEST			INVITE			SUGGEST			OFFER		
	LOW	EQUAL	HIGH	LOW	EQUAL	HIGH	LOW	EQUAL	HIGH	LOW	EQUAL	HIGH
Performative	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
"No"	6	14	9	7	0	6	5	9	8	6	14	11
Negative ability	4	6	19	16	8	12	6	17	6	9	14	2
St. of regret	14	16	7	19	18	12	4	1	1	8	0	0
Wish	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Excuse/reason	26	25	13	21	27	24	14	17	11	24	21	13
Alternative	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
Set condition	0	0	2	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	0
Promise	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
St. of principle	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	2	3	0	0
St. of philosophy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	1
Attempt to dissuade interlocutor	0	2	2	0	1	0	9	6	11	1	1	26
Acceptance as a refusals	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	3	0	0	0
Silence	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
avoidance	0	0	1	0	1	0	3	2	6	1	0	1
Adjuncts to refusals	3	5	8	6	12	5	9	6	8	9	14	9

Consequently, the frequencies of this formula (*explanation/reason*) were counted and displayed in Table 4 for monolinguals, bilinguals, and trilingual speakers.

Table 4.The Frequency of Explanation/Reason Semantic Formulae for Different Groups

	OFFER			SUGGEST			INVITE			REQUEST		
	HIGH	EQUAL	LOW	HIGH	EQUAL	LOW	HIGH	EQUAL	LOW	HIGH	EQUAL	LOW
Kurds (*n*=30)	0	13	18	18	13	18	13	22	21	12	16	20
Trilinguals (*n*=30)	13	21	24	11	17	14	24	27	21	13	25	26
Persian (*n*=35)	15	30	12	2	17	18	29	31	30	19	27	32
Bilinguals (*n*=32	15	17	25	4	21	15	26	23	24	19	21	29
English (*n*=34)	11	24	21	7	16	14	23	25	34	16	25	33

The frequencies of the semantic formula of explanation/ reason as an indirect speech act of refusal were significant; therefore, two comparative Chi-square analyses (Table 5) were run to detect any significant difference for 4 speech situations (namely request, offer, invitation, and suggestion) among monolinguals based on the frequency of provided responses. These comparative studies were conducted among three languages involved in order to examine the existing similarities or differences in using this formula for various social statuses (lower, equal, higher). In the case of observing differences, but not similarities, between these paired monolingual groups'

using explanation/reason formula, it may be possible to claim that transfer has/ has not occurred between Bilingual and Trilingual speakers.

Table 5. The Analysis of Chi-Square for Using Explanation/Reason in Speech Act of Refusals among Monolingual Speakers

		OFFER			SUGGESTION			INVITATION			REQUEST		
		HIGH	EQUAL	LOW	HIGH	EQUAL	LOW	HIGH	EQUAL	LOW	HIGH	EQUAL	LOW
Persian vs. English	*significant difference*	No	No	No	**YES**	No	No	No	No	No	**YES**	No	No
	asymp.sig (2sided)	.32	0.73	0.55	0.02	0.11	0.14	0.39	0.89	0.07	0.02	0.13	0.37
	Pearson chi-square	.00	0.12	0.36	5.24	2.55	2.15	0.73	0.02	3.36	5.22	2.32	0.81
	Phi	0.12	0.04	0.07	0.28	0.19	0.18	0.10	0.02	0.22	0.28	0.18	0.11
Kurdish vs. English	*significant difference*	**YES**	No	No	**YES**	No	**YES**	No	No	**YES**	No	**YES**	**YES**
	asymp.sig (2 sided)	0.00	0.09	0.57	0.00	1.00	0.05	0.13	0.76	0.00	0.89	0.03	0.00
	Pearson chi-square	10.34	2.82	0.32	11.87	0.00	3.85	2.26	0.09	10.40	0.02	4.85	11.72
	Phi	0.40	0.21	0.07	0.43	0.00	0.24	0.19	0.04	0.40	0.02	0.28	0.43

The results of the Chi-square tests for Kurdish and English speakers in three social statuses (low, high, and equal) showed that there was no significant difference among these two groups when employing explanation/reason for rejecting requests of an interlocutor in equal and high status. The observed chi-square values ($x^2_{obs, E}=2.82$, $x^2_{obs, H}=0.32$) are lower than the critical value of

3.84 at 1 degree of freedom. As represented in Table 6, the only significant difference among these two languages in refusing a request using explanation/reason was in low status (x^2=10.3, *df*=1, x^2_{obs}>x^2_{crt}=3.84, p=0.00≤ .05). Comparing the results of Chi-square among Farsi and English speakers, the researchers found no significant difference between these two groups in different social statuses for declining requests and these two languages similarly made use of explanation/reason in other situations.

To summarize the findings, speakers in English, Farsi, and Kurdish as separate languages acted similarly in many cases of using specified semantic formula of refusal; however, they differed significantly in some cases of using refusal formulae based on interlocutors' social status. Table 6 shows similarities and differences in employing explanation/reason across three languages. Then, the comparative tests were run to thoroughly investigate pragmatic transfer of refusals among bilinguals and trilinguals (Table 6).
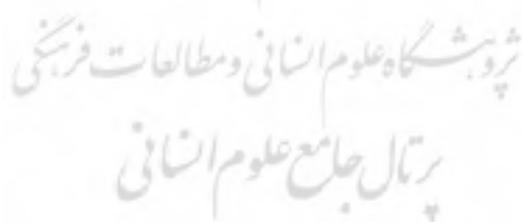
Table 6. Chi-Square Results for Using Explanation/Reason Semantic Formula in Different Groups

		REQUEST			INVITATION			SUGGESTION			OFFER		
		low	*equal*	*high*	*low*	*equal*	*high*	*low*	*equal*	*high*	*low*	*equal*	*high*
Trilinguals vs. English	*significant difference*	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
	asymp.sig (2sided)	0.12	0.34	0.76	0.00	0.09	0.26	0.65	0.44	0.15	0.11	1.00	0.37
	Pearson chi-square	2.39	0.90	0.09	11.87	2.84	1.25	0.20	0.59	2.04	2.54	0.00	0.82
	Phi	0.19	0.12	0.04	0.43	0.21	0.14	0.06	0.10	0.18	0.20	0.00	0.11
Trilinguals vs. Persian	*significant difference*	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	YES	YES	No	No
	asymp.sig (2sided)	0.54	0.53	0.38	0.12	0.86	0.76	0.70	0.52	0.00	0.00	0.12	1.00
	Pearsonchi-square	0.38	0.39	0.78	2.36	0.03	0.09	0.15	0.42	9.67	13.66	2.36	0.00
	Phi	0.08	0.08	0.11	0.19	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.08	0.39	0.46	0.19	0.00
Trilinguals vs. Kurdish	*significant difference*	No	YES	No	No	No	YES	No	No	No	No	YES	YES
	asymp.sig (2sided)	0.07	0.01	0.79	1.00	0.10	0.00	0.19	0.19	0.07	0.09	0.04	0.00
	Pearsonchi-square	3.35	6.24	0.07	0.00	2.78	8.53	1.70	1.70	3.27	2.86	4.34	16.60
	Phi	0.24	0.32	0.03	0.00	0.22	0.38	0.17	0.17	0.23	0.22	0.27	0.53
Bilinguals vs. Persian	*significant difference*	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	YES	YES	No
	asymp.sig (2sided)	0.92	0.30	0.67	0.27	0.08	0.86	0.71	0.16	0.33	0.00	0.00	0.74
	Pearson chi-square	0.01	1.09	0.18	1.23	2.98	0.03	0.14	1.98	0.94	12.99	8.48	0.11
	Phi	0.01	0.13	0.05	0.14	0.21	0.02	0.05	0.17	0.12	0.44	0.36	0.04
Bilinguals vs. English	*significant difference*	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
	asymp.sig (2sided)	0.27	0.48	0.32	0.00	0.89	0.21	0.64	0.13	0.38	0.15	0.14	0.23
	Pearson chi-square	1.20	0.49	1.00	9.67	0.02	1.60	0.22	2.31	0.78	2.09	2.14	1.46
	Phi	0.13	0.09	0.12	0.38	0.02	0.16	0.06	0.19	0.11	0.18	0.18	0.15

Regarding requests, comparative analyses between trilinguals and English/ Farsi/Kurdish speakers indicated no statistically significant differences(x^2=6.24, p≤.05, *df*=1) except for equal status between the trilinguals and Kurdish speakers. Kurdish language differed from English and Farsi in equal status so that no evidence was identified for pragmatic transfer from a specific language. It can be inferred that the trilinguals did not pragmatically transfer this formula from Kurdish language in the case of equal status like their L1. No strong claims can be made about the reasons due to insignificant differences between English and Farsi. It can be related to either learning from L3 or transfer from L2. Considering the only significant difference in equal status among trilinguals and monolinguals (Kurdish), pragmatic transfer was identified (transfer from English) since there was a significant difference between Kurdish and English in this regard. The same claim may come true about bilinguals regarding insignificant difference between Farsi and English (shown in Table 6).The evidence of transferability was common for bilinguals and trilinguals refusing requests through using explanation/reason in all social statuses.

Using Explanation/reason while refusing an invitation, no significant difference was observed among the paired comparison of trilinguals (as the main focus of this study) with English (as their L3), Kurdish (as their L1), and Farsi (as their L2) except for two situations. Regarding the significant differences among three languages in low status of refusing invitations (Table 6) and significant difference between trilinguals and English speakers (x^2=11.87, *df*=1, p=0.00≤.05) employing explanation/reason in rejecting a person of low status, it can be inferred that the explanation/reason pattern was transferred from L1 (x^2=0.00, p=0.00, *df*=1). The difference in this status between Trilinguals and Farsi speakers, however, is not significant; the amount

of *phi* showed that transfer is more from L1 than L2. Interestingly, the bilinguals differed from English speakers(x^2=9.67, p=0.00, *df*=1) in this situation and there was transfer from L1. The value of observed chi (x^2=8.53, *df*=1) was higher than the critical value of 3.84 at 1 degree of freedom comparing the trilinguals and Kurds refuting a high status interlocutor. Accordingly the difference between Trilinguals and Kurds was statistically significant and they didn't act similarly. According to Table 6, Farsi and English didn't differ in this regard, so that there would be a strong claim of transfer from L2 (albeit a bit stronger) or learning toL3.

Further comparison was carried out between the trilinguals and bilinguals to compare declining suggestions. No significant difference was observed in any of three statuses so there was not transfer. The only exception observed between the trilinguals and Farsi speakers was in high status (x^2=9.67, p=0.00, *df*=1). Although the difference was significant, Kurdish and English speakers were statistically different. The same was not true about English and Farsi speakers. Generally, it can be concluded that transfer occurred from L1 due to insignificant difference between English and Farsi in high status.

The last speech situation in the DCT included refusing an offer in higher, lower, and equal social statuses. The significant differences between the trilinguals and Kurds in equal (x^2=4.34, p≤.05, *df*=1) and high (x^2=16.6, p=0.00 ≤ .05, *d f*=1) statuses rejected the possibility of transfer from L1. English and Farsi participants acted significantly different from the Kurdish ones. Hence, it can be claimed that here is transfer from L2 or learning toL3. The same as pervious findings, no strong claim can be made. Among Bilinguals, transfer is rejected and the effect of L2 is evident in low social status.

6. Discussion

Results obtained from the comparative data analyses of cross-linguistic studies among EFL learners had been widely used to illustrate whether L1 might have an influence on L2. This study was a new trend in cross cultural studies in the case of trilingual EFL learners who had mastered three languages; however, because of being non-native speakers and thus little opportunity for interaction might not have had the chance of acquiring knowledge on refusal strategies and, more specifically, of semantic formulae or the rules to appropriately produce them. The findings of the present study showed a specific speech act performed among culturally and linguistically diverse groups having affected their language use.

Regarding the classification of refusal strategies proposed by Beebe et al. (1990), the present study concluded that the pragmatic transfer occur from L1 to L3 among trilinguals while refusing a situation through using direct/ indirect strategies. This was earlier explained based on the strong sense of belonging and solidarity among Kurds and the great influence of L1 on their successive languages among Kurdish Farsi Trilinguals who have been hardly striving to maintain and spread their mother-tongue language during. Kurds' eagerness to maintain their L1is representing their ethnic identity. On the other hand, this transferability can be illustrated in line with the findings of a study conducted by Raphiq and Zohar (2009). In their study, they investigated the effects of language status on hemispheric involvement in lexical decision responses of native Arabic speakers in Arabic (L1 for reading) and in two second languages (L2): Hebrew, which is similar to L1 in morphological structure, and English, which is very different from L1. The study revealed the impact of language status in the right visual field (RVF), reflecting the greater facility of the left

hemisphere (LH) in recognizing words in the participant's native Arabic than in their other languages. In this sense, resorting to first language facilitated fluency and competency in other languages. This may also be claimed in the case of pragmatic transfer too.

In the case of the subcategories of direct and indirect strategies of refusals, *explanation/reason* was recognized as the most frequent semantic formula across groups. In a similar vein, some studies (e.g., Al-Issa, 1998; Kitao, 1996; Nelson et al., 2002; Stevens, 1993, among others) made the same claim. The findings revealed that there are similarities and differences among Farsi, Kurdish, and English when using explanation or reason in various social statuses as the social status is concerned. Although these three languages acted differently, more similarities were observed in the case of this specific semantic formula. This finding is somehow inconsistent with Rubin's (1981) claim explaining that different languages and cultures have different criteria of appropriateness for speech act strategies. Transferability of this semantic formula did not occur in a specified pattern based on the social status variation.

In a few cases, it was not possible to mention and specify the effect of one of the languages (higher and equal status in offer; equal status in request; higher status in invitation) for the trilinguals who did not follow the same patterns as their L1. This adaptability to their other languages, either L2 or L3, manifests a kind of approach to minimum use of explanation/ reason when their interlocutors were friends or other people from an equal social status. Keshavarz et al. (2006) came to this conclusion that Iranians were more sensitive to higher and lower statuses. For instance, in refusing requests, Iranians had a much greater frequency of semantic formulae variation/shift when addressing higher, equal and lower status interlocutors. This claim didn't lend support to the findings of this study. The controversy may be caused by

Keshavarz et al. (2006)'s not considering a range of most frequent semantic formulae. For 2 cases (higher position of suggestion and lower social status of invitation), the transfer from L1 was specified. The bilinguals revealed the same inconsistencies (lower status offer, equal status request, and lower position of invitation). To sum, it was presumable that, in the case of using a specific semantic formula for refusing different social statuses, speakers did not act significantly different and transfer occurs from each of the languages based on some consideration of social standing.

7. Conclusion

The current study aimed to contribute to the existing literature on pragmatic transfer of refusal speech acts by investigating this issue among trilingual EFL learners. The findings of this study would contribute the language pedagogy since little is known about pragmatic difficulties to which EFL learners and trilinguals are exposed. Foreign language teachers should be aware that language fluency involves both the mastery of linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge. Kwon (2003) mentions that even language learners with a fairly advanced level of proficiency can produce pragmatic failures. To avoid miscommunications resulting from learners' pragmatic transfer, it is of paramount importance for EFL teachers to aid learners enhancing their knowledge or competence of appropriate use of speech acts in target language and to make them aware of transfer from L1 in order to make them pragmatically competent. SLA researchers would draw conclusions from the results of this study and conclude that pragmatic transfer occurs and transfer among trilingual learners evidently initiates from L1; however, much work remains to be done by triangulating the data through other instruments such as natural situation data collection, interviews, etc. Further research can apply a

longitudinal approach in order to review the development of pragmatic competence more in-depth.

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