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The gentle craft of saying "No" in Persian and English: A cross-cultural and cross-linguistic slant

Bahareh KORDESTANCHI[1] ✉, **Mehdi SARKHOSH[1]**
and Fatemeh MOAFIAN[2]

[1]*Urmia State University, Urmia, Iran*
[2]*Kosar University of Bojnord, Bojnord, Iran*
✉kordestanchibahare@gmail.com

Abstract

Refusals have proven to be problematic since they are the source of so many cross-cultural misunderstandings in that they are face threatening acts, which require that the speaker utilize redress, mitigation or politeness markers. The present study's goal was to investigate the realization of the speech act of refusal in the Iranians and Americans contexts to identify the similarities and differences. It also explored the effect of social status on the choice of refusal strategies. Two well-known popular family drama film series were selected as the sources of the data. Totally, 455 refusal words, expressions, and utterances were collected from the two series. The collected data was coded using Beebe et al.'s (1990) taxonomy of refusal strategies. Descriptive statistics, Binomial, and Chi-square tests were used to analyze the data. The frequency of the refusal strategies and also the frequency of utilizing these strategies with respect to the interlocutors' social status were analyzed. The results revealed no statistically significant differences between the two cultures with respect to the prevalence of refusal strategies, shift, and content of semantic formulae used in refusals. However, there were statistically significant differences in the frequency of the two major refusal categories, namely, Direct and Indirect strategies. Furthermore, concerning social status, the differences were statistically significant in the frequency of the refusal strategies utilized by the three social levels as regards the main categories in both cultures. The findings enhance intercultural understanding and provide valuable insights into the realization of refusals in different cultural contexts, the influence of social status, and the implications for intercultural communication. It highlights the significance of pragmatic issues and cultural awareness in promoting effective communication and mutual understanding across cultures, hence, ameliorates mutual cross-cultural communication and warrant teachers and material developers about the significance of pragmatic issues in developing the learners' communicative competence.

Keywords: *speech act, refusal strategies, social status, film series, Persian, English*

Тонкое искусство говорить «нет» в персидском и английском языках: кросс-культурный и кросс-лингвистический аспекты

Бахаре КОРДЕСТАНЧИ[1] ✉, Мехди САРХОШ[1], Фатеме МОАФИАН[2]

[1]Урмийский государственный университет, Урмия, Иран
[2]Косарский университет Боджнорда, Боджнорд, Иран
✉kordestanchibahare@gmail.com

Аннотация

Отказы создают сложности в коммуникации, поскольку они нередко являются источником межкультурного непонимания и могут восприниматься как угрожающие действия, требующие от говорящего извинений, смягчения речи или использования маркеров вежливости. Цель настоящего исследования – рассмотрение реализации речевого акта отказа между иранцами как представителями коллективистского общества и американцами, относящимися к индивидуалистическому обществу. Также исследовалось влияние социального статуса на выбор стратегии отказа. В качестве источников данных были выбраны два популярных сериала в жанре семейной драмы. Из двух сериалов в совокупности было отобрано 455 слов, фраз и высказываний, выражающих отказ. Собранные данные были закодированы с использованием таксономии стратегий отказа (Beebe et al. 1990). Для анализа данных использовались описательная статистика, биномиальные тесты и тесты Chisquare. Анализировалась частотность использования стратегий отказа с учетом социального статуса собеседников. Результаты не выявили статистически значимых различий между двумя культурами в отношении распространенности стратегий отказа, смещения и содержания смысловых формул, используемых при отказах. Однако наблюдались статистически значимые различия в частотности двух основных категорий отказов, а именно с использованием прямой и косвенной стратегий. Кроме того, учет социального статуса коммуникантов позволил выявить статистически значимые отличия в частотности стратегий отказа, используемых на трех социальных уровнях в обеих культурах. Результаты исследования способствуют межкультурному взаимопониманию и могут быть полезны для учителей и разработчиков дидактических материалов, направленных на развитие коммуникативной компетентности учащихся.

Ключевые слова: *речевой акт, стратегии отказа, социальный статус, сериалы, персидский язык, английский язык*

1. Introduction

Language and culture can interact in a variety of manners. One of the possible approaches is to investigate the impact of society on linguistic structure (Wardhaugh 2006). The study of pragmatics, particularly speech acts, is strongly tied to discussions of language and communication in society (Putri, Ramendra & Swandana 2019). The theory of speech acts was first propounded by Austin (1962) and defined as a set of utterances by which people perform a specific function such

as apologizing, complaining, requesting, refusing, complimenting, or thanking. Language and culture are inextricably bound, and the culture-specificity of how speakers realize these acts have been observed in studies in the literature (see Chen 1996, Eslami, Larina & Pashmforoosh 2023, Gladkova & Larina 2018).

People's perspectives on the proper use of speech acts vary widely in different societies (see Chen 1996). With the same token, the conception of polite realization of speech acts varies from culture to culture; what is polite in one community seems far from polite or even unclear or puzzling or too formal or flattering in another (Chang 2009, Larina 2015). In fact, speech acts are of paramount importance to be studied among different communities as they are the thrust of cross-cultural incertitude and miscommunication (see e.g., Liao & Bresnahan 1996, Nelson et al. 2002).

Among the different types of speech acts, the speech act of refusal is the epicenter of the current study. It is performed when a speaker directly or indirectly says 'no' to a request, invitation, suggestion, or offer (Brown & Levinson 1987, Chang & Ren 2020). The overriding significance of refusals emanates from the fact that they are the radix of many cross-cultural misunderstandings (Allami & Naeimi 2011). They are types of speech acts with a certain degree of offensiveness and are classified as face-threatening acts (FTAs) that damage the addressee's face (Brown & Levinson 1987). To settle accounts with this, a face-threatening act like refusal warrants going along with redress, mitigation, and politeness markers (Tamimi & Mohammadi 2014). Hence, the present study targets to investigate the realization of the speech act of refusal in the two communities of Iran, a collectivist society, and America, an individualistic society (see Hofstede 2011, Hofstede & Minkov 2013). The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What refusal strategies do Americans and Iranian use more frequently?

2. What are the differences between the refusal strategies used by Iranians and Americans?

3. How does social status impact on the frequency of the different refusal strategies used by the Persian and English speakers?

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical framework

A refusal is a speech act whereby the presenter repulses to participate inside an event offered by the interlocutor (Chen, Lei & Zhang 1995). Refusals as undesirable responses have been the foundation of several studies since the 1980s, mainly due to the intricacy of their linguistic structure (see Drew 1984, Levinson 1983). Levinson (1983) identified many structural characteristics of these non-preferred forms of second turns, comprising aspects of delay (i.e., planned pauses), preambles as in the form of discourse markers (i.e., *well*, *yeah*), explanations, statements of uncertainty, or regrets. However, the utilization of such linguistic

resources has been documented to differ from culture to culture (Moafian, Yazdi & Sarani 2019).

As refusals are intrinsically discourteous speech acts, using inappropriate refusal strategies might mar the relationship between the parties involved (Hassani, Mardani & Dastjerdi 2011). As a matter of fact, refusal is deemed a face-threatening act and it may menace the interlocutor's positive or negative face (Brown & Levinson 1987). Failing to identify the variables can result in threatening an interlocutor's positive or negative face and lead to impoliteness. The knowledge about these emic perceptions may contribute to pragmatically appropriate cross-cultural communication (Tajeddin & Moqadam 2023). Positive facial expressions convey a desire to be accepted by and contribute to a specific group of individuals, whereas negative face denotes a desire to be free of imposition and also have freedom of choice (Moaveni 2014). In order to minimize the face-threatening latency of refusals, the refuter must intersperse repudiation with politeness strategies while expressing the refusal (Chang 2009).

Brown and Levinson (1987) set fourth three factors that impact the seriousness of an FTA. The first is the social distance between the interlocutors (Distance) (e.g., strangers vs. family members); the second is the relative power of addressor over addressee (Power) (e.g., a dialogue between a mentor and an apprentice vs. an interaction between two teachers); and the third is the weight, or rank of the imposition (Rank) (e.g., asking someone to open the window vs. making a request to use someone's car). It should be pointed out that Brown and Levinson claimed the universality of these three factors (Morkus 2009).

2.2. Previously conducted studies

There have been cross-cultural studies on the refusal speech act which have reported that refusal strategies seem overridingly culture-specific (see Chang 2009). The following paragraphs summarize the previously conducted cross-cultural studies on this topic.

In a recent study, Litvinova & Larina (2023) examined culture-specific elements of refusals to invitations performed by American and Russian speakers in contexts with different levels of social and power distance between the participants. A Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was employed to collect the data. The findings revealed some differences in the role of social factors in the realization of refusals, while the most salient factor appears to be that of cultural context. Americans showed a tendency toward being more verbose and indirect. However, Russians were less frequent users of politeness strategies and frequently turned to directness.

In another study, Tajeddin & Moqadam (2023) looked into how native Persian and English speakers perceived and reacted to impoliteness in refusals. DCT was used to collect the data. The results demonstrated native Persian and English speakers used different criteria to determine how impolite a speech behavior was.

Deveci & Midraj (2021) examined refusals among 94 Emirati English-speaking students. The researchers created a written survey to collect the data. The study revealed that a statement of regret, a thank-you note, and an excuse, reason, or explanation were the most frequently employed elements of the refusal speech act.

Another study was conducted by Moafian et al. (2019) in which they compared Persian, English, and Balouchi speakers regarding their refusal strategies. It also investigated whether the interlocutors' social status affected the frequencies of refusal strategies. DCT was employed to elicit the participants' refusals. The results showed that there were significant differences between the three groups of speakers concerning both the total frequency and the frequency of the three main categories, namely, direct, indirect, and adjuncts to refusals.

In a similar study, Bella (2014) investigated refusal strategies used by participants at three different proficiency levels under situations of equal and unequal status. 80 participants including 20 Greek native speakers and 60 non-native speakers from various L1 backgrounds participated in the study. Open role-plays as well as retrospective verbal reports were used to collect the data. Reasons and explanations were reported as the most common strategies. Besides, advanced learners performed worse than expected in comparison to native speakers.

Although the studies are all illuminating in augmenting cross-cultural understanding, they suffer from certain shortcomings. The majority of the previous works used a small sample size, which reflects the target population inadequately. Using an appropriate instrument for data collection also influences the findings of the study. For instance, using DCTs as the main and preferred data collection tool has many weaknesses, which downgrade the value of the results. DCT utterances were short, simple in phrasing and less face-attentive than naturally occurring speech in such investigations; there seems to be no conclusive evidence that DCT is indeed a reliable, valid, or acceptable approach for gathering speech act evidence (see Yuan, 2001 for shortcomings of DCT). However, in the majority of the studies, DCTs were used as the main data collection instrument except for the study of Bella (2014) which utilized role-plays with verbal reports, including face-to-face interactions. Whether orally obtained data is somewhat more authentic than written data or observational field notes are better than elicited DCT data, is currently inconclusive (see Yuan 2001). Role play, too, has already been criticized for having failed to reflect the actual variety and dynamicity of natural negotiations representative of real conversations (Cohen 1996). On that account, observing naturally occurring conversations across individuals in a social community is a desirable way of gathering data. That is, natural data constitute the best source for analyzing interactions (see e.g., Kasper 2000). That being the case, the authors of the current study attempted to approach natural data as much as possible. Due to the high value of naturalistic observation, the authors gleaned refusal strategies across the two different cultures of Iran and America via TV film series. Such data gathering method does have strengths over the earlier methods of data collection

like DCTs or role play: It should be conceded that real-life languages, cultural information, and pleasure are all embedded in movies and film-series (Mecheti & Hudson 2014). Indeed, there is not much difference between naturally occurring data and scripted data. Naturally occurring data are the data that are not directly elicited by the researcher, but are the data observed without the researchers' intervention (Potter 2002). Films or film series are the exact facsimiles of natural life, and that being the case, possible shortcomings of DCTs are circumvented and natural and real-life data are secured (Yang 2008). Besides, clips of television episodes offer contextual, natural data, which are critical for pragmatic analysis. Second, the majority of TV shows depict ongoing plots about a particular group of people in a given region doing certain cultural activities. Third, they illustrate not only different cultures and languages, but also how native speakers use such phrases within particular situations. Finally, in comparison to role play, video clips from TV series allow for the collection of more information in a shorter period of time (Yang 2008). Accordingly, the current research is an attempt to study refusal speech act within series.

To fulfill the aims of the study, two popular family drama series were selected to obtain the study's goals. By comparing the findings of this study with those of the previous studies, researchers can secure a more comprehensive picture of the use of refusal strategies with respect to frequency and social status in different languages and cultures. Accordingly, the current research is an attempt to study refusal speech acts within film series. To throw light on the significance of the study, the following table summarizes the research studies which looked into the refusal speech act within films or film series.

Having caught a glimpse of the related literature, we realized that only Yang (2008) and Ghazanfari et al. (2013) investigated refusal speech act in film series. However, Yang (2008) studied refusals in merely one language. The only cross-cultural and cross-linguistic study in this area is Ghazanfari et al. (2013), who investigated the realization of refusal strategies in English and Persian film series in terms of linguistic devices. The frequency and content of semantic formulae were also considered. The findings revealed socio-cultural differences, reporting that when Iranians refused others, they were more likely to consider themselves as a community. Moreover, the Persian speakers were more prone to be more sociable and used more indirect refusal strategies in comparison to English speakers who used fewer excuses and were much more straightforward and direct. Therefore, Ghazanfari et al.'s study is the sole cross-cultural and cross-linguistic study in respect of examining refusal speech act in film series warranting conducting further research in this regard. Ghazanfari et al.'s (2013) study also suffers from some limitations. For instance, the authors did not examine the interlocutors' relative social statuses which impact the way refusals are expressed (Brown & Levinson 1978). The gaps in the existing literature incentivized the researcher to plan the current study to investigate the speech act of refusal in American and Persian communities vis-a-vis the social statuses of the interlocutors.

Table1. **Previously Conducted Studies on the Speech Act of refusal in Film Series or Movies**

Study	Film-Series or Movies	Models	Aim(s)	Main Findings
Ghazanfari, Bonyadi, & Malekzadeh, (2013)	50 Persian and 50 English movies	Beebe et al. (1990)	-To investigate refusal speech acts with respect to semantic formulas as well as gender differences	-The findings revealed notable distinctions between the two languages in terms of refusal responses and gender.
Yang (2008)	'The Sky of the Green Bird,' 'Youth does not understand amorous feelings, 'The Desire,' 'Stories in the Editors' office' and 'Trifles over the ground.'	Beebe et al. (1990)	-To examine refusal strategies based on various initiation acts as well as the motivating acts leading to refusals	-Requests, offers, invitations, and suggestions caused the initiation of refusals.

America was selected as an individualistic society and the Iranian community with its Persian speakers was selected as an instance of a collectivist society (see Hofstede 2011), who are believed to use speech acts differently from individualistic societies, for example, as regards the speech act of complimenting (see Sarkhosh & Alizadeh 2017).

To fulfill the goals of the study, the following research questions were set fourth:

1. What refusal strategies do Americans and Iranian use more frequently?

2. What are the differences between the refusal strategies used by Iranians and Americans?

3. How does social status impact on the frequency of the different refusal strategies used by the Persian and English speakers?

3. Data and methods

3.1. Instrument

Two popular family drama series were selected as the sources of data. The reasons underlying the selection of social drama are that this genre reflects daily social life and the playwright seeks to represent it as an actual world experience via drama. Drama is mimetic, which indicates it resembles real life. Drama is a form of art that attempts to emulate life and portray it to the audience in a realistic manner (Iwuchukwu & Yesufu 2013). Moreover, video clips display not only linguistic expressions, but also how language users use such utterances in real-life situations (Yang 2008).

In the United States, a TV series titled "This is Us" was appointed as a Top TV Program, based on its popularity, which received an 8.7 out of ten ranking, affording a high index[1]. In the context of Iran, the Persian series "Shahrzad" was selected because of its popularity across Iranians – it is evaluated as one of the most

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[1] see https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5555260/?ref_=vp_wbr_btf_wo

interesting TV series in the history of Iran's private cinema and television and has gripped Iranian audience since its initial broadcasting with the index[2] of 8.1 out of ten. Hereupon, 1320 minutes (22 episodes, each lasting 60 minutes) of the first season of "Shahrzad" and 1305 minutes (29 episodes, each lasting 45 minutes) of the first and second seasons of "This is Us" were watched and subjected to scrutiny. However, we limited the data analysis just to the verbal interactions and excluded the non-verbal refusals although they were very infrequent in the series. As a matter of fact, the most efficient strategy of interacting with people is verbal communication. The ability to manage everyday tasks with ease is provided by verbal communication which aids in reaching a speedy output because feedback is immediate and the message communicated in a verbal version is brief and to the point (Reddy 2021). Moreover, examining nonverbal performance is not a precise science where particular gestures can be interpreted differently by different researchers (Krauss, Morrel-Samuels & Colasante 1991). The data used for this study was compiled from two of the most popular television shows, which were produced after 2015. Totally, 455 refusal words, expressions, and utterances were listed and identified in order to acquire the expected data. Both of the episodes were carefully watched. The refusal-laden words were thoroughly documented by pausing the series while the refusal strategies were observed.

3.3. Coding scheme and data analysis

The data gleaned via film series were analyzed and coded on the basis of Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz's (1990; cited in Moafian et al. 2019) taxonomy of refusal strategies. However, the authors also adopted the expanded version of Moafian et al.'s (2018) refusal strategy taxonomy (the new strategies observed by Moafian et al. are shown by star in the table). The study only investigated verbal refusals, whereas non-verbal refusals are out of the scope of the present article. Besides, in this research a new semantic formula in the indirect refusal categories was discovered, which is marked by two stars in the table. The new semantic formula, which is refusal by means of proverbs, is illustrated in the following example, which was derived from participant responses.

(All examples are translated hereinafter by the authors from Persian to English).

> **Example (The Persian Series; Season1, Episode 19, 00:44:25)**: In the yard, Ghobad and Shirin are disputing. Shirin rushes out of the house, outraged, and Shahrzad asks Ghobad to accompany and soothe her.
>
> شهرزاد: کاش میرفتی دنبالش.
> (Šahrzād: kāš mirafti donbāleš.)
> Shahrzad: I wish you would go with her.
> قباد: چی میگی؟ واسه من شدی کاسه ی داغ تر از آش؟
> (Qobād: či migi? vase man šodi kāse-ye dāq tar az āš?)

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[2] see https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5332732/?ref_=nv_sr_srsg_0

Ghobad: What exactly are you saying? **(Criticize the request/requester, etc.)** Why are you being more catholic than the Pope? **(Proverb/expression/saying)**

Since data coding is subject to the coder's bias, the entire series was watched again after a month by the same researcher and the refusals were coded again; then, the codings on both observations were compared. The intera-coder reliability estimated via Chi-square was found to be 0.95. Due to space limitations, only a few examples of the refusals as well as how they were coded are presented below.

Direct refusal **used as illustrations**

Example 1 (The English Series; Season 1, Episode 1, 00:39:44): Jack and the man standing in the hospital looking out of the window at a baby room
Man: Smoke?
Jack: No. **(Non-performative statement; No)**

Indirect refusal

Example 1 (The Persian Series; Season 1, Episode 19, 00:21:38): Shirin asks the servant to tell Shahrzad to take the baby to her.

خدمتکار: خانم فرمودن که بچه رو ببرم پیششون.
(Xedmatkār: xānum farmudan ke bačče-ro bebaram piš-ešun.)
Servant: the madam told me to take the child to her.
شهرزاد: ببخشید بچه یه مقدار ناخوش احواله بگید یه وقت دیگه.
(Šahrzād: be-baxšid, bačče ye-meqdār nāxoš ahvāle, begid ye-vaqte dige.)
Shahrzad: I'm sorry, **(Statement of regret)** the baby is sick, **(Excuse, reason, explanation)**, next time **(Promise of future acceptance)**.

Adjuncts to refusals

Example 1 (The American Series; Season1, Episode 6, 00:02:10): Jack is talking to his co-worker at the office.
Co-worker: I got promoted, project manager; I'm bringing you with me.
Jack: Oh …Uh… **(pause filler)** thanks **(Grattitute/appreciation)**, but no **(Non performative statement, "No")**.

Once the coding procedure was accomplished, the frequencies of refusal strategies were calculated with regard to the types of refusal strategies and the relative social status of the interlocutors. Binomial and Chi-square tests were employed to find out whether the intended cultural differences were statistically significant. To this aim, SPSS. 22 was applied and the level of significance was set at .05. It is worthy of note that Chi-square was not run on the groups of data with the expected frequencies of less than 5.

Since the researchers are Iranian and were born and raised in the Iranian culture, they could identify the interlocutors in the series as having equal, lower, or higher social statuses. In lay terms, the social statuses of the actors were determined based on the relationships between them. When talking in intimate circles, friends and family members were considered as having equal social status; however, more important or older people were considered to have higher statuses when addressing younger or less important adults who were deemed lower in the Iranian culture.

Social status in the Iranian culture is not necessarily determined based on a person's job or rank in society. Since Iran is a collectivist culture (Hofstede 2011), older people are deemed to have higher social statuses in family relations and are less often refused when making a request or offering something, and refusing them is violating their positive face and a sign of disrespect. On the other hand, younger people are considered lower in their status in the Iranian culture, and refusing to accept their invitations or suggestions by older people is not deemed impolite. In the American culture, interactions between the actors were used to define their social positions. A friend, classmate, coworker, or sibling were regarded as having similar social standing when talking in intimate circles. In the workplace, hospital, and school, the employee and more important individuals in higher positions had higher statuses while speaking to less important people who were perceived to have lower social statuses in the American culture.

4. Results

The instances of the strategies and sub-strategies are presented in Table 3. The Binomial test was run to examine if the differences between the two cultures were statistically significant. (McClenaghan 2022).

As Table 3 demonstrates, the total frequency of the refusal strategies produced by the American and Persian speakers did not differ significantly (Observed proportion (Prop) Persian= .47, Observed Prop.English = .53, significance level or p-value (P)=0.160). Among the total of 455 refusal utterances employed by the users, the highest number of the applied strategies belonged to the American series (243) and the Persian series evinced fewer number of refusals (212). In respect of the subcategories, as Table 3 illustrates, statistically significant differences were found between the Americans and Iranians with respect to "Non-performative statement", (IB1: Observed Prop.Persian=.23, Observed Prop.English=.77, p=0.000); IB2: Observed Prop.Persian=.29, Observed Prop.English =.71, p=0.003), in the first main category, that is, direct refusal. The Americans articulated IB1, 73 times over the entire film series and the Persian speakers tended to apply it 22 times. IB2 was used in both languages with the American speakers tending to apply this strategy more frequently than the Persian speakers (39 vs. 16). And the total frequency of the refusal strategies employed by the American and Persian speakers differed significantly in direct refusals (Observed Prop.Persian=.25, Observed Prop.English=.75, P=0.000).

In the next category which is related to the indirect strategies, the languages differed significantly with regard to the use of IIC (Observed Prop.Persian=.33, Observed Prop.English=.67, p=0.008), III1 (Observed Prop.Persian=1, Observed Prop.English = .000, p=0.31), IIK2a (Observed Prop.Persian=.71, Observed Prop.English=.29, p=0.036), IIK2c (Observed Prop.Persian=.85, Observed Prop.English=.15, p=0.022), and IIN in the proposed taxonomy (Observed Prop.Persian=.95, Observed Prop.English=.05, p=0.000). Additionally, the total frequency of the refusal strategies used by the American and Persian speakers

differed significantly in Indirect refusals (Observed Prop.Persian=.58, Observed Prop.English=.42, P=0.009). With respect to the use of IIC, the results reported that the Persians employed this strategy 21 times while the intended strategy was observed 43 times more prevalent in the American series. III1 was articulated by the Persians 6 times over the entire film series while it was not employed at all by the Americans. IIK2a was used in both languages with the Persian speakers, who tended to apply this strategy more frequently than the American speakers (20 vs. 8). Concerning IIK2c, the Iranians tended to repeat the part of request 11 times more than what Americans did (2 times). With respect to the use of IIN, the results also reported that the Americans employed this strategy only once while the intended strategy was observed 21 times more prevalent in the Persian series.

In the third main category which is related to the adjuncts, the languages differed significantly in the two strategies of IIIC (Observed Prop.Persian=.11, Observed Prop.English=.89, p=0.039) and IIID (Observed Prop.Persian=1.000, Observed Prop.English= 0.00, p=0.008). The American speakers tended to apply IIIC more frequently than the Persian speakers (8 vs. 1). On the other hand, the Iranians tended to use IIID 8 times while the Americans (0) did not employ this type of refusal.

The instances of the strategies and sub-strategies are presented in Table 3. The Binomial test was run to examine if the differences between the two cultures were statistically significant Binomial test is used when a binary variable of interest is being investigated and one has a hypothesized or expected value to compare it to. Q-square, which is employed in Table 4 serves to evaluate a relationship between categorical variables, for example, lower or higher social statuses in our study.

Table 3. **The Frequency (F) of the Refusal Strategies Used by the Characters of the Two Film Series and the Results of the Binomial test Applied to the Data**

Refusal Strategies	Persian (F)	English (F)	Observed Prop.		
			Persian	English	P
I. Direct					
A. Performative (IA)	0	0	-	-	-
B. Non-performative statement					
1. "No" (IB1)	22	73	.23	.77	**.000**
2. Negative willingness/ability (IB2)	16	39	.29	.71	**.003**
Total	38	112	.25	.75	**.000**
II. Indirect					
A. Statement of regret (IIA)	3	10	.23	.77	.092
B. Statement of wish (IIB)	0	2	-	-	-
C. Excuse/reason/explanation (IIC)	21	43	.33	.67	**.008**
D. Statement of alternative (IID)	2	0	-	-	-
E. Set condition for future or past acceptance (IIE)	2	0	-	-	-
F. Promise of future acceptance (IIF)	10	10	.50	.50	1.000
G. Statement of principle (IIG)	0	4	-	-	-
H. Statement of philosophy (IIH)	2	0	-	-	-
I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor					

Refusal Strategies	Persian (F)	English (F)	Observed Prop. Persian	English	P
1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (III1)	6	0	1	.000	**.031**
2. Guilt trip (III2)	0	0	-	-	-
3.Criticize the request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or opinion); insult/attack (III3)	19	9	.68	.32	.087
4. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request. (III4)	0	0	-	-	-
5. Let interlocutor off the hook (III5)	3	2	.60	.40	1.000
6. Self-defense (III6)	1	0	-	-	-
7. Statement of positive consequences/benefits of refusal for the requester* (III7)	0	0	-	-	-
J. Acceptance that functions as a refusal					
1. Unspecific or indefinite reply (IIJ1)	7	6	.54	.46	1.000
2. Lack of enthusiasm (IIJ2)	4	6	.40	.60	.754
K. Avoidance					
1. Nonverbal					
a. Silence (IIK1a)	5	1	.83	.17	.219
b. Hesitation (IIK1b)	0	2	-	-	-
c. Do nothing (IIK1c)	1	2	.33	.67	1.000
d. Physical departure (IIK1d)	5	2	.71	.29	.453
2. Verbal					
a. Topic switch (IIK2a)	20	8	.71	.29	**.036**
b. Joke (IIK2b)	0	0	-	-	-
c. Repetition of part of request, etc. (IIK2c)	11	2	.85	.15	**.022**
d. Postponement (IIK2d)	8	2	.80	.20	.109
e. Hedging (IIK2e)	0	1	-	-	-
L. Resorting to third party* (IIL)	5	0	1.000	0.000	.063
M. Swearing* (IIM)	1	0	-	-	-
N. Proverb/Expression/By word/Saying**(IIN)	21	1	.95	.05	**.000**
Total	157	113	.58	.42	**.009**
III. Adjuncts to Refusals					
A.Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement	2	4	.33	.67	.678
(IIIA)	3	2	.60	.40	1.000
B. Statement of empathy (IIIB)	1	8	.11	.89	**.039**
C. Pause filler (IIIC)	8	0	1.000	-	**.008**
D. Gratitude/appreciation (IIID)	2	3	.40	.60	1.000
E. Showing respect * (IIIE)	0	1	-	-	-
F. Addressing with intimacy * (IIIF)	1	0	-	-	-
G. Addressing with respect * (IIIG)	17	18	.49	.51	1.000
Total					
Total	212	243	.47	.53	.160

The frequency of refusal strategies used by the American and Persian speakers in relation to the social statuses of their interlocutors was also assessed. In doing so, Chi-square was run to analyze the data. It was discovered that the total frequency of the refusal strategies used with individuals from various social statuses throughout the Persian and English languages differed significantly (Total$_{Persian}$:

$\chi2$=94.028, Degrees of Freedom (df)=2, p=0.000, Total$_{English}$: $\chi2$=409.645, df=2, p=0.000), which means that different social statuses performed the speech act of refusals significantly differently. As seen in Table 4, the interlocutors of equal social status received a significant number of exchanged refusals (136) in the Persian culture; the lowest number of refusals (27) was delivered from the people of the lower social statuses to the higher ones, and the number of refusals (49) from the higher statuses to the lower ones was in the middle. Likewise, the Americans' refusals were mostly observed among the people of the equal status (229) with an exception that the number of the refusal of the higher status was 3 and lower statuses was 11.

Regarding the major categories, the total frequencies of Direct strategies used by the Persians and Americans were significantly different with respect to the social statuses (Persian → Direct$_{higher}$:14, Direct$_{equal}$:21, Direct$_{lower}$:3; $\chi2$=13.000, df=2, p=.002) (English→ Direct$_{higher}$:1, Direct$_{equal}$:110, Direct$_{lower}$:1; $\chi2$=212.161, df=2, p=0.000) (see table 4). Concerning the second category of refusal strategies, the total frequencies of Indirect strategies utilized by the Persians and Americans were notably different in terms of social statuses (Persian → Indirect$_{higher}$:34, Indirect$_{equal}$:104, Indirect$_{lower}$:19; $\chi2$ =78.662, df=2, p=.000) (English → Indirect$_{higher}$:2, Indirect$_{equal}$:103, Indirect$_{lower}$:8; $\chi2$ =170.460, df=2, p=.000). The final statistically significant difference involved 'Adjuncts to Refusals,' the third major type of refusal strategies that was mostly exchanged among the individuals with equal social status (Persian → Adjunct$_{higher}$:1, Adjunct$_{equal}$:11, Adjunct$_{lower}$:5; $\chi2$ =8.941, df = 2, p =.011) (English→ Adjunct$_{higher}$:0, Adjunct$_{equal}$:16, Adjunct$_{lower}$:2; $\chi2$ =10.889, df = 1, p = 0.001) (See table 4).

To go into details of the subcategories, both Americans and Persians indicated a statistically significant difference regarding the use of IB1 with respect to the social status (Persian →IB1$_{higher}$:7, IB1$_{equal}$:13, IB1$_{lower}$:2; $\chi2$=8.273, df=2, p=0.016) (English→ IB1$_{higher}$:0, IB1$_{equal}$:72, IB1$_{lower}$:1; $\chi2$=69.055, df=1, p=0.000). In Persian, the highest number of the exchanged refusals (13) were related to the speakers of the equal social status, the lowest number of refusals (2) was offered by the lower status, and the number of refusals (7) expressed by the higher status was somewhere in between. In English, the highest number of exchanged refusals (72) also was related to the speakers of the equal status and the number of refusals (0) expressed by the characters with higher status and the number of refusals (1) expressed by the individuals with lower status were close to each other. The Americans indicated a statistically significant difference concerning the use of IB2 with respect to the social status (IB2$_{higher}$:1, IB2$_{equal}$:38, IB2$_{lower}$:0; $\chi2$=35.103, df=1, p=0.000). The highest number of exchanged refusals (38) was related to the speakers of the equal status, the lowest number of refusals (0) was offered by the lower status, and the number of refusals (1) expressed by the higher status was somewhere in between. Both the Americans and Persians indicated a statistically significant difference regarding the use of IIC with respect to the social status (Persian →IIC$_{higher}$:3, IIC$_{equal}$:14, IIC$_{lower}$:4; $\chi2$=10.571, df=2, p=0.005) (English→

IIC_{higher}:0, IIC_{equal}:41, IIC_{lower}:2; $\chi2$=35.372, df=1, p=0.000). In Persian, the highest number of the exchanged refusals (14) was related to the speakers of the equal status, the lowest number of refusals (3) was offered by the higher status, and the number of refusals (4) expressed by the lower status was in the middle. Likewise, the Americans' IIC was mostly exchanged among the speakers of the equal status (41) while the lowest number of refusals (0) was offered by the higher status, and the number of refusals (2) expressed by the lower status stands in the middle. Regarding the use of IIF, only the Americans indicated a statistically significant difference with respect to the social status (IIF_{higher}:1, IIF_{equal}:9, IIF_{lower}:0; $\chi2$=6.400, df=1, p=0.011). The highest number of exchanged refusals (9) was related to the speakers of equal status, the lowest number of refusals (0) was offered by the lower status and the number of refusals (1) expressed by the higher status was in the middle. Concerning IIK2a, only the Persians indicated a statistically significant difference with respect to the social status ($IIK2a_{higher}$:3, $IIK2a_{equal}$:15, $IIK2a_{lower}$:2; $\chi2$=15.700, df=2, p=0.000). The highest number of exchanged refusals (15) was related to the speakers of equal status, the lowest number of refusals (2) was offered by the lower status, and the number of refusals (3) expressed by the higher status was in the middle. Finally, only the Persians indicated a statistically significant difference concerning the use of IIK2d with regard to their social status ($IIK2d_{higher}$:0, $IIK2d_{equal}$:7, $IIK2d_{lower}$:1; $\chi2$=4.500, df=1, p=0.034). The intended strategy in Persian was commonly swapped between the equals (7), less frequently expressed by the lower status (1), and almost none by the higher status (0).

Table 4. **The Frequency of the Refusal Strategies Used by the Characters in the Two Film Series with Respect to the Interlocutors' Relative Social Statuses and the Results of the Chi-Square Applied to the Data**

	Persian			Persian			English			English		
	Lower	Equal	Higher	χ2	df	P	Lower	Equal	Higher	χ2	df	P
I. Direct												
IA	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	-
IB1	2	13	7	8.273	2	**.016**	1	72	0	69.055	1	**.000**
IB2	1	8	7	5.375	2	.068	0	38	1	35.103	1	**.000**
Total	3	21	14	13.000	2	**.002**	1	110	1	212.161	2	**.000**
II. Indirect												
IIA	1	1	1	.000	2	1.000	3	7	0	1.600	1	.206
IIB	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	2	0	-	-	-
IIC	4	14	3	10.571	2	**.005**	2	41	0	35.372	1	**.000**
IID	1	1	0	.000	1	1.000	0	0	0	-	-	-
IIE	0	2	0	-	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	-
IIF	0	8	2	3.600	1	.058	0	9	1	6.400	1	**.011**
IIG	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	4	0	-	-	-
IIH	1	1	0	.000	1	1.000	0	0	0	-	-	-
III1	0	1	5	2.667	1	.102	0	0	0	-	-	-
III2	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	-
III3	0	13	6	2.579	1	.108	0	9	0	-	-	-
III4	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	-
III5	0	3	0	-	-	-	1	1	0	.000	1	1.000

	Persian Lower Equal Higher			Persian χ2 df P			English Lower Equal Higher			English χ2 df P		
III6	0	1	0	-	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	-
III7*	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	-
IIJ1	1	5	1	4.571	2	.102	0	6	0	-	-	-
IIJ2	1	3	0	1.000	1	.317	0	6	0	-	-	-
IIK1a	2	3	0	.200	1	.655	0	1	0	-	-	-
IIK1b	0	0	0	-	-	-	1	1	0	.000	1	1.000
IIK1c	0	1	0	-	-	-	0	2	0	-	-	-
IIK1d	0	4	1	1.800	1	.180	0	2	0	-	-	-
IIK2a	2	15	3	15.700	2	**.000**	0	8	0	-	-	-
IIK2b	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	-
IIK2c	2	7	2	4.545	2	.103	0	2	0	-	-	-
IIK2d	1	7	0	4.500	1	**.034**	0	1	1	.000	1	1.000
IIK2e	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	1	0	-	-	-
IIL*	0	4	1	1.800	1	.180	0	0	0	-	-	-
IIM*	0	1	0	-	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	-
IIN**	3	9	9	3.429	2	.180	1	0	0	-	-	-
Total	19	104	34	78.662	2	**.000**	8	103	2	170.460	2	**.000**
III. Adjuncts to Refusals												
IIIA	0	2	0	-	-	-	0	4	0	-	-	-
IIIB	0	3	0	-	-	-	0	2	0	-	-	-
IIIC	0	1	0	-	-	-	0	8	0	-	-	-
IIID	4	4	0	.000	1	1.000	0	0	0	-	-	-
IIIE*	1	1	0	.000	1	1.000	2	1	0	.333	1	.564
IIIF*	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	1	0	-	-	-
IIIG*	0	0	1	-	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	-
Total	5	11	1	8.941	2	**.011**	2	16	0	10.889	1	**.001**
Total	27	136	49	94.028	2	**.000**	11	229	3	409.645	2	**.000**

5. Discussion

The overarching idea of the present study was to compare and contrast the frequency of different refusal strategies used by the Persian and American speakers in two popular film series. The study attempted to identify the types of refusal strategies utilized by the characters. Moreover, it examined whether the social status of the interlocutors impacted on the frequency of the refusal strategies employed by the Persian and English speakers. The results made manifest there were no statistically significant differences with respect to the prevalence of refusal strategies between the cultures inside the total frequency, but there were statistically significant differences in the frequency of the two major refusal categories, namely, Direct and Indirect between the two groups of the speakers. Moreover, no significant differences appeared between the two languages as regards the use of adjunct to refusals. The findings of this study are in line with those of Moafian et al. (2019), Ghazanfari et al. (2013), Hashemian (2012), who observed some similarities and differences between the Persian and English cultures. However, the results are not on the same page as those of the previous ones in that similar and different strategies used were not exactly the same.

As for the first research question (part one), among the major categories, Direct and Indirect strategies were the most frequently exchanged strategies among the English speakers, and Adjuncts to Refusals were the least employed ones. Regarding the subcategories, the 'Non-performative statement', "No" in the Direct category, 'Excuse/reason/explanation' in the Indirect category, and 'Pause Filler' in the Adjunct to Refusals were the most prevalent ones. Similar results were also observed in the previous findings. For instance, Moafian et al. (2019), in their empirical study, identified 'Non-performative statement', "No" as the most frequent type of direct refusal strategy. Hashemian (2012) also noted 'Pause filler' as the most common Adjuncts to Refusals strategy among English speakers.

Due to being the members of an individualistic society, the connection between the requester and the requestee was less prone to loss in the English culture via employing 'Non-performative statement', "No" (Moafian et al. 2019). With respect to 'Excuse/reason/explanation', these refusal strategies might serve to convince the interlocutor that he or she was still approved, but that there were some valid reasons for the refusal (Allami & Naeimi 2011). Concerning the 'Pause Filler', they seemed to be used by the people involved when they were looking for a proper expression or taking a breath as well as seeking for another phrase or double-checking what they had already stated (Okazawa 2014).

In respect of the first research question (part two), 'Indirect strategies' were the most ubiquitous strategies traded between the Persian speakers in the major categories. The second most frequent refusal strategies observed in the Persian language belonged to the major category of 'Direct strategies'. 'Adjuncts to Refusals' held the third position. Regarding the subcategories, the 'Proverb/Expression/Saying', 'Excuse/reason/explanation', 'Topic switch', and 'Criticize the request/requester' in the Indirect category, 'Non-performative statement, "No" ', in the Direct category, and 'Gratitude/appreciation' in the Adjunct to Refusals were the most frequently employed strategies among the Persian speakers. The obtained results are compatible with the previous findings. For instance, Moafian et al. (2019) and Ghazanfari et al. (2013), both in the Iranian context and among Persian speakers, also noted indirect strategies as the most prevalent types of refusal strategies in the Persian culture. The reason why the Persian speakers used Indirect strategies more frequently might be the effort to save the requester's positive face as well as to save the rapport with the requester whose demand was ignored. Since the Persian speakers are the participants of a collectivist society (Hofstede 1986), the threat of losing social bonds and friendship might prompt them to make use of more indirect strategies to describe the refusal act in the hopes of maintaining the relationship with the requester (Moafian et al. 2019).

In keeping with the second research question, the findings unveiled that the overall frequencies of the refusal strategies used in the Persian and English languages were not considerably different. Likewise, there was no significant difference between the two languages apropos of Adjunct to refusals. However, there were statistically significant differences between the two cultures as regards

'Direct' and 'Indirect' strategies. The English speakers employed more Direct strategies, whereas the Persians employed more Indirect strategies. Pelto (1968; cited in Ghazanfari et al. 2013) places cultures on a 'Tight-Loose' Spectrum. English people originate from loose communities. In English-speaking countries, there is much less pressure and less cultural duty. Persian society, on the other hand, is at the tight end of the spectrum. In tight communities, there is a strong sense of responsibility to fulfill one's duties. For instance, in some cultures, refusing to accept the interlocutor's offer, advice, or request is considered far from polite, whereas this is not true in western individualistic cultures. This perspective can be seen in the findings. English speakers were much more straightforward, frank, and open in their encounters, employing more non-performative utterances than the Persian speakers (see Ghazanfari et al. 2013 for similar findings in the Persian context).

The findings revealed that there were significant differences across the cultures in the subcategories of Direct strategies including 'Non-performative statements of "No"' and 'Negative willingness/ability'. The English speakers were inclined to use these strategies significantly more often than the Persians. Among the subcategories of Indirect strategies, the findings intimated some discrepancies across the cultures. That is, there were statistically significant differences between the Persians and Americans regarding the strategies of 'Excuse/reason/explanation', 'Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester', 'Topic switch', 'Repetition of part of request', 'Proverb/Expression/ Saying'. Compared to the Persian speakers, the English people availed themselves of more 'Excuse/reason/explanation'. With respect to the other mentioned Indirect subcategories, the Persians surpassed the English speakers. Lastly, the findings indicated that there were significant differences between the two languages in respect of 'Pause filler' and 'Gratitude/appreciation' among the subcategories of Adjunct to Refusals. On the basis of the analysis, the Persian speakers exercised more 'Gratitude/appreciation' and less 'Pause filler' than the Americans. The observed results can be attributed to the fact that the Persian culture is regarded as a collectivist culture, whilst the English society is seen as an individualistic one (Hofstede 2011). As a consequence, the rules and values that guide relations in the two societies vary. By way of illustration, in the Persian culture, the other party apparently takes the interlocutor's emotions into account in order to prevent hurting them. Denial of a request in an English-speaking culture, on the other hand, may actually be safer since privacy rights and self-comfort seem to be essential within this culture. As a corollary, Persians may employ additional strategies to save their speakers' positive faces, eliminate the likely harmful impact of their refusals, and mitigate the aversive consequences, such as embarrassment (Moafian et al. 2019).

On the subject of the fourth research question (how does social status impact on the frequency of the different refusal strategies used by the Persian and English speakers?), the findings lay bare significant differences in the overall number of strategies among the three levels of social status in both cultures. The speakers of

equal social status traded the most refusal strategies in both languages. In the American culture, the lowest number of refusals was offered by the higher status, whereas in the Persian culture, the lowest number of refusals was offered by the lower status. It seems that in the American culture power has no considerable effect on the number of refusal strategies transmitted between the interlocutors. This is in line with Allami & Naeimi's (2011) study in which the native English speakers did not exhibit a significant frequency change in the use of formulae depending on the status of their interlocutors, and thus did not claim to be sensitive to a specific status type (Allami & Naeimi 2011). In the Persian society, it appears that the hierarchy of power was effective in the employment of refusal strategies. Although the highest number of refusal strategies were swapped between people of equal status, the second place was determined by the frequency in which people from higher social status offered to those of lower one. As a consequence, it may be assumed that the power hierarchy influenced the usage of refusal strategies in the Persian culture to some extent. This is congruent with the study of Allami & Naeimi (2011) in which native Persian speakers showed a relatively high level of frequency shift in the utilization of various semantic formulae with respect to social status.

Furthermore, the social status of the interlocutors yielded statistically significant differences in the frequency of the refusal strategies used by the three social levels regarding the main categories of 'Direct', 'Indirect', and 'Adjunct to Refusals' in both cultures. As for the interlocutors with unequal social status, in English, the number of refusals expressed by the characters with higher status and the number of refusals expressed by the individuals with lower status were the same for direct strategies, and with regard to indirect strategies, the people with lower social status offered more strategies to individuals with higher one. However, in the Persian culture, the number of refusals expressed by the characters with higher status outweighed the lower status in both Direct and Indirect strategies. In the Persian society, it appears that the hierarchy of power influenced the use of refusal strategies to some degree while in the American culture the power hierarchy was not prominent. Furthermore, it may be contended that cultures all over the world have their own set of beliefs, values, and customs, which differentiate them from one another (Zaw 2018). However, the 'Direct', 'Indirect', 'Adjunct to Refusals' strategies in both cultures were commonly swapped between the equals. \In both groups, the highest number of the exchanged refusals were related to the speakers of equal social status. The same was observed concerning the subcategory strategies. 'Non-performative statement' "No", 'Negative willingness/ability', 'Excuse/reason/explanation', 'Promise of future acceptance' in English, and 'Non-performative statement' "No", 'Negative willingness/ability', 'Excuse/reason/explanation', 'Promise of future acceptance', 'Topic switch,' and 'Postponement' in Persian were mostly exchanged between the equals. Therefore, in spite of the differences, similarities were also detected between the two cultures. It seems that technological advances and globalization, which have converted the world into a global village, are not innocent in this regard. As Moaveni (2014: 1)

maintained, "the advent of new technologies such as the Internet has changed the way we interact. This technology has brought people of different cultures closer to each other." In line with this view, social media facilitates the effective connection of a wide variety of people, customs, beliefs, and places from all over the world without ever being constrained by time or geography (Sawyer & Chen 2012). Such increasing international interactions, consequently, besides differences, bring similarities between the speech patterns of different societies and cultures.

5. Conclusion

The present research looked into the frequency and distribution of refusal strategies in the Iranian and American film series with a focus on linguacultural elements. The interlocutors' relative social status was also probed into. The findings manifested both similarities and differences in the realization of the refusal speech act between the cultures. Furthermore, statistically significant differences were discovered between the two cultures among three levels of social status.

The study findings offer some implications to the people engaged in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication, learners, and those contributing to language education system. The first implication is that the individuals involved in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication, as well as learners, must be aware of the importance of knowing pragmatics and the culture-bound application of different speech acts. Teachers are recommended to provide required classroom instruction in this regard. Material developers are also advised to include the relevant materials in the text books, movies, as well as other educational resources. Regarding the theoretical implications, the findings can enhance intercultural understanding and provide valuable insights into the realization of refusals in different cultural contexts and the influence of social status. It highlights the significance of pragmatic issues and cultural awareness in promoting effective communication and mutual understanding across cultures.

It goes without saying that there were some limitations to the study. The cornerstone of the study was primarily refusals. Hence, it is recommended that the study be replicated by other researchers focusing on the role of gender and social statuses in the realization of other speech acts to secure a brighter picture of how different cultures realize different speech acts. Over and above that, in the current study, film series with social drama genre were selected. Further research is recommended to be carried out in this scope, using other genres such as comedy, etc. in order to compare the results.

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Bionotes:

Bahareh KORDESTANCHI holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics at Urmia State University, Iran. She is interested in undertaking research projects in the realm of pragmatics and discourse analysis. She also teaches BA courses at the University of Urmia, Iran.
e-mail: kordestanchibahare@gmail.com; b.kordestanchi@urmia.ac.ir
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1736-3310

Mehdi SARKHOSH has a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Tehran and is currently a faculty member (assistant professor) at Urmia State University, Iran. His main research interests include: pragmatics, and discourse studies. He also teaches MA and PhD courses at the University of Urmia, Iran.
e-mail: m.sarkhosh@urmia.ac.ir
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2483-4662

Fatemeh MOAFIAN holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics and is currently an assistant professor at Kosar University of Bojnord, Iran. She has co-authored several research articles in national and international scientific research journals such as Frontiers in Psychology, International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, System, ELT, Asian EFL Journal, etc. She has also co-authored two books. Her research interests are pragmatics, educational psychology, mindfulness, and teacher education.
e-mail: f.moafian@kub.ac.ir
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3782-1561

Сведения об авторах:

Бахарех КОРДЕСТАНЧИ получила степень PhD по прикладной лингвистике в Государственном университете Урмия (Иран) и преподает там в настоящее время. Она занимается исследованиями в области прагматики и дискурс-анализа.
e-mail: kordestanchibahare@gmail.com; b.kordestanchi@urmia.ac.ir
 https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1736-3310

Мехди САРКХОШ получил степень PhD по прикладной лингвистике в Тегеранском университете. В настоящее время он является старшим преподавателем в Государственном университете Урмия (Иран), где преподает ряд дисциплин магистрантам и аспирантам. Его исследовательские интересы сосредоточены в области прагматики и дискурс-анализа.
e-mail: m.sarkhosh@urmia.ac.ir
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2483-4662

Фатемех МОАФИАН имеет степень PhD по прикладной лингвистике и является старшим преподавателем в Косарском университете Боджнурда (Иран). Она соавтор нескольких научных статей, опубликованных в Иране и за рубежом, в частности в журналах *Frontiers in Psychology*, *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, *System*, *ELT*, *Asian EFL Journal*, а также двух книг. В сферу ее научных интересов входят прагматика, педагогическая психология и педагогика.
e-mail: f.moafian@kub.ac.ir
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3782-1561