



The Iranian Bilingual (Persian-Baluchi) and Monolingual (Persian) Learners' English Pragmatic Competence: A Focus on Refusal Speech Act Sets



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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to explore the pragmatic competence of Iranian Persian- and Persian-Baluchi-speaking learners learning English as their second and third languages, respectively. The realization of refusal strategies with respect to the status of interlocutors (lower, equal & higher) and the types of eliciting acts (requests, invitations, offers, & suggestions) were studied. Moreover, the perception of appropriate refusal speech act sets with regard to the social distance between the participants, their power relationship and the degree of imposition of refusal were explored. 36 Persian-Baluchi-speaking and 33 Persian-speaking learners of English were asked to complete a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and a Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT). Results of the study revealed variations in frequency and shift of semantic formulas employed by Baluch and Persian subjects. Persian-speaking English learners were found to use more indirect formulas and more face-saving strategies per response, while Persian-Baluchi-speaking English learners were found to use more direct types of semantic formulas at different degrees of frequency. Except for offer in which 'off the hook' along with 'direct refusals' were used more and 'regret' was used less, in other situations, 'excuse/explanation', 'regret' and 'direct refusals' were more frequent. However, Baluch subjects did not reveal better pragmatic competence over Persian subjects as the differences between the two groups in recognizing appropriate refusal strategies were found to be insignificant.

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1. Introduction

The individual's ability to mentally organize language in Second Language (L2) and Third Language (L3) learning has always been interesting for scholars and educators. According to [Safont-Jorda \(2005\)](#), L2/L3 learning is the acquisition of a non-native language, simultaneously or consecutively, by students who have already acquired or are acquiring one or two other languages. In comparison to bilinguals who benefit from two languages as their linguistic base in third language acquisition, monolingual learners can only refer to their first language as the base one ([Safont-Jorda, 2005, 2011](#)). [Bialystok et al. \(2005\)](#) stated that in both L2 and L3 learning, the learner is acquiring an additional language; however, L3 acquisition encompasses a more diverse and complex nature. It involves "non-linearity, language maintenance, individual variation, interdependence and quality change" ([Safont-Jorda, 2005, p. 12](#)). The modality of additional language acquisition has always received due attention of researchers and educators. Regarding bilinguals and multilinguals' functioning, [Bialystok et al. \(2005\)](#) argued that learners of L2/L3 have shown more cognitive improvement and the ability to contemplate and form concepts. Furthermore, due to learning to cater to more linguistic systems and because of being richer in language experiences, multilinguals are equipped with more and/or better resources ([De Bot, 2012](#)).

One construct which is important in language learning process is pragmatic competence. L2 pragmatic ability refers to the exploration of individuals' pragmatic competence in their interlanguage ([Allami &](#)

[Naeimi, 2011](#)). [Barron \(2003, p.10\)](#) defines pragmatic competence as "knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language's linguistic resources." Refusal as a face-threatening speech act is one of the frequently performed acts in our daily lives. According to [Beebe et al. \(1990\)](#) and [Rasekh Eslami \(2010\)](#), refusal is one of the complex speech act strategies to perform and needs a high level of pragmatic competence to be realized properly. To perform it, interlocutors usually use indirect strategies to decrease the offense to hearers. However, it varies in the degree of directness, indirectness, and appropriateness across languages and cultures and between bilinguals and multilinguals. Moreover, the strategies employed by interlocutors to refuse may vary in terms of the status of the interlocutors in relation to each other (high to low, equal, & low to high). This speech act is also sensitive to the types of eliciting acts (request, invitation, offer, & suggestion). As far as pragmatic competence studies are concerned, [Kasper and Rose \(1999\)](#) and [Safont-Jorda \(2005\)](#) stated that the issue that requires further investigation is that of the role of subjects' linguistic background. Accordingly, the comparison of bilingual speakers learning an L3 with monolingual speakers learning an L2 expands the scope of the research on the acquisition of pragmatic competence, at least as far as the use of refusal linguistic realization is concerned.

The diversity of the languages spoken in Iran has changed this country to a regionally bilingual one. Persian/Farsi is the mother tongue

of the country and Kurdish (in West), Baluchi (in Southeast), Turkish (in Northwest), Armenian (in Julfa, the Armenian quarter of Isfahan) and Arabic (in Southwest) have created the bilingual portions of Iran. In the South-Eastern part of Iran in Baluchestan area, Baluchi is spoken as the first language of the locals. This language which belongs to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family is nearly linked to Persian. According to [Barjasteh Delforooz \(2010\)](#), based on phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical analysis, Baluchi includes three major dialects: Western (or Rakhshani), Southern (or Makrani), and Eastern Baluchi.

These bilinguals, thus, refer to their mother tongue (Baluchi) or the official language (Persian) in different situations and in interaction with people from different levels of status. Being competent in two languages, the bilinguals in learning English as an L3 may show differences in the use of refusal speech act sets compared to the monolinguals in learning English as an L2. Studies exploring the realization of speech act by learners learning additional languages have shown that bilinguals and multilinguals have a higher degree of pragmatic competence than monolinguals ([Fouser, 1997](#); [Jessner, 2008](#); [Safont-Jorda, 2005, 2013](#), [Barnes, 2006](#); [Cenoz, 2000, 2007](#)). Following this view, this study has analyzed and compared the strategies employed in refusing requests, suggestions, offers, and invitations by Iranian Persian speakers and Baluchi speakers in the process of learning English. Further, the study has attempted to examine the effects of being monolingual or bilingual in using English

as an L2/L3, focusing on the perception of appropriate refusal strategies.

2. Literature Review

With respect to the role of pragmatic competence in the acquisition of additional languages, [Safont-Jorda \(2005\)](#) explored the possible differences in the pragmatic competence and meta-pragmatic awareness of monolingual and bilingual learners of English, with regard to the request speech act in particular. 160 English university learners were asked to complete a discourse completion test, a discourse evaluation test and to participate in open role-plays. According to the findings, bilinguals' degree of pragmalinguistic awareness was higher than that of monolinguals. The performances of bilinguals, moreover, were better in oral and written production tasks in formulating requests. [Fouser \(1997\)](#) delved into the pragmatic competence of a Korean learner of Japanese language as his third language (English was his second language). Trilingual subject was reported to show better pragmatic competence in the verbal completion as production tasks. [Aliakbari and Changizi \(2012\)](#) investigated the realization of refusal strategies of Iranian multilinguals. The authors studied the use of refusal by 278 Persian (n=136) and Kurdish (n=142) students. Data analysis revealed that direct refusal, regret, excuse/reason, wish, and postponement were the most frequently used formulas. Regarding the frequency and shift of semantic formulas, Kurdish learners displayed a higher level of frequency shift in their use of several semantic formulas with respect to status level. They were also found to employ a greater variety of strategies. Swearing was also found to

be a new type of semantic formula not included in the classification of refusal strategies adopted as theoretical framework.

More recently, [Rahimi Domakani and Hashemian \(2016\)](#) investigated the pragmatic awareness and production of Iranian Turkish and Persian EFL learners in terms of speech act of apology. Almost insignificant differences were reported between the two groups with regard to their perceptions of appropriateness and inappropriateness of speech acts. Furthermore, it was illustrated that monolinguals/bilinguals showed tendency towards using all super-strategies of apology except "Responsibility Expressions" and "Promises of Forbearance". Sources of pragmatic failure on the part of learners were identified as lack of cultural awareness, the case of subtractive bilingualism in Iran, and insufficient pragmatic input. [Mehrpur et al. \(2016\)](#) explored the production of refusals in three languages (Kurdish, Farsi & English) and focused on the role of linguistic knowledge in pragmatic transfer of refusals. They coded and analyzed the data based on semantic formula sequences. The Kurdish learners of English fluent in Farsi (trilinguals) were compared with native English speakers, Farsi monolinguals, Kurdish monolinguals, and bilingual Farsi learners of English. They concluded that pragmatic transfer was evident in choice and content of semantic formulae. Differences were also reported in sociocultural norms of English, Farsi, and Kurdish languages in terms of refusal speech act and the individuals' social power. Relative distance was recognized to have a paramount role in speech act performance. They also came up with the conclusion that transfer of refusals mostly

happened from L1 (Kurdish) not from L2 (Farsi) to L3 (English).

Focusing on the effect of being bilingual on pragmatic production and meta-pragmatic awareness in third language learning, [Zand-Moghadam and Adeh \(2020\)](#) compared Turkish-Persian bilinguals learning English as their L3 with Persian monolinguals learning English as their L2. Bilingual EFL learners outperformed monolinguals in pragmatic production and meta-pragmatic awareness confirming their appropriate use of speech act strategies. [Khany and Haghi \(2020\)](#) by focusing on syntactic features of future tense and taking into account the predictions of the extant L2 and L3 generative theories, studied the acquisition of English future tense between Persian monolinguals and Kurdish-Persian bilinguals learning English. Attributing it to the lack of English future tense syntactic features in the previously acquired languages, they concluded that both groups had problems with acquiring future tense. It was also reported that the learners of both groups experienced much more challenges at the early stages of learning English future tense and gradually as their proficiency level progressed, they became more successful in producing target-like forms.

In spite of being of great importance both for Iranian studies and historical linguistics, Baluchi is among the less intensely investigated modern Iranian languages ([Korn, 2003](#)). Most of the extant studies on Baluchi language focus on its phonology (e. g., [Okati et al., 2013](#); [Mahmoudzahi et al., 2019](#)), grammar (e. g., [Jahani, 2019](#); [Korn, 2006](#)) and vocabulary (e. g., [Korn, 2006](#)). In other words, the research on the comparison between the Iranian monolinguals (Persian) and bilinguals (Baluchi & Persian)

with regard to their pragmatic competence in the process of learning English as an L2/L3 has been missing. The question undertaken in this study is, therefore, to find out the extent to which Iranian Baluch-Persian bilinguals are different from Persian monolinguals in the process of learning another language (English) with regard to their use of refusal strategies. In other words, the study endeavors to answer the following questions:

1. What are the refusal strategies frequently used by Persian- and Persian-Baluchi-speaking English learners in refusing suggestions, offers, requests, and invitations when interacting with interlocutors from higher, equal, and lower status?
2. To what extent does Persian/Baluchi-speaking English learners' pragmatic competence differ from that of Persian-speaking English learners with respect to the perception of appropriate refusal speech act sets?

3. Methodology

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 36 Persian-Baluchi-speaking and 33 Persian-speaking learners of English language. The Baluch subjects were studying English as their L3 (Baluchi, Persian, & English) and Persian subjects were studying English as their L2 (Persian & English). All learners were undergraduate EFL learners selected from Chabahar Maritime University and University of

Sistan and Baluchestan, two universities with native Baluchi speakers with an average age between 20 and 25 years old. It should be mentioned that at the outset of the study, the participants were ensured that their privacy would be protected and their data would remain confidential. Parental education was used to measure the subjects' socioeconomic status (Gottfried et al., 2003; Modir Khamene, 2006). The subjects were asked to rate on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 indicating no qualification & 5 indicating a university degree) to indicate their parents' educational attainment. The average level of parental educational attainment turned out to be diploma.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and the significance of differences between the groups with regard to their age, gender, English exposure, and proficiency level. With respect to the subjects' previous exposure to English language, the participants were asked to rate on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 indicating no proficiency & 5 indicating native-like proficiency).

Table 1
The Descriptive Statistics and Significance of Differences on the Subjects' Profiles

	Baluch subjects Mean (SD)	Persian subjects Mean (SD)	Significance of differences t(p)
Gender	25 M 11 F	18 M 15 F	
Age	22.13 (1.37)	21.90 (1.33)	0.70 (0.48)
English exposure	2.61 (0.64)	2.57 (0.61)	0.23 (0.81)

Proficiency level	33.08 (4.17)	33.63 (3.83)	-0.57 (0.58)
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M=Male, F=Female, SD=Standard Deviation

The independent t-tests indicated that there was no significant difference between learners of the two groups with regard to their ages ($t=.70$, $p=.48$), exposure to English language ($t=.23$, $p=.81$), and proficiency level ($p=.58 \geq .05$). It is worth mentioning that for estimating language proficiency level, the First Certificate in English (FCE) was administrated among learners. The test assessed all four language skills i.e. reading, listening, writing and speaking.

Instruments

The written Discourse Completion Test

The written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) developed by [Beebe et al. \(1990\)](#) was applied to introduce some natural refusal scenarios to learners. The test is a role-play questionnaire consisting of 12 situations divided into three requests, three invitations, three offers, and three suggestions. Moreover, each occasion entails three statuses: refusal to a higher person, refusal to an equal person and refusal to a lower person.

Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion

Test

In order to analyze the differences between bilingual and monolingual EFL learners in perception of pragmatic errors or appropriateness of refusal speech act strategies, a Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT) was applied. The test contains a description of a contextualized situation requiring a refusal and multiple choices of responses requiring subjects to choose the most appropriate response that fits the intended situation. Each occasion specifies three major situational variables: the social distance between

the participants (D), their relative power to each other (P) and the level of imposition (I), each of which has a binary (+/-) category. The level of imposition "has to do with the extent to which the expenditure of goods, services, or energy is involved in carrying out a request or a refusal, or how severe the offense was that requires an apology" ([Hudson, 2001](#), p. 284). The original test has 24 items on three speech act sets of request, refusal and apology ([Hudson et al., 1992, 1995](#)). The refusal situations (8 items) were selected to measure respondents' recognition of correct refusal speech act. Each situation comprises three responses only one of which would be considered fully proper by a native speaker of English.

Procedure

After ensuring of the homogeneity of the two groups in terms of age, English exposure and language proficiency, the English format of DCT was distributed among Persian-Baluchi-speaking and Persian-speaking EFL learners. It generally took 20-30 minutes to complete the DCT. In order to be analytically correct, the produced refusals were parsed into formulas. The collected data were reviewed to specify which semantic formulas (language forms) were used in English. The responses were also analyzed for the frequency of each formula present in the responses. The same classification of semantic formulas applied by [Beebe et al. \(1990\)](#) was employed in the present study to determine the speech act sets. The responses to DCT were returned to the one of the researchers personally.

One week after the subjects completed DCT, MDCT was distributed

among them to avoid the intervention of their responses to DCT by the content of MDCT. It took 10-15 minutes to complete the MDCT. The collected data were reviewed to identify the correct responses selected by Persian-Baluchi-speaking and Persian-speaking learners.

Responses were first divided according to their situation: request, invitation, offer and suggestion. The frequency of the semantic formulas used by each group in response to each DCT situation was calculated. The computed numbers were changed to percentages. In analyzing the responses to DCT, all 36 Persian-Baluchi-speaking learners were considered as one group and all 33 Persian-speaking learners were considered as another group. The shift of frequencies of semantic formulas relative to the status of interlocutors were also analyzed. To estimate the reliability score of coding system for the semantic formula, the collected data were reassessed by a trained coder working independently. The inter-rater reliability for request, invitation, suggestion, and offer .92, .90, .95, and .95, respectively.

Data from MDCT was scored according to a key provided by the test developers (Hudson et al., 1992, 1995). One point was assigned for each correct response and zero point for either of the incorrect responses. The chi-square test was run to statistically check the differences between the two groups.

4. Results

The frequency, content and shift of employed semantic formulas in refusals of requests from a

higher, an equal and a lower status person (situation 12, 2 and 1) are presented in Table 2. The frequencies (in percentage) indicate how many monolingual and bilingual EFL learners employed a given semantic formula.

Table 2
Frequency of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Requests with Regard to Interlocutor Status (Situations 12, 2, 1)

	Baluch Subjects (n=36)			Persian Subjects (n=33)		
	Hig h	Equ al	Lo w	Hig h	Equ al	Lo w
Formulas						
No	0	0	0	0	15	15
Negative W	50	0	33	45	15	21
Regret	16	83	100	6	51	51
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	16	83	50	45	45	100
St of Alternative	0	0	0	0	6	0
Promise of Future Acceptance	33	0	16	15	0	0
St of Principle	0	0	0	0	0	0
St of Philosophy	0	0	0	0	0	0
St of Negative Consequence	0	0	0	0	0	0
Criticize the Requester	0	0	0	15	15	0
Off the Hook	16	0	0	0	6	0

Lack of Enthusiasm	0	0	0	0	0	0
Avoidance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hesitation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Do Nothing	0	0	0	0	6	0
Topic switch	0	0	0	0	0	0
Joke	0	0	0	0	0	0
Postponement	0	0	0	15	0	0
Hedging	16	0	0	0	0	0
St of positive Opinion	0	0	0	0	0	0
St of Empathy	33	16	0	6	0	0
Pause Filler	0	16	16	0	6	15
Gratitude	33	0	0	0	0	0

% of each group that used a given formula

As Table 2 indicates, the most frequent formulas, among the two groups, were expression of regret and excuse/explanation. Moreover, these formulas were more employed in lower status than in higher and equal ones in all cases. Accepting these similarities, however, some differences are also noticeable. The first mostly used formulas among Baluch subjects were expression of regret and then excuse/explanation, however, and in a reverse order excuse/explanation and then expression of regret were the first and second mostly used formulas employed by Persian subjects. Although, Persian-Baluchi-speaking L3 learners employed more refusal strategies in higher, equal and lower status situations, Persian-speaking L2 learners showed more diversity in the strategies in these situations. Furthermore, Persian subjects employed direct refusal

considerably more compared to Baluch subjects, the frequency mean score of the Persian learners was 18.5% and that of the Baluch learners was 13.8%. Finally, all learners employed statement of empathy much more frequently in addressing the requester in lower status, though the frequency mean score of the Baluch learners was 16.3% and that of the Persian learners was 2%. Save for the case of expression of regret and excuse/explanation, Persian learners did not demonstrate a high level of frequency shift of the employment of strategies with regard to the interlocutor's status. Persian respondents were, thus, less sensitive to a certain status type. Nonetheless, Baluch learners of English showed almost a high level of frequency shift in the employment of some refusal strategies with regard to the interlocutor's status. The most striking differences with respect to the interlocutor's status were found in the employment of negative willingness, expression of regret, and excuse/explanation.

Table 3 presents the frequency and the shift of semantic formulas employed in refusals of invitation from a higher, an equal and a lower status person i.e. situations 4, 10 and 3, respectively.

Table 3
Frequency of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Invitations with Regard to Interlocutor Status (Situations 3, 10, 4)

	Baluch Subjects (n=36)			Persian Subjects (n=33)		
	High	Equal	Low	High	Equal	Low
Formulas						
No	0	33	0	6	6	0
Negative W	16	50	16	30	15	30

Regret	50	66	66	60	45	60
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	66	83	80	51	100	66
St of Alternative	0	0	0	0	0	0
Promise of Future Acceptance	0	0	0	0	0	0
St of Principle	0	0	0	0	0	0
St of Philosophy	0	0	0	0	0	0
St of Negative Consequence	0	0	0	0	0	0
Criticize the Requester	0	0	0	0	0	0
Off the Hook	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lack of Enthusiasm	0	0	0	0	0	0
Avoidance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hesitation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Do Nothing	0	0	0	0	0	6
Topic switch	0	0	0	0	0	0
Joke	0	0	0	6	0	0
Postponement	0	0	0	6	6	0

Hedging	0	0	0	0	0	0
St of positive Opinion	13	0	16	15	0	0
St of Empathy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pause Filler	11	16	0	0	30	0
Gratitude	16	19	16	15	30	15

% of each group that used a given formula

Similar to refusing requests, the frequency of employed semantic formulas was in favor of Baluch respondents and the variety of employed semantic formulas was in favor of Persian respondents. The mostly used strategy was excuse/explanation in refusing invitations. Compared with refusing requests, the frequency of the use of direct refusals was more in Baluch learners' responses and less in Persian learners' ones. The areas of similarities between groups were, also, vast in contrast to refusing requests, leading us to conclude that in refusing invitations there existed more common patterns and formulas between monolingual and bilingual subjects of the study in L2 and L3 learning, respectively. While the frequency of some semantic formulas was observed to be similar across the two groups, there were also some differences. Regarding the use of pause filler by Persian-Baluchi-speaking L3 learners, there were the frequency of 11%, 6% and 0% for each of the interlocutor statuses, respectively. 30% of Persian-speaking L2 learners, however, employed pause fillers in addressing the interlocutor in an equal status. Furthermore, in refusal of invitation from a higher status person,

6% of the Persian learners used jokes or postponement strategies and in refusal of invitation from an equal status person, 6% of the subjects used postponement formula. Nevertheless, these were never employed by Baluch learners. As for the shift of the frequency of used semantic formulas, the two groups appeared to be not much status sensitive in refusing invitations compared with refusing requests. Persian-speaking learners, however, showed a slight status sensitivity in using the formula of excuse/explanation. The learners employed 51%, 100% and 66% excuse/explanation to a higher-, equal-, and lower-status person, respectively.

Table 4 presents the frequency and shift of semantic formulas employed in refusals of offers from a higher, an equal and a lower status person i.e. situations 11, 9 and 7, respectively.

Table 4
Frequency of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Offers with Regard to Interlocutor Status (Situations 7, 9, 11)

Formulas	Baluch Subjects (n=36)			Persian Subjects (n=33)		
	Hig h	Equ al	Lo w	Hig h	Equ al	Lo w
No	33	83	0	6	100	6
Negative W	16	83	33	15	60	30
Regret	16	50	33	0	6	6
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	50	66	33	21	60	84
St of Alternative	0	0	0	0	0	6
Promise of Future Acceptance	0	0	16	0	6	0

St of Principle	0	0	0	6	0	0
St of Philosophy	0	0	0	0	0	0
St of Negative Consequence	0	0	0	0	0	0
Criticize the Requester	0	0	0	15	0	0
Off the Hook	100	0	0	100	0	0
Lack of Enthusiasm	0	0	0	6	0	0
Avoidance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hesitation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Do Nothing	0	0	0	6	0	6
Topic switch	0	0	0	0	0	0
Joke	0	0	0	0	6	15
Postpone ment	0	0	0	0	6	0
Hedging	0	0	0	0	0	0
St of positive Opinion	0	0	33	0	0	6
St of Empathy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pause Filler	0	33	16	6	0	6
Gratitude	0	33	16	6	66	6

% of each group that used a given formula

One significant similarity was seen in the use of the semantic formula of letting the interlocutor off the hook (100% by both groups). The other interesting similarity was refusing directly. The two groups, for instance, stuck more to direct refusal formulas in comparison to other types of refusals. Along with these

similarities, however, there were some noticeable differences. While Persian-Baluchi-speaking L3 learners expressed regret much more frequently particularly to an equal-status person (50%), only 6% of Persian-speaking L2 learners employed this formula. Other areas of differences can be found in the use of statement of alternative, statement of principle, criticizing the requester, lack of enthusiasm, do nothing, joke, and postponement being only used by Persian respondents. For example, unlike Baluch respondents, Persian learners made jokes particularly with a lower-status person in refusing his/her offer (15%). Persian learners also showed more consistency in using strategies regardless of status level as compared with Baluch ones. All in all, it is noticeable that, similar to request and invitation situations, Baluch learners used higher frequency of semantic formulas while Persian learners enjoyed a greater diversity of them.

Table 5 presents the frequency and shift of semantic formulas employed in refusals of suggestions from a higher, an equal and a lower status person i.e. situations 6, 5 and 8, respectively.

Table 5
Frequency of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Suggestions with Regard to Interlocutor Status (Situations 8, 5, 6)

	Baluch Subjects (n=36)			Persian Subjects (n=33)		
	Hig h	Equ al	Lo w	Hig h	Equ al	Lo w
Formulas						
No	16	16	16	0	6	21
Negative	33	66	0	0	0	0

W						
Regret	33	50	0	0	21	0
Excuse, Reason, Explanation	33	16	0	36	66	21
St of Alternative	0	0	0	6	0	6
Promise of Future Acceptance	16	0	0	6	0	0
St of Principle	0	0	0	6	21	6
St of Philosophy	0	0	0	0	0	0
St of Negative Consequence	0	0	16	0	0	0
Criticize the Requester	33	0	16	36	0	0
Off the Hook	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lack of Enthusiasm	0	0	0	0	0	0
Avoidance	0	0	16	0	0	0
Hesitation	0	16	0	0	0	0
Do Nothing	0	0	0	0	6	21
Topic switch	0	0	33	0	0	30
Joke	0	0	0	0	15	0
Postponement	0	0	0	21	0	0
Hedging	16	16	0	0	0	6
St of positive Opinion	16	0	33	0	6	6

St of Empathy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pause Filler	0	0	16	0	15	0
Gratitude	0	0	0	0	6	15

% of each group that used a given formula

It was noted that the number of semantic formulas with regard to both Baluch and Persian subjects decreased when refusing suggestions from a person in high, equal and low status as compared with previous situations. The reason for this decrease can be explained with respect to the learners' lower sensitivity on explaining or employing face-saving strategies toward a suggestion. Baluch learners' use of negative willingness, with the mean score of 33%, and Persian learners' use of excuse/explanation, with the mean score of 41%, were more than other semantic formulas. It can be seen that Persian-Baluchi-speaking L3 learners were more direct in the tone of refusals than Persian-speaking L2 ones. The frequency of their direct refusals was the highest when addressing their friend while Persian respondents employed more direct refusals with a higher-status person. Another area of difference was related to the use of expression of regret. Baluch respondents apologized (showed regret) in refusing the suggestions particularly to an equal-status person with the mean score of 27.66%, while Persian respondents expressed regret only to an equal-status person with the mean score of 7%. While Baluch respondents were less elaborate on their reasons (33%, 16%, 0%), Persians tended to use elaboration with higher frequencies (36%, 66%, 21%). Moreover, Baluch subjects never expressed gratitude in suggestion situation, while Persians tended to show their appreciation to a person in an equal

and lower level. Overall, Baluch subjects used higher frequency of semantic formulas, while Persians used more diverse strategies in refusing suggestions. As for the shift of the frequency of used semantic formula, the two groups appeared to be not much status sensitive in refusing suggestions compared with other situations.

Table 6 presents the percentage of appropriate refusal speech act strategies selected by Persian/Baluchi-speaking L3 and Persian-speaking L2 learners.

Table 6
Frequency of Appropriate Refusal Speech Act Perception with Regard to Situational Variables (Distance, Power & Imposition)

Items	D	P	I	Baluch Subjects	Persian Subjects	X ² (p)
1	+	-	-	72.2	81.8	0.01 (0.89)
2	-	+	-	69.4	60.6	0.55 (0.45)
3	+	+	+	80.6	81.8	0.07 (0.78)
4	-	-	-	66.7	60.6	0.36 (0.54)
5	-	+	+	38.9	78.8	2.63 (0.10)
6	+	-	+	44.4	57.6	0.25 (0.61)
7	-	-	+	52.8	63.6	0.10 (0.75)
8	+	+	-	65.3	64.1	0.02 (0.88)

As table indicates, learners generally showed similar frequencies in selecting the appropriate refusal speech act sets. Furthermore, they did not demonstrate sensitivity to the situational variables. The most correctly notified item by Persian-Baluchi-speaking subjects was item 3 (80.6%) and the least correctly identified

item by the same group was item 5 (38.9%). While, the most correctly notified items by Persian-speaking subjects were items 1 and 3 (81.8%) and the least correctly recognized item by the same group was item 6 (57.6%). Items 3 and 8 revealed the lowest differences between Baluch and Persian subjects and item 5 revealed the highest discrepancy between the subjects in identifying the proper speech act. Item-by-item comparisons, however, revealed that there were no significant differences between Persian-Baluchi-speaking L3 and Persian-speaking L2 learners in recognizing pragmatic appropriateness.

5. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that there is variability in the refusal strategy use of Baluch Bilingual and Persian monolingual EFL learners. The presence of an additional language leads to differences in the knowledge of the routines of semantic formulas. Regarding the first research question, a variety of the refusal semantic formulas with regard to the contextual variables including the status of interlocutors and the eliciting acts was reported. The most common semantic formulas were excuse/explanation, expression of regret, and direct refusal. Requests were mostly refused by an excuse/explanation with an expression of regret (particularly when refusing someone of lower status). Regarding an invitation, excuse/explanation to an equal-status person was used in most cases. 'Off the hook' along with 'direct refusals' were used more while 'regret' was used less, in refusing an offer. As for suggestions, direct refusals and excuse/explanation (especially when refusing

someone of equal status) were used. It can be seen that refusals by Baluch and Persian respondents were sensitive to the contextual use of the strategies.

Despite these similarities, differences in the frequency and shift of semantic formulas were found between the two groups. Baluch subjects used higher percentage of semantic formulas, Persians enjoyed more diverse formulas. Persians were also found to use more face-saving strategies per response than Baluch learners of English. Falling back on politeness norm of L1 culture, Persian respondents tried to assure their interlocutor that there were some reasons for their refusals. The greater variety of strategy use by Persian subjects can also be attributed to this need for face saving in refusals. On the other hand, Baluch respondents were found to use more direct types of semantic formulas at different degrees of frequency. It is to be noted that the level of directness differed based on the type of speech act and the status of interlocutor. Except for the request situation in which Baluch subjects showed high level of frequency shift in the use of formulas based on the interlocutors' status, in the other contexts, the subjects tended to be consistent regardless of status level. These findings are consistent with the studies previously done on refusal strategies. According to these studies, expression of regret, excuse/explanation and direct refusals are among the most frequently used speech act strategies ([Kwon, 2004](#); [Aliakbari & Changizi, 2012](#)).

Regarding the second research question and the appropriateness of refusal speech act perception, the findings demonstrated that

Persian monolinguals noted a greater proportion of proper speech act sets than Baluch bilinguals in English. However, the differences were not found to be significant. Learners also did not show sensitivity to the social distance, power relationship and imposition of refusal between the speaker and hearer. Although data from this study provide interesting information on bilingual pragmatic competence, the results do not confirm an advantage of bilingual over monolingual respondents in terms of pragmatic competence in applying semantic formulas in refusal situation during learning English. Regarding the efficacy of the presence of additional language in promoting pragmatic competence, the analysis did not delineate better performance of bilingual EFL learners in noting appropriate refusal speech act over monolingual EFL learners. While the two groups showed convergence to native speakers in recognizing the speech act that native English speakers would use in a given situation, either of which did not reveal a higher pragmatic competence.

The findings of the study do not support the results of previous studies in bilingualism and multilingualism ([Safont-Jorda, 2005, 2011](#), [Cenoz, 2003](#); [Fouser, 1997](#), [Barnes, 2006](#)). As mentioned in the literature, previous studies have attributed an advantage to bilinguals over monolinguals with respect to pragmatic competence with a focus on request acts linguistic formulations ([Safont-Jorda, 2005, 2011](#)), general pragmatic knowledge ([Cenoz, 2003](#)), pragmatic transfer ([Fouser, 1997](#)), and the acquisition of pragmatic competence ([Barnes, 2006](#)). One reason for this difference may relate to the focus of our study. This study explored the differences between pragmatic competence of bilingual and monolingual

learners of English with a focus on refusal acts linguistic formulation. The realization of refusal speech act, as a result, may affect subjects' perception of pragmatic features in a given situation. Refusals are recognized as face-threatening acts since speakers' refusal of an invitation or request would contradict inviter or requester's expectation. Therefore, refusals entail a high level of pragmatic competence ([Beebe et al., 1990](#)). Another reason may be due to the transfer of semantic formulas from the first language to the additional language. Furthermore, it was observed that first language literacy plays an important role in subsequent language learning ([Bialystok, 2001](#); [Hoffmann & Stavans, 2007](#); [Safont-Jorda, 2013](#)). In our study, the findings may be related to the fact that Baluch bilinguals as opposed to Persian monolinguals in Iran do not receive formal education and literacy in their first language. Although Baluch respondents were able to communicate, read and write in their L1, it seems that their first language failed to confer benefit on their pragmatic competence in L3 acquisition.

6. Conclusion

Considering the importance of pragmatic competence in developing communicative competence and the role of different variables including affective and cognitive variables, socio-linguistic factors, language proficiency, differences in formal education, and meta-pragmatic knowledge on learners' pragmatic competence, improving this competence and taking account of learners' linguistic background in the process of learning an additional language seems necessary. The results of the study revealed variations in frequency and shift of semantic formulas employed by Baluch and

Persian subjects. However, Baluch bilingual EFL learners did not reveal better pragmatic competence over Persian monolingual EFL learners.

To generalize results, further research on bilingual and multilingual pragmatic development is needed. Replication of the present study with the inclusion of different elicitation instruments to put a spotlight on interlanguage pragmatics, thus, would help to confirm the generalizability of findings. One data elicitation instrument in this study was a multiple-choice test which provided learners with contextualized situations and three options out of which one was correct. Multiple-choice items are generally criticized for making learners choose between pre-determined answers rather than allowing individualized responses. Since pragmatic competence encompasses a range of phenomena as the role of speaker and hearer, the social distance of the participants, their point of view, and the constraints they may encounter in using language in social interaction, multiple-choice tests may not completely cover the variables. However, the MDCT used in this study was controlled for three main situational variables as social distance, power relationship and imposition. Future studies should explore other elements as proficiency level, age of acquisition of L2/L3, degree of exposure to target language and cultural and linguistic background of bilinguals in other local varieties in Iran and in the other parts of the world.

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