

# Saying 'No' in a Foreign Language: Can You Really Do It?

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**Dogan Bulut. 2003. Saying 'No' in a Foreign Language: Can You Really Do It?** *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 11(3), 145-169. The culture-specific features of language use are claimed to be particularly evident in speech acts. In this study, we investigated for possible differences between American English (AE), Turkish (TT) and Turkish English (TE) refusal performances in terms of the frequency and order of semantic formulas. Three groups of subjects participated in this study and this included Americans (for American English data), Turks (for Turkish data) and advanced level nonnative Turkish learners of English (for interlanguage data). A twelve-item DCT and its closed-role play version were used as the instruments, and the results were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively by using percentages and Spearman Rank Order Correlations. It was found that even though the most frequently used semantic formulas did not change across data types, the variation was higher in the oral data and responses were longer in all three groups. Another observation related to data type was the pattern of language use by the interlanguage group. The advanced level Turkish nonnative speakers of English resembled rather the target language patterns of language use in the written data while they relied rather on the native language norms in the oral responses, which may be attributable to the language education system and the amount of exposure to the written and oral norms in Turkey.

**Key words:** speech acts, refusals, interlanguage, American English, Turkish

## 1. Introduction

As a consequence of the efforts for globalization, the nature of economic, political and personal relationships has also changed and become increasingly more cross-cultural. A foreigner in the streets of your city or your village is not something from another planet any

more. However, there is still no guarantee that waving hands, smiling at each other or even saying *merhaba* means the same for both parties. It is a fact that cross-cultural communication without cultural considerations or target culture experience may very often lead to the failure of communication. Takahashi and Beebes (1987) very often cited example is about the conversation between late President Nixon of the United States and the late Prime Minister Sato of Japan. Nixon asks Sato whether he would agree to curtail Japan's fabric exports to the United States. Sato answers, *zensho shimasu*, which is literally translated to English as *I'll take care of it*. Later, President Nixon was disappointed as he thought that the Prime Minister did not keep his promise. However, the Prime Minister did not feel any obligations as what he said in Japanese was one of the sixteen ways of saying no.

It is a fact that the existence of speech acts, including refusals, is universal, that is, any language has the potential to be able to produce them. However, the contexts of situation and the types of linguistic forms available are naturally culture-specific, and the major problem in cross-linguistic or foreign language communication is not the non-existence of a speech act in the native or target language, but rather the way how and under what circumstances it is performed. Handling context with its culture-specific variables and the linguistic selection based on these specificities requires attention to different disciplines such as linguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Because of the differences between culture-specific variables and linguistic selections across cultures, different languages develop different sets of patterned, routinized utterances that their speakers use to perform a variety of speech acts such as refusals, requests, invitations, offers, etc., and as Wolfson (1989) states, the principle underlying the investigation of speech behaviors is that these are far from being universal across cultural groups (p. 15).

The importance of the scientific study of communication both for the purposes of language teaching and enhancing cross-cultural understanding has been recognized in applied linguistics, and it has been claimed that the lack of knowledge about the diversity of value systems is the

reason for intercultural misunderstanding (Wolfson, 1989). Actually, what makes a language foreign is not only its new lexicon and grammatical rules, but its belonging to a foreign culture and the value systems of that culture embedded in the language. This has been demonstrated in many comparisons across cross-cultural and foreign language interactions. For example, the way the Americans extend their invitations by adding an expression at the end like *Come if you want to* makes the Japanese feel uncomfortable. Such an approach in Japanese culture is the sign of insincerity, and the one who invites is expected to ask the invitee persistently to accept the invitation. There is also a different procedure in accepting offers in Turkish culture compared to some other more western cultures. Turks are brought up to refuse something offered for the first time and expect the host to offer again and again and will be really disappointed if the host stops after once. Similar procedures from Indian and Arab cultures have also been reported (Rubin, 1983).

As stated by Wolfson, morphologic or syntactic errors only indicate that the Speaker is not proficient enough in the language and the Hearers expectations will be based on how s/he perceives the Speakers proficiency. However, full proficiency in language but problems with sociolinguistic rules of speaking may result in serious communication breakdown or what Thomas (1983, 1984) refers to as pragmatic failure which is the result of a pragmatic or sociolinguistic transfer of native sociocultural norms of speaking. Pragmatic failure may reflect badly on the Speaker and make him/her sound rude or disrespectful and so forth giving a negative impression to the Hearer. For this reason, those who need to communicate with people from other cultures must learn the pragmatics of that language as well as the rules of grammar and lexicon specific to that language. In short, what Hymes (1971) termed as communicative competence includes the ability or competence as to when to speak and what to talk about with whom, where and in what manner, without which pragmatic failure is unavoidable.

Refusals are different from the other speech acts in the sense that imposition is on the Hearer rather than on the Speaker as the Hearer is told something that s/he does not want to hear. They usually have a

formulaic structure, and negotiating them requires an ability to manipulate especially indirect utterances (Robinson, 1992). Then, it is no surprise that non-native speakers of a language will have problems in interpreting and producing appropriate refusal utterances within the framework of social and contextual rules which determine their performance as such a demand requires high level of pragmatic competence on the part of the speaker. Beebe et al. (1990) state that given the absence of this competence and the social-psychological motivation perhaps even urge to draw on ones deeply held native values, transfer will be complex and prevalent in second language refusals (p. 68).

### **1.1. Purpose of the Study**

In this study, we investigated the performance of refusals in American English (AE), Turkish (TT) and advanced level Turkish English (TE). Our study specifically deals with the issue of pragmatic transfer from Turkish to English by Turkish native speakers learning English in Turkey (in an EFL context). In order to be able to detect the possibility of transfer, the refusal performances of three different groups were investigated separately in terms of the frequency and order of refusals.

After the analyses of the data separately from the three groups, in order to investigate the evidence of pragmatic transfer in the refusal performance of Turkish speakers of English, that is, whether the refusals of this group are similar to those of Turkish or to those of American English, differences and similarities in the refusal performance of these three groups were investigated with regard to the frequency, and order of semantic formulas.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 The Subjects**

The subjects of this study were three different groups of undergraduate

students from Turkey and the United States. The university students were selected as the subjects as this was not a developmental but a normative study, and according to Lyuh (1992), at their age and education level university students must have acquired the appropriate rules of language use that represent the norms of the society in which they live. At the same time, the university students are the most convenient subject population available for such research which requires a large sample of data.

American English (AE) data were collected from American students studying at Northern Arizona University in the United States. Their age ranged from 18 to 26, and a total number of 1204 cases of refusals (475 male and 729 female) from the DCT was examined for this study. The number of American students who participated in the closed-role play was 37 (17 male and 20 female), and a total number of 433 cases of refusals (194 male and 239 female) from this group was included in the study.

The Turkish native speakers (TT) who participated in this study were the undergraduate students at the Departments of Turkish Language and Literature and History of Erciyes University. The ones who studied at a high school with an English preparatory class were eliminated considering their level of English and again only the ones who were between the ages of 18 and 26 were included in the study. The DCT was administered to a total of 100 subjects. A total of 934 cases of refusals (455 male and 479 female) from this group was included in our investigation. As for the closed role-play, 20 male and 20 female students participated and 428 cases of refusals (207 male and 221 female) were included.

The subjects in the Turkish Speakers of English (TE) were the students of English Language and Literature Department at Erciyes University in Turkey. Only the third and fourth year students were selected and considered to be advanced level Turkish speakers of English as a foreign language. In their selection, their stay or residence in an English speaking country was also taken into consideration. The DCT was administered to a total of 100 subjects and from this group, a

total of 800 cases of refusals (324 male and 476 female) were included in our study. The closed role-play data were collected from 35 subjects and the total number of refusal cases was 381 (174 male and 207 female). The subjects age ranged also from 18 to 26. A total number of 4180 cases of refusal responses from three groups were collected through the DCT and its closed role-play form from both male and female subjects. However, for the purposes of this study, the variable of gender is not taken into consideration.

## **2.2. The Instruments and Data Collection**

One of the data collection methods used for this study was a DCT . It has been a much used and controversial elicitation method in cross-cultural speech act studies (Kasper and Dahl 1991). The method was first used in speech act studies by Blum-Kulka (1982), and has been widely used for the collection of the data on speech act performance both within and across language groups since then. The DCT is a written questionnaire in which scenarios that call for specific speech acts are presented to the subjects for them to respond in writing what they think they would actually say under the described situations.

The other data elicitation technique used for this study is what is called closed role-play (Kasper and Dahl 1991, p. 18) or modified role-play (Kinjo 1987, p. 86). In this technique, the subjects are described the situation orally and asked what the person whose role s/he is playing would say in the situation. The advantage of this method is claimed to be the subjects opportunity to say what and as much as they would like to say, and their spoken language is thought to be a good indication of their natural way of speaking, but to what extent their responses are representative of what the subjects would say in real life situations is hard to predict.

Being aware of the weaknesses and the strengths of data collection methods employed in our study and considering the practicality and convenience in our situation, we adapted the DCT used by Beebe et al. (1990) in their study of refusals for comparing five different languages.

The same situations were also used for the closed-role plays, and the only difference was that each situation was described and the subjects were asked what they would say in that situation in real life.

### **2.3. Coding and analysis of the Data**

For coding the data, a refusals taxonomy which was developed first by Beebe et al. (1990) and also used by Lyuh (1992) and Al-Issa (1998) was adapted for our study. However, the original taxonomy did not include the semantic formulas of Sarcasm, Request for information, Removal of negativity and Clarifying relationship. The first three were added to the taxonomy by Lyuh and Al-Issa, and the last one was existent in the data for the present study.

The data were coded for semantic formulas. Semantic formulas represent the means by which a particular speech act is accomplished, in terms of the primary content of an utterance, such as a reason, an explanation, or an alternative (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991). For example, a respondents refusal of an invitation to a friends house for dinner, saying I am sorry, I have theatre tickets that night. How about tomorrow? is coded as Expression of regret + Excuse + Offer of alternative for the analysis of the frequency of semantic formulas in successive positions. The taxonomy also allowed for a broader classification for the order of semantic formulas in the refusal responses, and this classification included direct refusal, indirect refusal and adjunct to refusal. The first two categories being clear, the third one means preliminary remarks that could not stand alone and function as refusals (Beebe et al., 1990, p. 57).

The number of semantic formulas identified and coded in responses was between one and six. Some responses had only one semantic formula such as No. (the semantic formula of direct NO), and some had two as in No, thank you (the successive semantic formulas of direct NO + Gratitude), etc. The number of each semantic formula existent in all these six positions were added up, and the average number of semantic formulas per person was calculated for each subject group for

the calculation of the general frequency. However, in the analysis of the data in terms of the most common three combinations of semantic formulas, only the first three positions of semantic formulas were taken into consideration as only a few of the responses had more than three semantic formulas. The data were cross-tabulated to see if the distribution would allow for any statistics to be used. The frequency distribution revealed that it was only possible to use ranking statistics because more than 20% of the categories had less than 5 observed frequencies, and also while a certain semantic formula was used by one group, it was not used by other groups at all. For example, the semantic formula clarifying relationship was not used by the American group at all.

The most appropriate statistical test was the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation (Rho). With this test it is possible to determine how much the order of the frequency of the same values from most preferred to least preferred for two groups differs (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991, p. 451). However, in order to do that, the percentages of the frequencies were computed again and the tests were run for the percentages because the groups did not have equal number of subjects and the frequencies were normed this way.

### **3. Presentation of the Data**

#### **3.1. Frequency of Semantic Formulas**

The highest number of semantic formulas used in a single response from all three language groups did not exceed six both in the written and oral data, and the average number of semantic formulas per person was also calculated. It was found that the average number of semantic formulas per person was higher in the oral data for each language group. In the written data, TT group had the highest average (2.30) and this was followed by TE group (2.27) and AE group (2.18). In the oral data, AE group had the highest average (3.45) and this was followed by TT group (3.27) and TE group (2.91).



In order to do an overall comparison, the semantic formulas which fell in the same category were added up for each language group, and Table 1 presents the most preferred three semantic formulas in the written data for AE, TT and TE groups.

**Table 1. Overall Frequency of Semantic Formulas (DCT)**

Language	Order of Preference						Total %
	1		2		3		
	Semantic Formula	%	Semantic Formula	%	Semantic Formula	%	
AE	Excuse, reason, expl.	25.85	Non-performative	12.09	Attempt to persuade	11.22	49.16
TE	Excuse, reason, expl.	32.82	Non-performative	14.38	Attempt to persuade	13.38	61.58
TT	Excuse, reason, expl.	28.81	Attempt to persuade	17.92	Non-performative	14.48	58.21

In AE, the total percentage of the most preferred three semantic formulas was 49.16, and excuse-reason-explanation (25.85%) was the first of them, which was commonly realized in the forms such as

- (1) a. Funds are tight ...
- b. I need them to study ...
- c. I didnt like the vase anyway ...
- d. As part of the curriculum we are required to focus more on grammar...

And the second formula was non-performative (12.09%) which was used in two certain forms commonly;

- (2) a. No, but thank you (Direct "NO")
- b. I can't. (negative ability)

The third most preferred semantic formula was attempt to persuade (11.22%) which was used in three common forms as in

- (3) a. I am tired of making up for your responsibility (statement of negative attitude)
- b. Normally I am pretty organized (self-defense)
- c. Don't worry about it (letting the interlocutor off the hook)

TT group had 58.21% total for the first three and the same first preference as the AE group which was again excuse-reason-explanation (28.81%) and included typical forms of

- (4) a. Ben de ekonomik sikinti içerisindeyim ...  
'I also have financial problems'
- b. Notlarım yanımda yok ...  
'I don't have them with me'
- c. Bu akşam işim var ...  
'I am busy this evening'

The second most preferred semantic formula in TT was attempt to persuade (17.92%) and was also commonly realized through the forms as in the AE group:

- (5) a. Diyetin hiçbir işe yaradığı yok...'Diet is of no use'  
(statement of negative attitude, feeling)
- b. Ben de düzenli bir insanımdır aslında ... 'In fact, I am also an organized person'(self-defense)
- c. Önemli değil ... 'Not important' (let the interlocutor off the hook)
- d. Canın sağ olsun ... 'May your soul be alive' (let the interlocutor off the hook)

As the third most preferred semantic formula, TT group used non-performative (11.48%) most commonly in the form of direct No as in

- (6) a. Hayır, olmaz 'No, it is not possible'

b. Yok, ... 'No,...'

rather than negative willingness or ability.

TE group had the very same pattern as AE group and preferred the semantic formulas of excuse-reason-explanation (32.82%), non-performative (14.38%) and attempt to persuade (14.38%), respectively, and the total for these three most preferred semantic formulas was 61.58%. For the first semantic formula,

- (7) a. I have a lot of work to do ...
- b. I have an appointment ...

can be given as typical examples of non-explicit use of this semantic formula, and for the second most preferred semantic formula, there were two common forms;

- (8) a. I think it is not suitable for me (negative attitude or feeling)
- b. Dont important for me (letting the interlocutor off the hook)  
          or It is not matter.

For the third most preferred semantic formula in TE, similar to AE form, they commonly used negative ability as in

- (9) a. I cant do this
- b. I cant go with you

It is to be noted that for the most preferred three semantic formulas, all three groups had the same ones, and AE and TE even had the same order of preference. With the TT group they differed only in the order of the second and third semantic formulas. The similarity across language groups was also supported statistically with the findings based on the comparison of all the semantic formulas in the written data. As would be expected, the highest correlation was between AE and TE ( $\rho = .96\%$ ), which means that these two groups had very similar

order of preference not only for the first three but for all 18 different kinds of semantic formulas. The next highest correlation was between TT and TE ( $\rho = .89$ ) and this was followed by the lowest correlation between AE and TT ( $\rho = .88$ ). However, all of them were still very strong correlations.

Another point, which is to be noted with regard to the written data is that while the semantic formula of removal of negativity was used by AE group fourteen times, it was used only once by the TT group, and in the same way the semantic formula of clarifying relationship was used sixteen times by the TT group and was not used by the AE group at all.

**Table 2. Frequency of Semantic Formulas (ORAL)**

Language	Order of Preference						Total %
	1		2		3		
	Semantic Formula	%	Semantic Formula	%	Semantic Formula	%	
AE	Excuse, reason, expl.	32.51	Non-performative	15.51	Attempt to persuade	12.50	60.52
TE	Excuse, reason, expl.	35.46	Attempt to persuade	14.86	Non-performative	13.60	63.92
TT	Excuse, reason, expl.	35.40	Attempt to persuade	15.90	Non-peformative	12.90	64.02

As can be seen in Table 2, the findings from oral data for overall frequency of semantic formulas supported the findings based on the written data in the sense that for all three groups the semantic formulas used in written and oral data were the same with the exception that TE group followed the same pattern as the TT group in the oral data, that is they had the order of excuse-reason-explanation, attempt to persuade and non-performative. This deviation in the oral data was also supported by the statistical results, that is, the correlation between TE and TT in the oral data was slightly higher ( $\rho = .86$ ) than the correlation between AE and TE ( $\rho = .80$ ).

Similar to the written data, the semantic formula of clarifying

relationship was again used 36 times by the TT group, once by the TE group and was not used at all by the AE group. However, with regard to the semantic formula of removal of negativity, oral data were different in the sense that it was also used by TE and TT groups.

### 3.2. Order of Semantic Formulas

Following Takahashi and Beebe (1987) and Beebe et al. (1990), each response was considered as consisting of units of direct (A), indirect (B) or adjunct (C) semantic formulas. The order of the semantic formulas in each response was recorded up to three positions; in other words, what a participant said first, second and third, as few responses consisted more than three semantic formulas. After the classification based on the broader categories of formulas, most commonly used three combinations of semantic formulas for each broader category were identified and discussed for the overall comparison of the language groups. Table 3. and Table 4. indicate the broader categorization of the most preferred three combinations of the first three positions in the written and oral data.

**Table 3. Combination of the Broader Categories (DCT)**

Language Group	Most Preferred Three Combinations						Total %
	1		2		3		
	Order of S.F.	%	Order of S.F.	%	Order of S.F.	%	
AE	Indirect-Indirect	28.6	Indirect	14.3	Ind.-Ind.-Ind.	8.5	51.4
TE	Indirect-Indirect	26.8	Indirect	12.0	Adjunct-Indirect	11.5	50.3
TT	Indirect-Indirect	23.9	Indirect	13.6	Ind.-Ind.-Ind.	12.2	49.7

In the written data, the most preferred combination of semantic formulas by the AE group was Indirect-Indirect (28.6%) and the most common form of this combination was statement of regret + excuse-reason-explanation, as in the example of

(10) I am sorry but business has been slow lately.

Similar to AE group, TT group also had the same most commonly used combination (23.9%), the most common form of which was excuse-reason-explanation + excuse-reason-explanation as in the response

(11) İngilizce' grameri bilmeden konuşmak mümkün olmaz. Bu yüzden gramere ağırlık veriyorum 'It is not possible to speak in English without knowing grammar. For this reason, I focus on grammar.'

In TT, responses of this combination usually had the first formula as the explanation for the excuse or reason which followed it.

TE group had the same most commonly used combination of broader categories as AE and TT groups (26.8%). However, for the more specific classification, they had the same combination as the AE group: statement of regret + excuse-reason-explanation as in

(12) I am sorry but I dont have the notes from last week.

This means that all three groups preferred indirect semantic formulas the most in their refusal responses. However, the interlanguage group had the same specific combination of semantic formulas as the target language group.

The most preferred second response for all groups contained a single semantic formula (Indirect (AE: 14.3%, TT: 13.6% and TE: 12%) which was excuse-reason-explanation as in the examples below:

- (13) a. I cant stand your husband. (AE)  
b. Ben de geçen hafta yazmadım. 'I didnt take notes either last week'  
c. I have to take my son from school. (TE)

For the most preferred third combination, AE and TT had the same

broader categories (Indirect + Indirect + Indirect) and the same semantic formulas which were statement of regret + excuse-reason-explanation + excuse-reason-explanation as in the examples of

- (14) a. I am sorry but I am very busy. I really don't have time to let you copy my notes. (AE)  
 b. Özür dilerim ama gitmem lazım. Arkadaşlarla buluşacağız.  
 'I am sorry but I have to go. I will meet my friends' (TT).

However, TE group had a combination which was different from the AE and TT groups. It was Adjunct + Indirect broader categories, and the semantic formulas were statement of positive attitude and feeling + excuse-reason-explanation as in

- (15) I would like to come but at Sunday night I must help my younger sister about her lessons.

**Table 4. Combination of the Broader Categories (ORAL)**

Language Group	Most Preferred Three Combinations						Total %
	1		2		3		
	Order of S.F.	%	Order of S.F.	%	Order of S.F.	%	
AE	Ind.-Ind.-Ind.	24.0	Ind.- Ind.	13.4	Adjunct-Ind.-Ind.	10.6	48
TE	Ind.-Ind.-Ind.	22.3	Ind.- Ind.	17.3	Ind.- Ind.-Direct	10.8	50.4
TT	Ind.-Ind.-Ind.	25.5	Adjunct-Ind.- Direct	14.3	Ind. - Ind.	13.1	52.9

Table 4. presents the findings based on the oral data. As can be seen, the responses were more elaborated in the oral data, which means that more semantic formulas were used because one semantic formula responses in the written data usually had the combination of two

semantic formulas in the oral data. In the same way, two semantic formula responses usually had the combination of three semantic formulas. With regard to broader category classification, all three groups had the combination of the same categories for the most preferred combination of broader categories: Indirect + Indirect + Indirect.

However, with regard to the specific semantic formula classification, each group had a different combination of indirect semantic formulas. For example, AE group had statement of regret + excuse-reason-explanation + verbal avoidance as the most commonly used combination of semantic formulas for the first three positions, for which

- (16) I am sorry, but we are not doing too well right now. I want to take it back and think about it couple of months

can be given as a typical example. The verbal avoidance was usually in the form of postponement in such combinations. In TT group, the most commonly used indirect combination was attempt to persuade + excuse-reason-explanation + attempt to persuade as in

- (17) Benim işlediğim şekilde olmalı çünkü tecrübelerimle gördüm. En faydalı yol budur. 'It should be how I do it because I have seen it with my experience. This is the best way.'

“Attempt to persuade” in such combinations was usually in the form of self-defense.

TE group had the same broader categories as both the target and native languages but differed from both in the combination of semantic formulas. TE group had “statement of regret” + “excuse-reason-explanation” + “excuse-reason-explanation” as the most commonly used combination of semantic formulas as in the example of

- (18) I am sorry but I have to go to Ankara to visit my wives parents because her mother is ill.



In the oral data, the most commonly used second combination was the same in AE and TE responses with regard to broader categorization, and TT group had a different combination. The broader combination for AE and TE groups was Indirect + Indirect, but they differed in the combination of two semantic formulas. AE group had “excuse-reason-explanation” + “statement of alternative” as the most common second combination as in

- (19) I get to study them myself. If you want you can come and study with me if that'll help.

TE group had statement of regret + excuse-reason-explanation as the second common combination as in

- (20) Sorry, but it is not my way.

TT group had a combination of three semantic formulas, each being from a different broader category (adjunct + indirect + direct). The semantic formulas were “statement of positive attitude and feeling” + “excuse-reason-explanation” + “non-performative” (in the form of negative ability) as in

- (21) İşleri bitirip öyle gitmeyi ben de isterdim ama uzun zamandır görmediğim arkadaşlarıma söz verdim. Bu yüzden kalamayacağım  
'I also would like to finish, then go but I have promised to my friends whom I haven't seen for a long time. For this reason, I will not be able to come.'

Most preferred third combination was different for each language group in the oral data both with regard to the broader categories and semantic formulas. In AE group, the most preferred third combination was adjunct + indirect + indirect, for which the semantic formulas were statement of positive attitude and feeling + excuse-reason-explanation + excuse-reason-explanation as in

- (22) You really flattered me boss, but my family is here in the city.  
My kids have friends in the schools.

TT group had the combination of indirect + indirect, for which the semantic formulas were excuse-reason-explanation + statement of alternative as in

- (23) Yarın sınav olduğu için benim çalışmam gerekli. Sen de başka bir yerden bu notları temin etmeye çalış istersen. 'As there is an exam tomorrow I have to study. You had better find these notes from somewhere else.'

TE group had the broader categories of indirect + indirect + direct, and the semantic formulas were statement of regret + excuse-reason-explanation + non-performative (in the form of negative ability) as in the example of

- (24) I am sorry but I have plans to visit my parents with my family. So, I could not come.

#### 4. Discussion of the Results

In order to see whether the three groups differed from each other with regard to the most frequently used semantic formulas in general, semantic formulas (the highest number observed was six) in each group were added up in the relevant categories, and also the overall number of semantic formulas used in each group were found and divided by the number of responses in each group to see which group had a higher number of semantic formulas in average.

Such an attempt yielded important differences across language groups both in the written and oral data; findings show that the refusal responses from both TT and TE groups were longer than the refusal responses from AE group in the written data. On the other hand, in the

oral data, AE group had the longest responses, and this was followed by TT and TE groups, respectively. In the written data, TE responses were also longer than AE responses, which also receives support from the literature. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986, p.177) compared the utterance length among native and nonnative speakers of Hebrew within the performance of the speech act of request. They pointed out that lack of confidence and eagerness to ensure that the message gets across was the factor causing lengthy responses on the part of nonnative speakers. They also claimed that nonnative speakers contextual explicitness in speech act performance may be caused by a transfer of learning strategy, derivable from teachers insistence on complete sentences. On the other hand, the maxim of quantity from Grices CP may be a reason and the longer utterances by TE group in the written data can be attributable to native language influence with regard to how much information should be revealed.

With regard to the most preferred three semantic formulas, all three groups had the same semantic formulas (Excuse-reason-explanation, Non-performative and Attempt to persuade) both in the written and oral data, and the order of preference in the written data was the same in AE and TE groups, which was also supported by the highest correlation between these two groups. However, the order of preference in TE changed when refusing orally and it was the same as TT pattern, and again the similarity between TT and TE groups in the oral data was supported by the highest correlation between these two groups. It can be concluded that both in the written and oral data AE and TT groups had different orders of preference, and while TE group had the same pattern as AE group in the written data, in the oral data it resembled the pattern by TT group.

No support from literature has been found to explain this change. However, it can be claimed that such a pattern may have to do with the amount of written and oral language the EFL learners in Turkey are exposed to. The learners of English are restricted with regard to native speaker exposure and usually learn language in the written form. Hence, in the written language it is normal that they are closer to

target language norms, but as they do not have the oral opportunity, they may be relying on their native language norms while speaking, and the findings in our research may be attributable to this.

Another difference was the use of the semantic formula Clarifying relationship in TT both in the written and oral data. AE group did not use it at all while it was used 16 times in the written and 36 times in the oral data by TT group, which may be attributed to rank-consciousness of Turkish society. In this sense, for example, a Turkish student is expected to greet his/her professor by saying Good morning my teacher. This semantic formula was very rarely used also in TE and this may also be considered as the transfer of native language norm.

Three language groups were also compared with regard to the broader classification of semantic formulas (Direct vs. Indirect vs. Adjunct to Refusal) for the most preferred three typical combinations and it was found that most preferred combination of semantic formulas in all three groups included Indirect-Indirect categories, which means that AE, TT and TE groups preferred rather the indirect ways of saying No in the written data. However, the comparison of the groups with regard to more specific semantic formulas revealed that AE and TE groups preferred the same combination (statement of regret + excuse-reason-explanation). The second most common response in all three groups was the same both in the broader (Indirect) and semantic formula classifications (excuse-reason-explanation). However, in the most preferred third combination AE and TT groups had the same broader (Indirect-Indirect-Indirect) and specific classifications (statement of regret + excuse-reason-explanation + excuse-reason-explanation), but TE group differed from both the target and native language groups in the broader (adjunct-indirect) and specific classifications (statement of positive feeling and attitude + excuse-reason-explanation). In the oral data, the responses were elaborated in most cases; that is, more semantic formulas were used almost in every response. For example, the number of semantic formulas in the most preferred combination consistently increased from two to three in each language group, and

the variation in the specific classification was higher across language groups. However, the broader categories were still the same in most cases also in the oral data.

## 5. Conclusion

It is hoped that the results of this study lead to more awareness of the similarities and differences between AE and TT native speakers with regard to the performance of refusals as one of the face-threatening speech acts and pragmatic competence of the Turkish nonnative speakers of English. As no other study on Turkish (TT) or Turkish English (TE) refusals has been reported so far, there was no evidence for the results of the present study in literature.

The findings are cross-culturally significant in the sense that within the limits of these three groups, the speech act of refusing is universal; that is, all three groups had ways of refusing, and these ways were not necessarily always different from each other. However, the differences which were evident across language groups are at a level which may lead to misunderstandings and breakdown in cross-cultural communication. For example, two semantic formulas in TT data clarifying relationship and verbal avoidance (in the form of postponement *In<sup>o</sup>allah* If God willing)- did not exist in AE responses.

Another difference across language groups was the length of responses. Even though written and oral data findings contradicted, all three groups were different both in the written and oral data. If our assumptions are based on the written data (which has more support in literature in this sense), the indirectness and lengthy responses by TT subjects does not mean insincerity or verbosity. At the same time, the shorter and more direct responses by AE subjects should not be perceived as something negative by TT or TE speakers. This finding can be claimed to be the culture-specificity of maxim of quantity as all three groups had different lengths/numbers of semantic formulas in their responses.

In order to be pragmatically competent in the target language, the

importance of the sociolinguistic rules of language use has been recognized by many researchers (Bardovi-Harlig 1992, Eisenstein and Bodman 1986, Bouton 1994, Cohen 1996), and deviations such as the ones presented in this study may lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdown. As a multi-dimensional approach has been employed in this study and the complexity of refusing pragmatically leads to difficulties in terms of giving clear cut explanations, it is hard to make generalizations in most cases. However, similar to other studies in this direction five different patterns were observed in our comparisons:

1. Native and target language groups had different patterns and also the interlanguage group differed from both and had its own pattern.
2. Native and interlanguage groups had the same pattern and target language differed from both, which was accepted as negative transfer from the native language.
3. Native and target language groups had the same pattern but interlanguage group differed from both.
4. Target and interlanguage groups had the same pattern but native language differed from both.
5. Native, interlanguage and target language groups had the same patterns, which is usually considered as positive transfer. However, in this study we avoided using this term as it may not necessarily be the consequence of positive transfer in some cases. It may be the consequence of language learning process as in Pattern 4.

Another important finding in interlanguage group was related to the difference in data collection methods. It is interesting that the interlanguage group reflected rather the norms of the target language in the written data while the findings were the opposite in the oral data; that is, they relied heavily on the native language norms. Such a result may be attributable to the amount of written and oral language they are exposed to. This means that in the less improved skills they rely on

their native language rules also in language use.

As a conclusion, it can be extrapolated that even if the data collected and analyzed may not be fully representative of these three different groups, it is hoped that the information about these three groups is still valuable with regard to the role of the culture in determining speech patterns of their members. It is also hoped that the findings of this study can be useful in identifying some of the points which may lead to communication breakdown among Turks and Americans with regard to the performance of refusals. As Gudykunst (1991, p. 2) points out, If we understand others languages, but not their cultures, we can make fluent fools of ourselves.

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