

## **HOW DO TURKISH EFL LEARNERS SAY ‘NO’?**

### **İngilizce’yi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğrenen Türk Öğrenciler Nasıl**

#### **‘Hayır’ Der?**

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##### **Abstract**

How to express politeness is an important issue for language learners. The aim of the study is to investigate the refusal strategy use of female EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners at a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). 82 EFL learners participated in the study, and 62 of the participants completed the English DCT and were B1.2 (intermediate level) learners. 20 of the participant completed the Turkish DCT and were A2 (beginner level) learners. The DCTs were completed during class time. After the DCT, follow-up interviews were conducted with randomly selected 10 participants who completed the English DCT. The data were analyzed qualitatively and in frequency bases. The data were coded by two coders for reliability. The findings showed that stating reason and regret were the most preferred strategies while refusing and the participants who completed the English DCT used more various strategies than the participants who completed the Turkish DCT. Power was another consideration in deciding on the refusal strategy use. When compared, both data sets presented both similar and different semantic formulas in refusing the given situations. At the end of the study, it is suggested that more attention should be paid in teaching pragmatic knowledge to EFL learners and authentic material and DCT activities can be used for enhancing pragmatic awareness for language learner.

**Key words:** *Politeness, refusal strategies, pragmatic competence.*

##### **Özet**

Dil öğrenenler için kibar ifadelerin nasıl kullanılacağını bilmek önemlidir. Bu çalışmanın amacı söylem tamamlama etkinliğinde, kız öğrencilerin kullandıkları red etme strateji kullanımını araştırmaktır. 82 İngilizce’yi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenciler çalışmaya katılmıştır, ve 62 katılımcı verilen etkinliğin İngilizce’sini doldurmuşlardır. Düzeyleri B1.2 (orta düzey) olarak belirlenmiştir. 20 katılımcı ise verilen etkinliğin Türkçe’sini doldurmuştur. Düzeyleri A2 (başlangıç düzeyi) olarak belirlenmiştir. Verilen etkinlik sınıfta ders saatinde doldurulmuştur. Bu etkinliğin ardından rastgele seçilen 10 öğrenci ile görüşme yapılmıştır. Bu öğrenciler verilen etkinliği İngilizce olarak doldurmuşlardır. Veriler analizi nitel ve sıklık belirleme olarak yapılmıştır. Güvenirlik çalışması için iki kişi kodlama yapmıştır. Bulgular neden ve pişmanlık belirtmenin en sık tercih edilen strateji olduğunu göstermiştir. İngilizce red eden katılımcılar daha çeşitli strateji kullanımı gerçekleştirmişlerdir. Statünün red etme stratejisi kullanımını etkilediği görülmüştür. Veriler karşılaştırıldığında benzer ve farklı anlamsal yapılar kullanmışlardır. Çalışmanın sonunda, İngilizce’yi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilere pragmatik bilgi öğretimine daha çok dikkat çekilmesi gerektiği önerilmektedir. Ayrıca derste özgün malzeme kullanımı ve söylem tamamlama etkinliklerinin dil öğrenenler için pragmatik farkındalık yaratmak için kullanılabileceği önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Kibarlık, red etme stratejileri, pragmatik yeterlik.*

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## 1. Introduction

Politeness differs from culture to culture and person to person. Especially in teaching a foreign or second language politeness is a vital issue that should receive attention. To teach politeness, first pragmatic awareness of the learners should be the focus. There are few studies on any aspect of pragmatic processing in L2 (Kasper and Rose, 1999). For L2 learners, it is important to develop grammatical competence, but although some learners are highly proficient in L2, they experience difficulty in using or gaining pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei, 1998; Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin, 2005). One strategy to come over the insufficiency of pragmatic competence is to make transfer from L1 to L2. However, since there are cross-cultural differences among the languages, learners reflect their own culture in the use of L2. This is because they may judge power relations and social context different from the target language speakers. Another reason for this transfer is insufficient instruction and course materials (Boxer and Pickering, 1995; Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan and Reynolds, 1996). Learners should engage with authentic materials and with materials which help them to develop their pragmatic awareness in L2. In the current study context, learners are taught to use model verbs and expressions to be polite. They engage situations where they are required to be polite; however, it is observed that they experience difficulty in transferring what they learnt while using the language.

The use of politeness strategies and the concept of politeness have been investigated in broad sense in L1 (Matthews, Hancock and Durham, 2006; Heinemann, 2006; Felix-Brasdefer, 2006; Carlo and Yoo, 2007; Kasper, 2006; Bataneh and Bataneh, 2008). Although the researchers agree that it is necessary to conduct more empirical research examining (im)politeness and perceptions of (in)appropriateness, there are less studies on the politeness strategy use in EFL and ESL context. Some studies showed that EFL learners use different politeness strategies while learning L2 and experience difficulty in learning them (Johnson, 2008; Eryani, 2008, Brasdefer2008). For Turkish EFL learners, there has been some studies on politeness: Turkish native speakers' use of politeness strategies in their requests in English (Karatepe, 2001), politeness perception of Turkish monolingual speakers and Turkish-German bilingual returnees (Martu, 2006), and politeness in requests (Zingir, 2008). This study focuses on refusal politeness strategies because as speech act, refusals in EFL and ESL context received less attention compared to requests and apologies. Hence, because of the mismatch of what is taught and what learners produce, limited focus on refusals in Turkish EFL learners, the current study aims at examining the refusal politeness strategies with EFL learners at preparatory school at a university.

### 1.1 Politeness

The most known theory on politeness is the Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). This theory is taken as basis for most studies (SturtzSreetharan, 2006; Chen and Yang, 2007; Graham, 2007; Schnurr, Marra, Holmes, 2007; Johnson, 2007) because it is identified by many researchers as the most extensive model of politeness (Hatipoğlu, 2007) and argued that it is useful to analyze various types of discourse (Daly, Holmes, Newton and Stubbe, 2004). The definition of polite behavior in this theory is the use of (non)verbal strategies that considers the hearer's feelings by showing concern for his/her face needs. Face is a universal concept with two basic desires: negative face which is the desire not to be imposed on and positive face which is the need to feel appreciated and approved of (Wilson, Aleman and Leatham, 1998). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness is vital and in most casual interactions, the participants negotiate their

roles and are careful to behave according to their roles. They are also careful not to cause loss in their face; however, despite the corporation of the participants, some illocutionary acts occur intrinsically to the addressee's and speaker's positive and negative face. The acts that can damage the person's face are named as Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs).

Politeness strategies are used to avoid FTAs. Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that when a person is in need to perform FTA, the individual must perform the act in the most direct and efficient manner, or attempting to mitigate the effect of the FTA on the hearer's positive or negative face (as cited in Duthler, 2006). Use of politeness strategies varies from person to person. Daly et al. (2004) state that individuals in every community acquire their identities through interaction with other people in the group; hence they develop politeness strategies in line with the norms and rules in their own community. Furthermore, the perception of (im)politeness can differ from one person to another and there are also different perception of the degree of politeness in terms of behavior (Graham, 2007; Johnson, 2007). One aspect of politeness is that the speaker uses mitigations like 'please' to mild the speech act like request and refusals (Gibbons, 2008; Sato, 2008). Another way is to use modal expressions (Johnson, 2008). Felix-Brasdefer (2006) conducted a study with 20 male Mexican Spanish speakers to find out the politeness strategies. The findings showed that politeness was evident with formulaic/semi-formulaic expressions to negotiate face. Culture plays role in negative and positive politeness. some cultures and language groups have a tendency for negative politeness use like Japanese and English cultures, and some have a tendency for positive politeness like Australia and America (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Mills, 2008). For requests and disagreeing Hatipoğlu (2007) claims that Turkish has negative politeness use.

### **1.2 Previous studies on politeness**

It is a well-known fact that there are some factors influencing politeness strategy use like age, gender, socio-economical situation, level of education and so forth. First of all, gender may be an effect on the politeness strategy use of individuals. For example, Gibbons (2008) conducted a study on variation of politeness usage in Hong Kong Cantonese. He observed natural requests in a minibus in Hong Kong. It was displayed that women and young people were more polite than men and the old. Similar results were found by Samar and Alibakhsh (2007) with Iranian speakers. Also SturtzSreetharan (2006) claims that men's linguistic practices are less polite than women's. O'Neil and Colley' study (2006) showed that men were more assertive than women. Hence, sociopragmatic factors should be considered in the work of politeness.

Politeness differs also from one culture and language to another. A sample study can be the study of Liao and Bresnahan (1996). They examined the strategy use of American and Chinese speakers in terms of refusals. The findings showed that the most frequent strategy used was apology (I am sorry) by both language speakers in similar way. Nonetheless, they found that American speakers did not tend to refuse friends when compared to Chinese speakers. When power relations were the case, Chinese speakers refused speakers at higher status by use of apology and reasons.

### **1.3 Politeness in ESL and EFL**

Language use is effortless and perhaps automatic for native speakers (L1). Nonetheless, while learning a second or foreign language, it needs more effort and attention. There are studies focusing on EFL and politeness (Takashi, 2005; Uso-Juan and Martines-Flor,

2008). All suggest at the end that more attention should be paid to EFL and ESL learners while teaching politeness strategy use. EFL learners experience difficulty in communication not only because of lack of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary but also because of the social and contextual factors in English language (Uso-Juan and Martines-Flor, 2008). Hence, teachers should help learners to develop their pragmatic competence otherwise while the learners communicate, breakdown can occur. To help learners to develop their pragmatic competence, Uso-Juan and Martines-Flor (2008) suggest some learner-based method in terms of mitigation devices. They suggest that the first step is helping the learners to explore the language. For this they recommend awareness-raising activities. For instance, the teachers can make use of film excerpts and use authentic materials in class helping students to explore the language. As a second step, they suggest helping learners to produce the language. One activity can be watching films. While watching, when the speech act part comes, the teacher can stop the recording and ask the student stop perform it. The last step is providing feedback to help learners develop their pragmatic competence.

In EFL context, Chen and Yang (2007) conducted a study on refusals. They compared the strategy use of refusals of American speakers and Taiwanese EFL learners. The findings showed that both groups used similar strategies for refusals. The highest mean for indirect refusals was found for refusals to requests, followed by refusals to invitations and then suggestions. Chen and Chen (2007) found that both native speakers of American English and Taiwanese EFL learners used most of the time indirect strategies to refuse. Wannaruk's study (2008) displayed similar findings with Chen and Yang (2007; Al-Eryani, 2008; Felix-Brasdefer, 2008). All groups used similar strategies in refusals apology and explanations. Also, in the study of Chang (2008), all three groups (American college students, English students and Chinese learners) used similar strategies; however, there were small differences in the semantic formulas.

On the other hand, in terms of power relations EFL learners showed more complex refusal strategies with power-equals and simpler refusals with power-unequals, and the Japanese students showed less disagreement with the requester when they were with power-unequals (Walkinshaw, 2007). The study of Chen and Chen (2007) found that social status affected both native speakers of American English and Taiwanese EFL learners. American speakers used more apologies when refusing a inferior's suggestion; however with superior's suggestions they used more alternatives, avoidance or acceptance.

#### **1.4 Politeness in Turkish EFL Learners**

Turkish has its own norms and politeness strategies like other languages. In Turkish, a speaker can be in a situation where s/he may refuse requests, invitations, offers or suggestions. For instance, when a friend invites a Turkish person somewhere to go, a direct refusal may take place like "hayır" (no) or "seninle hiçbir yere gidemem!" (I can't go anywhere with you) (İrman, 1992). These are considered as impolite. It is also possible to use apology and regrets or excuses (İrman, 1992).

#### **1.5 Pragmatic Transfer and Politeness Strategy Use**

Pragmatic comprehension of L2 learners is vital because without pragmatic comprehension, it is not fair to expect the learners make use of pragmatics in L2. The study of Takashi and Roitblat (1994) examined the possible L1-L2 processing differences in comprehension of conventional indirect requests. They found that L2 participants spent more time than L1 participants in comprehending the requests. Thus this may

cause the participants to produce an answer for the requests in a longer time (Holtgraves, 2007). Pearson (2006) showed that pragmatic competence develop before grammatical competence and L1 pragmatic system has an effect on processing new L2 data. The study of Felix-Brasdefer (2008) displayed that grammatical competence influenced the degree of elaboration of a reason in the study. Lack of L2 grammar affected the target-like refusal with high level of mitigation and elaboration. Furthermore, it was found that L1 culture leads to pragmatic transfer especially with higher status refusals (Chen d Yang, 2007; Chang, 2008).

The study of Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005) on L2 pragmatic awareness activity showed that learners when receiving instruction on politeness they can recognize the speech acts. Another way suggested by Byon (2006) is using Discourse Completion Tests (DCT) as consciousness-raising activities to develop learners' sociopragmatic awareness.

Considering the studies on politness, the following research questions were formed:

### **Research Questions**

1. What English refusal strategies do Turkish EFL learners generally use in the given scenarios in Turkish and English?
2. Does power have an effect on the refusal strategy use of Turkish EFL learners in Turkish and English?
3. What semantic formulas do Turkish EFL learners use in their refusal strategies in Turkish and English?
4. Do Turkish EFL learners use pragmatic transfer for their refusal in English?

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Participants**

The participants of the study were 120 B1.2 level students. This number included both male and female students but since gender had an effect on politeness strategy use only 62 female students were chosen from the population. By this way, the effect of gender on politeness strategy use was eliminated. 20 female students completed the discourse completion task in Turkish. They were A2 level students at the same school. A2 level learners were selceted for the study since they are less exposed to English and they may not transfer their strategies from English to Turkish. On total 82 female students participated in the study.

### **2.2 Materials**

The data were collected through a 12-item Discourse Completion Task and follow-up interviews (Felix-Brasdefer, 2008). The task was taken from Yamagashira (2001) which was an adapted version of Discourse Completion task of Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990). There were 12 scenarios (3 requests, 3 invitations, 3 offers, 3 suggestions). Power was also considered in these scenarios. Three statuses were included: higher, lower, and equal. Each situation required being answered by a refusal. The translation of the scenarios was made by two English instructors at school and it was reverse translated too. After the DCT, with 10 randomly selected students verbal reports were conducted. The questions were related to their responses such as reason of the strategy use and whether they thought in English of in Turkish while completing the DCT.

### Coding and Data Analysis

Descriptive quantitative analyses were used in the study to investigate the strategy use of EFL learners in refusals. The data were coded according to the taxonomy developed by Beebe, Takashi, and Uliss-Welz (as cited in Chen and Yang, 2007). While analyzing the data, additional codes were added such as compliment and jokes. There were two main categories: direct and indirect refusals. In appendix B the categories, subcategories and examples are presented.

For data analysis a second coder was used. She was an English instructor at the same school where the current study took place. Before she coded the data, she was trained for the coding with 5 English DCTs and 5 Turkish DCTs completed by male students. Then she was asked to code 25% of the whole Turkish DCT (5 papers) and English DCT (16 papers). The inter-coder reliability for Turkish DCT was 0.88 and for English DCT it was 0.91.

### 3. Results

**3.1 Research question 1:** *What English refusal strategies do Turkish EFL learners generally use in the given scenarios in Turkish and in English?*

To answer this question the politeness strategy use of the participants were analyzed in terms of request, invitation, offer and suggestion.

#### Request

The participants refused each request with various politeness strategies. The refusal strategies for both Turkish and English refusal were found out. The numbers are the times of each occurrence in whole data. Table 1 shows the findings.

**Table 1:** Refusal strategies for requests

	English	Turkish
	%	%
Reason	63.9	73.3
Negative willingness	62.3	16.6
Regret	47.8	28.3
Criticism	11.8	1.6
Wish	8	5
No	5.9	3.3
Compliment	3.2	1.6
Condition	1.6	5
Pause filler	1.6	0
Past condition	0	5

As Table 1 shows, for refusing in English the participants used mostly *stating reason* and *excuse*, and this was also a common strategy for refusing in Turkish. In all three request scenarios, *stating reason* or *excuse* was used. In addition, stating negative willingness or ability was very common in the refusals for both Turkish and English DCT data. Another common strategy for both languages was stating regret. This was stated as "I'm sorry/Sorry" in both languages. However, in English refusals, the participants used direct refusal strategies and compliments more frequently than in Turkish. Another completely different strategy for the two languages was *pause fillers* and *past condition*. In English,

the participants used pause fillers whereas in Turkish refusals pause fillers were not used. In the English DCT data, no past condition strategy was used. However, this strategy was common in Turkish refusal. With past condition, it is meant that the participants stated a past condition. For instance, they stated that “if you had informed me before, I would have accepted your request”. As well as indirect refusals, direct refusals were also used by both groups such as stating “no” but this was most of the time used with other indirect refusal strategies following it. Since the semantic formulas are related to the third research question, they will be analyzed in detail under that heading.

**Invitation:** What strategies the participants used in English DCT and Turkish DCT were found out. The findings are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Refusal strategies for invitation

	<b>English</b>	<b>Turkish</b>
<b>Invitation</b>	%	%
Reason	86	88.3
Regret	34.9	23.3
Wish	24.1	16.6
Negative willingness	18.2	16.6
Pause Fillers	9.6	6.6
Thank	8.6	8.3
Compliment	7.5	1.6
Indefinite acceptance	3.7	3.3
No	2.1	6.6
Past condition	0	10

The participants who completed the English DCT preferred mostly stating reason as a refusal strategy (86%). This is followed by stating regret and wish. These are similar strategy uses for the participants who completed the Turkish DCT. Similar to refusing requests, they did not use past condition whereas the Turkish DCT data included past condition for refusing invitation. As it can be seen from Table 2, similar refusal strategies were used by both groups in terms of refusing an invitation.

### **Offer**

Both data sets were analyzed to find out what refusal strategies were used for offers. The findings are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Refusal strategies for offers

	<b>English</b>	<b>Turkish</b>
<b>Offer</b>	%	%
Reason	43	53.3
Thank	38.7	28.3
Off hook	31.1	100
No	23.1	18.3
Negative willingness	21.5	20
Accept	15.5	13.3
Condition	5.9	6.6
Wish	5.3	5
Pause filler	3.7	5
Compliment	2.1	15
Warn	1.6	3.3
Past condition	0	1.6

Table 3 displays similar findings to other refusal situations; in other words, stating reason or excuse as the most commonly used strategy by the participants completing the English DCT. On the other hand, the Turkish data included mostly *off hook* strategy use (100%), but 31.1% of the participants who completed the English DCT used the strategy "off hook" which is the case when they say "don't worry, that's okay" and so forth. This is the case for item 9 in the DCT only, because a lady wants to pay for the vase she breaks. However, this strategy is not used for the other scenarios. This is followed by a direct strategy use for the English data. For Turkish data, the participants used stating reason or excuses as the secondly common strategy. For item 7 where a friend offers more cake, the participants used warning for the second part of the scenario stating that if they eat more, they would explode. Thus, although the scenarios were related to refusing offers different strategies were used for almost each item. The reason can be that the other two items did not offer something to eat and did not insist. Thus for refusing offers, there were slight differences between the groups in terms of strategy use.

### Suggestion

The participants were given situations where they had to refuse a suggestion. The findings are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Refusal strategies for suggestions

	<b>English</b>	<b>Turkish</b>
<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Reason	39.7	21.6
Self defense	19.8	30
Criticism	13.9	38.3
Negative willingness	11.2	8.3
Thank	8.6	3.3
Accept	7.5	1.6
Question not understood	5.9	0
Indefinite acceptance	4.8	0
Pause fillers	4.3	0
Wish	2.1	0
Attack	1	0
Past condition	0	3.3

In Table 4, it can be observed that there were various strategy uses in refusals in English data compared to Turkish data. Although indefinite acceptance, pause fillers, wish, and joke were used by the participants who completed English DCT, these strategies were not used in Turkish data. In addition, while English data used mostly stating reason or excuses as strategy, Turkish data used criticism most commonly. This may show that Turkish people are not open to suggestion especially when these are like advice. Interestingly attack was used in English data. One of the answers is presented below:

**Student:** Ah excuse me, some of the students were talking after class recently and we kind of feel that the class would be better if you could give us more practice in conversation and less on grammar.

**You:** *Will you talk with the exam paper on midterm? NO!*

**Student:** O.K, it is only a suggestion.

As it can be seen from the extract from the data, the participant attacks the person who makes a suggestion. There may be a low power effect but this will be discussed later on. Another big difference between the groups is that while 7.5% of the English group



accepted the suggestions first as fine, they had to refuse it, in the Turkish group only 1.6% of the participants accepted the suggestion. Thus these acceptances were more like agreeing with the idea, namely it was stated they were good suggestions, but they could not practise. As a result, in terms of refusing suggestions, the groups used different strategies.

To sum up, the participants who completed the English DCT used similar strategies with the participants who completed the Turkish DCT in refusing requests and invitations; however, they showed differences in the refusal strategy use for offers and suggestion.

### 3.2 Research Question 2: Does power have an effect on the refusal strategy use of Turkish EFL learners in Turkish and in English?

The data were analyzed to find out whether both groups differed in their strategy uses when power relations were regarded. Hence, the data were analyzed for request, invitation, offer, and suggestion considering power.

#### **Request**

In refusing requests, for both groups power relations affected the refusal strategies. Table 5 presents the findings.

**Table 5:** Refusal strategies and power in requests

Request	English			Turkish				
	High	%	Equal	Low	High	%	Equal	Low
Negative willingness	26.8		17.2	18.2	10		5	15
Regret	17.7		17.2	15.1	6.6		13.3	8.3
Reason	28.4		16.1	3.2	18		21.6	21.6
Criticism	0		10.2	1.6	0		6.6	5

When the English group was refusing someone from low status, 18.2% of them used negative willingness whereas in high status this percentage increases to 26.8%. However when refusing someone from lower status, the English group used mostly the strategy of stating reason (28.4%). When the participants were at higher status, most of them preferred stating reason (28.4%) and negative willingness (26.8%). When they were refusing a friend, they used negative willingness (17.2%), regret (17.2%), stating reason (16.1) and criticism (10.2%). When they were refusing someone from lower status, none of them used criticism in their refusals. Most of the participants stated that they were sorry first and then they stated they could not do what the speaker required. This shows that the learners were aware that different strategies should be used when power is the case. However, although they were at higher status, they used direct refusal strategies, but they preferred non-performative statements which may seem as an appropriate use. On the other hand, the Turkish group used stating reason mostly for all status: low (21.6%), equal (21.6%), high (18%) which shows difference with the English group. They used negative willingness more when they were at lower status and less when they were refusing a friend. While refusing a friend, they preferred stating regret. Criticism was not used for refusing some one at higher status which is similar to the English group. As a result, in refusing requests, the groups used different strategies from each other and in different status.

### Invitation

For invitation, the refusal strategies were investigated regarding power relations. The findings are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6:** Refusal strategies and power in invitation

Invitation	English			Turkish		
	High %	Equal	Low	High %	Equal	Low
Reason	28.4	31.1	26.3	31.6	30	25
Wish	10.7	6.4	6.4	3.3	8.3	10
Regret	10.2	9.6	13.9	13.3	6.6	3.3
Negative willingness	4.3	4.8	8.6	6.6	5	6.6
Compliment	2.6	5.9	2.1	0	0	1.6
Thank	1.6	3.7	3.7	1.6	1.6	5
Past condition	0	0	0	8.3	1	0
Exclamation	0	0	0	0	5	0

Table 6 presents that when refusing an invitation from someone at high status, 28.4% of the participants who completed the English DCT used stating reason. When refusing a friend, this percentage increases to 31.1% and for lower status it is 26.3%. Also when they were refusing someone at higher status, they preferred stating they would wish to accept the invitation, but then they stated their reason of refusal. Wish was used less with equal and lower status. However, stating regret was more often used with lower status. Some of the participants also thanked for the invitation first and then refused it. Similarly, the Turkish group also preferred using stating reason from all status at higher percentages than the other strategies. However, although the percentages are not very different from each other in the English group regarding status, in the Turkish group, it shows differences across the status more. For instance, regret was used with refusing someone at higher status 13.3%, but for equal and lower status it was less used. Also past condition (a form of wish) was used mostly in refusing for higher status. While the English group used compliments in refusing in all status, the Turkish group used it only in refusing at lower status. On the whole, in Turkish data, it seems that the participants were more aware with the statuses compared to English data.

### Offer

Both data were analyzed in terms of refusal strategies for offers and power relation effect. Table 7 shows the findings.

**Table 7:** Refusal strategies and power in offer

Offer	English			Turkish		
	High %	Equal	Low	High	Equal	Low
Reason	22.5	19.3	1	25	20	8.3
Negative willingness	17.2	4.3	0	11.6	16.6	0
Thank	6.9	31.7	0	1.6	7.5	3.3
Wish	4.8	0.5	0	0	0	5
Regret	4.3	0	0	3.3	0	0
Compliment	2.1	0	0	13.3	1.6	0
No	0.5	27.9	4.3	1.6	16.6	0
Accept	0.5	15	0	0	11.6	1.6
Criticism	0	0	1	0	0	0
Off hook	0	0	31.1	0	0	33.3

Table 7 displays that for refusing someone from higher statuses, the English group used commonly stating reason as a refusal strategy (22.5%), for equal status thanking was used most commonly (31.7) and for lower status off hook strategy was used which was “never mind” “don’t worry”. On the other hand, in the Turkish data, when refusing someone from higher status stating reason/excuse was most commonly used (25%), and for equal status too (20%). For refusing someone from lower status, the Turkish group used frequently the off hook strategy too which is a similar finding for the English group considering the lower status. Off hook was never used for other status. Another finding is the use of compliment before refusing the offer. The English group preferred the use of compliments less than the Turkish group. A similar finding is the use of regret. Both groups used this strategy while refusing higher status. For refusing a person from an equal status, both groups used direct refuse such as “no”. However, the English group also thanked for the offer after or before refusing it.

### **Suggestion**

The findings related to how the participants refused suggestions from high, equal and low status are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8:** Refusal strategies and power in suggestion

<b>Suggest</b>	<b>English</b>			<b>Turkish</b>		
	<b>High</b> <b>%</b>	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b> <b>%</b>	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Low</b>
Reason	6.9	22.5	10.2	1.6	10	10
Criticism	3.7	3.7	6.4	5	18.3	15
Self-defense	12.3	0	7.5	23.3	1.6	5
Accept	5.3	1.6	0.5	1.6	0	0
Negative willingness	4.3	3.2	3.7	1.6	3.3	3.3
Thank	4.3	2.6	3.7	1.6	1.6	0
Pause fillers	0	4.3	4.3	0	0	0
Wish	0	4.3	0	0	0	6.6
Indefinite acceptance	2.6	0.5	1	0	0	0
Joke	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	0
Philosophy	0	0	0	0	3.3	3.3

While refusing a suggestion coming from a person at equal status, the English group used stating reason (22.5%) whereas self defense was not used while refusing a person from an equal status. However, self defense was used by the Turkish group at all status and higher in refusing someone from a higher status similar to the English group. While criticism was used at a high percentage by the Turkish group (18.3%), it was less preferred by the English group. The English group used indefinite acceptance more at higher status whereas it was not used by the Turkish group at any status. Also the English group used jokes for refusing except at high status, but the Turkish group did not use it. However, telling a philosophy was used only by the Turkish group at equal and low status. This strategy was used when the participant was offered a piece of cake. For refusing someone at higher status, it is seen from the table that the Turkish group did not use different refusal strategies for higher status whereas the English group used various refusal strategies while refusing an offer.

To summarize the findings, the participants who completed the English DCT tried to use various refusal strategies whereas the Turkish group did not, but most of the strategies

were similar in both groups but they differed in the use of refusing people from different status.

**3.3 Research question 3:** *What semantic formulas do Turkish EFL learners use in their refusal strategies in Turkish and English?*

To find out what kind of semantic formulas each group used, the data were analyzed in terms of request, invitation, offer, and suggestion considering power relations too. The percentages at this stage were not found out because the most frequent semantic formulas were taken into consideration at this part of the study. To start with, the semantic formulas for each group are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9:** Semantic formulas for refusing a request

English N=61			Turkish N=20		
High (n)	Equal	Low	High	Equal	Low
regret- reason (19)	regret-reason (7)	regret-reason- nw (8)	reason (5)	regret- reason (3)	nw- reason(4)
regret-nw (12)	no-nw (6)	regret-nw (7)	nw-reason (3)	cr-regret (3)	reason (5)
regret-nw- reason (6)	regret-nw-cr (4)	regret-nw- reason (5)	Reason-nw (3)	reason (5)	regret- reason (3)
reason (11)	wish-reason (2)	nw-reason (5)	regret-reason- pastcondition (3)		
nw-reason (2)	Accept- condition (2)	wish-reason (1)			
	regret-nw- reason (2)	compliment- nw (4)			

**nw: negative willingness, cr: criticism**

Since there were various semantic formulas in English DCT data, the most commonly used formulas were considered at this study. For high status, almost all participants started their refusals with stating regret, but they continued the formula differently. For higher status, 19 participants from the English DCT started their refusals with regret and then followed by stating the reason or excuse why they refuse the request. Regret-reason was used also for the other status in the English data. This is a similar finding for the Turkish data. Furthermore, direct refusal was used only for refusing requests from equal status in the English data whereas in the Turkish data it was never used for none of the status. When both data groups are compared, it can be seen that the English group used various formulas whereas the Turkish data used reason and regret and their different combinations. A formula used by the Turkish group but not by the English group is criticism and regret for equal status. This is the scenario where a student asks his friend for class notes but did not attend the lessons. Therefore, the participants first criticize the student for being lazy and then state their regret.

Another data analysis for semantic formula was carried out for refusing invitations. The findings are presented at Table 10.

**Table 10:** Semantic formulas for refusing an invitation

<b>English High (n)</b>	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Turkish High</b>	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Low</b>
wish-reason (16)	regret-reason (14)	Regret-reason (15)	regret-reason (4)	pause filler-wish-reason (5)	wish-reason (5)
regret-reason (11)	wish-reason (11)	wish-reason (11)	nw-reason (3)	regret-reason (4)	no-reason (3)
compl-reason (5)	reason (11)	nw-reason (6)	pastconditon-reason (3)	thank-reason (3)	thank-reason (2)
really-regret-reason (3)	compliment-reason (10)	thank-reason (4)	reason-regret (2)	reason (3)	reason (3)
thank-reason (2)	thank-reason (6)	compliment-reason (4)		nw-reason (2)	

**nw: negative willingness, cr: criticism**

As seen in Table 10, the English group starts the refusal for higher status with a wish that they could join, but then they refuse by stating a reason or excuse (n=16). For refusing all status, regret-reason was the most commonly used semantic formula. Wish-reason was the second commonly used formula for equal and low status. Thank-reason was used less commonly by the English group for high and equal status. Compliment-reason was used for refusing equal status (n=10), and for lower status (n=4), for high status (n=5). The participants, first state that the invitation was *great/nice* but they could not join because of some reasons. For the Turkish data, what attracts attention is the use of pause fillers for equal status (n=5) while this was not used in the English DCT. For refusing high status in Turkish data, regret-reason was used more (n=4) than the other formulas. For lower status, the refusal was made with wish-reason formula. In both groups, stating the reason of refusal was commonly used for each status but with different semantic formulas. Moreover, the Turkish data did not include thanking for an invitation from a person from a higher status, but it was used for equal and lower status. English and Turkish data are the same in refusing strategy in terms of refusing someone from lower status. In both data sets wish-reason was used.

For refusing an offer, what kind of semantic formulas both groups used are presented at Table 11.

**Table 11:** Semantic formulas for refusing an offer

<b>English High</b>	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Turkish High</b>	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Low</b>
wish-reason (10)	no-thank (29)	off hook (41)	compliment-reason (6)	no-thank (8)	off hook (17)
nw-reason (8)	no-reason (4)	no-off hook (8)	reason (3)	thank-reason (4)	off hook-reason (3)
thank-reason (7)	nw-thank (2)	pause filler-off hook (4)	reason-nw (3)	reason (4)	
thank-nw (5)	reason-thank (7)	cr-off hook (3)	compliment-nw (2)	no-reason (2)	
reason-nw (5)	reason (3)	off hook-reason (2)	no-reason (2)		
compliment-reason (4)					

**nw: negative willingness, cr: criticism**

Table 11 shows that wish-reason was used by ten students while refusing an offer from a higher status. No-thank was used by 29 students for refusing equal status offer and 41 students used off hook for lower status refusal. At this formula, the offer is first refused by saying "no" and "thanks". However, the Turkish data includes the same formula for refusing equal status and lower status. At high status, there is difference, in Turkish data compliments were used but in English data stating a wish was more common. Similar strategies were used but with different combinations in both data. One of the differences is the use of pause fillers at lower status in the English data (n=4). When the whole table is considered, it can be noticed that while the participants refuse in English, they showed richer performance than the group who completed the DCT in Turkish. Another formula in the English data is cr-off hook (n=3) whereas this was not used in completing the DCT in Turkish. In this scenario, a cleaning lady want to pay for the vase she broke, thus first she is criticized for not being careful but then the participants state that the lady should not worry about it.

The semantic formulas used in refusing suggestions were analyzed for both data sets. The findings are presented at Table 12.

**Table 12:** Semantic formula for refusing a suggestion

<b>English</b>			<b>Turkish</b>		
<b>High</b>	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Equal</b>	<b>Low</b>
self defense (11)	reason (22)	self defense (10)	self defense (13)	criticism (11)	Reason (7)
criticism (5)	criticism (6)	criticism (7)	criticism (3)	reason (5)	Criticism (6)
accept-self defense (5)	wish-reason (5)	reason (5)		philosophy (2)	
thank-self defense (3)	thank-reason (4)	wish-reason (4)			
thank-indefinite acceptance (2)	nw (3)	accept-reason (4)			
criticism-self-defense (2)	pause filler-nw-reason (3)	nw (3)			

Table 11 shows that the participants completing the English DCT used various refusal strategies compared to Turkish group. The refusal strategy for high status shows similarity in both groups, they preferred self-defense (Eng, n=11; Tur, n=13). This is followed by criticism in both groups again (Eng, n=5; Tur, n=3). The Turkish group used two semantic formulas for this group but nothing else whereas the English group used 6 different common semantic formulas. Stating reason is used as the most common refusal strategy for equal status (n=22) in English group. The English group refuses someone from high status with thank-self-defense (n=3), acceptance-self defense (n=5) whereas for lower status the formulas are more plan such as only criticism (n=7), and only stating reason (n=5). Thus both groups show difference in semantic formulas regarding power and the language they filled in the DCT.

#### **3.4 Research question 4:** *Do Turkish EFL learners use pragmatic transfer for their refusal in English?*

Research question was partly answered by the research questions 1,2 and 3 because the findings were related to the refusal strategy of the participants in English DCT and Turkish DCT, and the findings were presented together to see the differences. To mention those findings, in requests, the English group used regret-reason at all statuses, and in

Turkish group reason (high), regret-reason (equal) and negative willingness-reason (low) were used. Since this study lacks native speaker data, the findings may be compared with those in the study of Yamagashira (2001) which was conducted with graduate American speakers. On this study, the American speakers started their refusals commonly regret-positive opinion at high status. For low status the American speakers started with the same strategy and continued with excuses. Considering this finding, the refusal strategies of the participants in the current study can be said to be similar to those of American speakers except the use positive opinion.

When the data was analyzed for invitation, in the current study, the participants used t semantic formula wish-reason at high status, regret-reason at equal status and regret-reason at low status whereas the American speakers at Yamagashira's (2001) study started their refusals again with positive opinion, and continued with excuse and regret for higher status, and for lower status they used regret/gratitude-excuse-gratitude/alternative. Thus for refusing an invitation, it can be said that the participants of the current study showed difference both with the refusal semantic formulas of the American speakers (Yamagashira, 2001) and the Turkish group. The only common point is the use of excuses (reason).

For refusing an offer, the participants of this study, most of the time, accepted the second offer of the speaker (*come on, just little piece*) whereas the American speakers (Yamagashira, 2001) insisted in their refusals. This part was not included in the tables earlier not to create a bias in the formulas. Thus for this particular offer the participants may be considered as transferring pragmatic knowledge because in Turkish culture when the person who offers soothing to eat and insists, it is usually accepted with a condition "OK but just a little" which was also the case with the both groups in this study. For the cleaning lady who wants to pay for the broken vase, almost all of the participants in this study used *off hook* stating "don't worry" and this was the same with the American speakers in the study of Yamagashira (2001). However, it cannot be said that no pragmatic transfer occurred because the Turkish data included also off hook for this item. Thus it cannot be known whether the English grouped used pragmatic transfer or used off hook because they learnt that it is the way in English.

For suggestions, the American speakers (Yamagashira, 2001) used excuse/direct "no"-excuse-gratitude (high) but the participants used only self defense and this was used also for refusing someone at lower status. This may show that the participants used pragmatic transfer in refusing suggestions because they used the similar strategies with the group who completed the DCT in Turkish.

To understand whether pragmatic transfer occurred while completing English DCT, 10 female students were interviewed after they had completed the DCT. They were asked what language they thought while completing the DCT, whether they use the same strategies in daily life. 9 said that they thought the context was in Turkey but thought the strategies in English, and one student thought in Turkish and translated the situations and the refusal strategies. This may be evidence that the students used pragmatic transfer because they thought that the situations took place in Turkey and this may have led to pragmatic transfer in completing the DCT. All of the interview participants stated they would use the same strategies and formulas in daily life too, which can be also an evidence that they used pragmatic transfer.

Since the participants who completed the English DCT used more and various refusal strategies than the participants who completed the Turkish DCT, it can be said that there

is not a certain pragmatic transfer. However, it cannot be said that all refusal strategies were used because they knew that they would use those certain strategies because it shows similarity with the Turkish group and the American speakers (Yamagashira, 2001). The similarity between the strategy use in both groups is stating reason, and this was used more frequently than the other strategies.

#### 4. Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate the refusal strategies of female EFL learners at a discourse completion task. 61 intermediate level students completed the English version of the DCT and 20 students completed the Turkish version of the DCT. Power was also considered in the DCT.

The most commonly used refusal strategies in both groups were investigated. It was found that the participants who completed the English DCT used stating a reason/excuse and regret, and this was the same for the Turkish group which is a similar finding to the study of Liao and Bresnahan (1996). Thus indirect refusal strategies were preferred more frequently (Chen and Yang, 2007; Chen and Chen, 2007; Al-Eryani, 2008; Felix-Brasdefer, 2008; Wannaruck, 2008). Regret and apology are also used in Turkish (İrman, 1992). Where the answers differed was the place of these strategies in the semantic formulas. One difference between the groups was the use of past condition in the Turkish data. The participants used this as "If you had told me earlier, I would ..." but this was never used by the English group. In English data, the reason for not using this strategy may be the structure if-clause in English. The English group may not have been taught this structure yet, or they may have not felt secure in using this structure. Few of the participants used the future condition, thus the participants may have wanted to use past condition but avoided. Uso-Juan and Marties-Flor (2008) suggest that EFL learners have difficulty in communication because of lack of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary. This may be an explanation of not using past condition.

The data were analyzed also whether power had an effect on the refusal strategy use in both groups. It was found that more indirect strategies were used when refusing someone from high and low status and more direct "no" in refusing a friend. This was the same for the Turkish group. Another finding was that although indirect refusal was used, still few students used direct refusals for higher status in the English group, but they preferred non-performative statements which may seem as an appropriate use. The Turkish group shows differences across the status more. Regret was used with refusing someone at higher status, but for equal and lower status it was used less. Additionally past condition was used for refusing someone from higher status. Another finding is that the English group used compliments in refusing in all status, but the Turkish group used it only in refusing when it was for lower status. These findings may show that the students were more aware of the effect of power in refusing in Turkish.

When the semantic formulas were examined in both groups, it was observed that the English group used longer and various formulas compared to the Turkish group. Liao and Bresnahan (1996) found that Chinese students used fewer refusal strategies, and this was also the case for the Turkish group. They used only one strategy most of the time such as only regret or reason. The English group used longer and more different formulas, and Liao and Bresnahan (1996) found that the American speakers used various refusal strategies. Thus, it can be said that either the students were aware of this fact or they used more strategies and longer formulas because they may have felt insecure in refusing in L2. The second seems more rational because the students told in the



interviews that they would refuse in the same way in daily life and they thought that the scenarios took place in Turkey.

In terms of pragmatic transfer, when all the findings are considered, it may be said that pragmatic transfer was used by many participants because 10 participants stated that they thought the scenarios took place in Turkey, but 9 of them thought in English and produced in English. Similarly, the studies of Chen and Yang, (2007) and Chang (2008) found that L1 culture leads to pragmatic transfer especially with higher status refusals. Also regret was commonly used as a strategy in both data, this may be the result of pragmatic transfer because İrman (1992) states that regret is used commonly in Turkish as a refusal strategy. Furthermore, Pearson (2006) claims that pragmatic competence develops before grammatical competence, and L1 pragmatic system has an effect on processing new L2 data. Felix-Brasdefer (2008) found that grammatical competence influenced the degree of elaboration of a reason in the study which was also the case in this study. The participants who completed the English DCT used many excuses and reasons to convince that they really could not make it.

### **5. Implications and suggestions**

The findings of this study showed that the participants tried many strategies and semantic formulas in refusing in English, and this may show that they do not feel much secure in L2 although they are taught such speech acts in their speaking courses. Thus, it may be suggested that more attention should be paid to EFL learners while teaching politeness strategy use. Teachers should help learners to develop their pragmatic competence. Some learner-based methods in terms of mitigation devices are suggested by Uso-Juan and Martines-Flor (2008). In addition, the use of authentic material is mentioned by Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005). One of the most interesting suggestions for developing pragmatic competence is the use of Discourse Completion Tests (DCT) as consciousness-raising activities (Byon; 2006). Thus such activities can be implemented to the curriculum and more attention can be paid to develop native-like politeness strategies of EFL learners.

### **6. Limitations of the study and Suggestion for further studies**

The most vital limitation of the study is not to have a native speaker data for refusal strategies. Therefore the findings in terms of pragmatic competence are not very strong. Thus, it is suggested that studies in terms of politeness strategy use should include native speakers of English, EFL learners and Turkish speakers. For further studies it is suggested to use role play tasks with DCT so that spoken data can be collected too. Also gender, age and level of education can be considered as variables in the use of politeness strategies. Finally, since there can be personal preferences on the use of politeness strategies, introvert and extrovert EFL learners' use can be studied.

### **7. Conclusion**

This study was an attempt to investigate the use of refusal strategies of Turkish EFL learners. The findings showed that various and longer semantic formulas were used in the English DCT data and power was less considered compared to Turkish DCT data. Also, it was found that pragmatic transfer may occur in such tasks because of lack of grammatical competence, vocabulary and pragmatic competence.

### **Appendix A** **Refusal Strategy Code**

#### Classification of Refusals

##### I. Direct

- A. Performative (eg. "I refuse")
- B. Nonperformative Statement
  - 1. "No"
  - 2. Negative willingness/ability ("I can't")

##### II. Indirect

- A. Statement of regret ("I'm sorry")
- B. Wish
- C. Excuse, reason, explanation ("my children will be home that night")
- D. Statement of alternative
  - 1. I can do X instead of Y
  - 2. Why don't you do X instead of Y
- E. Set condition
  - 1. Future
  - 2. Past (if you had asked me earlier, I would have...)
- F. Promise of future acceptance ("I'll do next time")
- G. Statement of principle
- H. Statement of philosophy ("one can't be too careful")
- I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor
  - 1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester ("I won't be any fun tonight")
  - 2. Guilt trip (waitress to customers who wants to sit a while "I can't make a living off people who just order coffee")
    - 3. Criticize the request/requester
    - 4. request for help, empathy and assistance by dropping or holding the request
    - 5. Let interlocutor off hook (I Don't worry about it", "that's OK")
    - 6. Self-defense ("I'm trying my best")
- J. Acceptance that functions as a refusal
  - 1. Indefinite time
  - 2. Lack of enthusiasm
- K. Joke
- L. Compliment ("thanks, nice offer but...")

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