

## Research Article

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# Refusal Strategies in Emirati Arabic: A Gender-Based Study

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**Abstract:** This study explores how Emirati Arabic speakers refuse requests, with a special focus on how men and women differ in refusal strategy use. While researchers have studied refusal strategies in different Arabic dialects, there has been little investigation into Emirati Arabic – a dialect shaped by Gulf Arab traditions, trade interactions, and religious influences. This study aims to fill that gap by analysing the specific linguistic and cultural factors that shape refusals in Emirati Arabic. To achieve this, the study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Data were gathered through a written discourse completion task, which presented participants with eight real-life refusal scenarios involving various interlocutors. The refusal strategies were classified using Beebe et al.'s (1990). John Benjamin Publishing Company) framework, which categorises refusals as direct, indirect, or adjunct strategies. The results showed that indirect refusal strategies were the most common, followed by direct refusals and adjunct strategies. Among the major strategies, the findings indicated variegated use of sub-strategies based on gender and situation. Female participants were more likely to suggest alternatives or make promises, while male participants were more inclined to assert principles, avoid confrontation, or discourage the request, indicating a more direct approach. Situational variations also played a role. The highest number of refusals occurred in response to wedding and dinner invitations, emphasizing the cultural importance of such gatherings. Meanwhile, refusals to requests from mothers showed the lowest use of direct strategies, underscoring the significance of familial respect and obligation in Emirati culture. This study includes practical implications for cross-cultural communication, language education, and sociolinguistic research on Arabic dialects.

**Keywords:** refusal strategies, speech act theory, Emirati Arabic, gender

## 1 Introduction

The notion of the speech act, a cornerstone of pragmatic theory, has been the launching point of pragmatic theory in investigating human communication. First outlined by Austin (1962) and then expanded by Searle (1969), speech acts are defined as the minimal units of discourse; they include actions the speaker performs through language, namely requests, apologies, promises, and refusals. Searle's (1969) taxonomy identifies five categories of speech acts: directives, commissives, representatives, declaratives, and expressives. The current

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research focuses on the refusal speech act, which falls under the expressive category and involves a refusal to engage in an action proposed by another speaker.

Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) suggest that speech acts follow universal rules; therefore, similar speech acts are realized identically across languages. However, some opposing arguments exist on the aforementioned aspects of speech acts by Blum-Kulka (1987) and Wierzbicka (2003), indicating that speech acts represent specific realizations according to social and cultural variations. Refusals, being one of the speech act types, show these differences. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), refusal strategies depend on parameters like social distance, power relation, and threat of the foreshadowed act. In the case of refusals, politeness strategies are usually resorted to in order to mitigate the offence, and speakers adjust their refusal realisation according to the socio-cultural norms embraced by a speech community.

Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) maintain that speech acts represent general rules, maintaining a similar performance across languages. While similar opinions highlight the universality of speech act realisation, dissimilar opinions point out the variability based on social and cultural variables. Blum-Kulka (1987) and Wierzbicka (2003) also highlight speech acts as being culture-specific. Refusals, as acts of speech, are not an exception; there is notable variation in their strategies across cultures. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that refusal strategies depend essentially on social distance, power relations, and the degree of the initiating act. The politeness strategies help minimise the offence of the refusals because speakers from a particular socio-cultural speech community often adhere to their refusal strategy according to the norms of that speech community.

During the last three decades, research on speech acts has been examined in various languages and cultural contexts to explore a universal mechanism of human communication and culturally and socially determined norms of such linguistic behaviour (Afzaal *et al.*, 2024). Olshtain and Blum-Kulka's (1985) and Meier's (1995) works are cases of that point. These studies have proven worthy of both theoretical and practical applications. For instance, the results enhance language pedagogy by maximizing the pragmatic competence of the learner, which, after all, reduces intercultural communication breakdown and cultural stereotyping (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). Speech act research has evolved around three major areas: intralingual studies, cross-cultural comparisons, and learner-centred studies. Intralingual studies address speech acts within one language or culture, and cross-cultural studies compare their realisation across different linguistic and cultural environments. Learner-centred studies usually investigate how language learners realize speech acts and often identify cases of pragmatic failure.

Empirical works across different Arabic dialects, focusing on Speech Acts as a sub-genre of pragmatics, have documented the cultural and linguistic differences in detail. For example, addressing compliment response strategies in Emirati Arabic, Rabab'ah *et al.* (2024) revealed the contours of established cultural norms on communicative behaviour. Likewise, the work of Rabab'ah *et al.* (2024), studying the metaphorical conceptualizations of pain in Algerian Arabic, portrays certain speech acts related to sociocultural phenomena in the form of conceptual metaphors. Lounis *et al.* (2024) highlight the role of gender and social power in advice-giving strategies in Algerian Arabic. Al-Khawaldeh & Rabab'ah (2024) present an analysis of reprimand strategies in Jordanian Arabic at different social levels. Furthermore, Rabab'ah *et al.* (2022) examine the strategies of impoliteness employed in Jordanian hospitals, while Rabab'ah and Fowler Al-Hawamdeh (2020) report strategies of persuasion in Jordanian and Algerian television commercials, indicating the existence of the greatest variation in the speech act of persuasion. In the meantime, cross-cultural works like Rabab'ah and Fowler Al-Hawamdeh (2020) on apologies in Arabic and English provide evidence of the language and culture intertwining within the speech act of apology. The existence of variation in refusal strategies has yet to be thoroughly understood, as research on such speech acts in the Gulf dialects, particularly the Emirati dialect, is limited. Moreover, research investigating the speech act of refusal in Emirati Arabic is lacking. Therefore, addressing this gap would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how the speech act of refusal is realised in this Gulf dialect.

Among the speech acts that have been the object of numerous cross-cultural studies, refusal holds a special place due to its intrinsic complexity and high potential for causing misunderstandings. Following Chen *et al.* (1998), a refusal is a reaction to an initiating act of request, offer, or invitation and relies heavily on the context of the situation (Ruthrof, 2007). Keshavarz *et al.* (2006) state that refusals are produced spontaneously, allowing little planning time for speakers, who have to operate with a wider range of possibilities. As Brown and Levinson (1987) point out, a refusal is a face-threatening act; hence, its realization becomes even more difficult. A refusal

can damage interpersonal relationships, especially during intercultural communication, when differences in pragmatic conventions may increase the risk of miscommunication (Al-Issa, 1998; Stevens 1993).

Refusal strategies in varieties of the Arabic language have been examined and analysed (Benbouya & Rabab'ah, 2022; El-Dakhs, 2018, 2020; Huwari et al., 2023; Nordin et al., 2024). However, in Emirati Arabic (a Gulf dialect) refusals have not been yet examined. Emirati Arabic is distinct because of its phonological features, and words that are tied to desert life. Because the UAE location is a trade hub, Emirati Arabic incorporates loanwords from Persian, Urdu, Hindi, and English. Finally, Emirati Arabic is rich in idiomatic expressions (Leung et al., 2020). This paper, therefore, aims to explore the realisation of refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic in response to requests in real-life situations. To this end, this study attempts to answer the following questions: (1) What strategies are employed in Emirati Arabic to express refusal? (2) How do refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic vary across genders? (3) How do refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic vary across situations? By addressing such questions, this study hopes to add to the current level of understanding regarding refusal strategies in a Gulf dialect, thereby contributing to useful insights into both theoretical research and practical applications in cross-cultural communication and language teaching.

## 2 Literature Review

The existing research on the discourse of refusal in Arabic dialects reflects a variation in the application of these strategies and how sociocultural, contextual, and linguistic factors influence them. This review includes a thematic analysis of refusal strategies employed in different Arabic-speaking areas in relation to their significance in the study of Emirati Arabic. For example, Al Kayed et al. (2020) explored refusal strategies and pragmatic modifiers within the Jordanian Arabic dialect. He recorded 24 h of conversations to investigate how Jordanians managed refusals in different contexts. The study revealed that complex strategies involving both direct and indirect approaches were preferred to frequently use external modifiers, such as religious expressions, to soften refusals. Using such politeness markers in expressing refusal depicts the cultural values prioritizing harmony and face-saving. The results highlight the importance of the interplay of culture in constructing refusal strategies. In a similar vein, Yousef and Al-Khawaldeh (2021) investigated how native speakers of Jordanian Arabic articulate their refusals for offers, suggestions, and invitations while investigating sociolinguistic factors such as gender within Jordanian society. With a total of seventy subjects selected from Hashemite University, the findings revealed the usage of indirect strategies to mitigate interactions and marked the substantial gender differences in the refusals of speech acts.

In a contrastive study, Alshmaseen et al. (2023) analysed the refusal strategies employed by Jordanians and Syrian refugees in Jordan when engaging in communication, with special emphasis on the linguistic and semantic aspects of the strategy. The study employed a discourse completion test (DCT) incorporating 10 scenarios that included requests, offers, invitations, and suggestions. The differences between the two groups were significantly distinct, with more Jordanians adopting negative willingness and more direct refusals and explanations for their refusal, whilst the Syrian refugees primarily employed more indirect approaches. Gender was also an important variable: women employed longer and more elaborate refusals with multiple strategies in both groups. Their findings illustrate the socio-cultural and gender differences concerning the type of refusal strategies employed.

Refusals in Iraqi Arabic and Algerian-spoken Arabic (ASA) were also examined. For instance, Abdul Sattar et al. (2009) conducted a study on refusal strategies in Iraqi Arabic. They studied how 30 male students at the university refused suggestions made to them by people of different social ranks. Using a written discourse completion task (WDCT), the study used an indirect strategy, such as explaining, which was provided as a common strategy across all cases. However, specific strategies varied by social status, as participants employed polite strategies of apology and future acceptance with higher-status interlocutors. In contrast, refusals to equal status interlocutors were negative opinions and negatively repetitive. In contrast, refusals to lower-status interlocutors were more direct and often included criticism or attack. These findings shed light on the issue of power dynamics, the social hierarchy that exists, and how it pertains to the study of refusal strategies,

a common theme in studies conducted on Arabic dialects. Similarly, Benbouya and Rabab'ah (2022) conducted a study on refusal strategies in ASA, which serves as the basis for this field. A mix of 30 Algerians (15 males and females each) were studied with an oral discourse completion task, involving interlocutors of equal, higher, and lower social statuses. The study results showed that an overwhelming percentage prefers adopting direct refusing strategies more than the negative willingness or ability across all social statuses, which implies that directness and clarity are elements that Algerians heavily prioritize. Cultural norms guide preferences toward clear and direct communication, especially when refusing offers.

Saudi Arabia was another area of interest to Arab researchers. For example, Ababtain (2021) aimed to find out what refusal strategies are used by Saudi Arabs. The participants were 25 Saudi females and 25 Saudi males. A DCT of six scenarios was used to collect the data, which was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The participants' answers were collected and analysed using the taxonomy of refusal proposed by Beebe *et al.* (1990). The study found that both genders preferred indirect, adjunctive, or do in combination with direct strategies. The results revealed, however, that male respondents were more direct than female respondents. Moreover, it was found that the most commonly used refusal strategy by both genders is the 'excuse, reason, explanation' strategy. In a recent study, Al-Asmari (2024) examined gender and family relationships more closely in her study on the refusal strategies of Saudi women regarding parental instructions. Based on the parents' varying levels of imposition, mothers and fathers, the participants completed a written DCT with 60 different scenarios. It was revealed that the majority of the Saudi females employed the 'Excuse, reason, explanation' strategy, but many participants additionally altered their responses according to the gender of the parent. Indirect strategies, such as 'Attempt to dissuade interlocutor', were more evident in refusals to fathers than in mothers. In contrast, "Statement of alternative" was more commonly used with mothers than fathers. The findings indicate that gender norms and family structures define the refusal strategies in a culture that values respect and deference.

Studies on refusal strategies across cultures highlight the significant influence of cultural norms and language proficiency on pragmatic behavior, revealing differences between native speakers and language learners in their use of direct and indirect refusal strategies. For instance, in equal and unequal status situations, Morkus (2014) investigated the link between language ability and pragmatic competence while looking at the interplay between refusal strategies of native speakers of Arabic and American learners of Egyptian Arabic as a foreign language. The results showed that learners, no matter their level, employed more direct strategies than natives, who preferred to be indirect with some degree of engagement in negotiation. Advanced learners showed better alignment with native speakers' use of language by being more indirect and using negotiation. The study also demonstrated some examples of pragmatic transfer from learners' native languages where the directness of refusals was more pronounced. These results highlight the problem language learners face in mastering culturally appropriate pragmatic strategies.

Al-Sallal (2024) explored the extent to which Bahraini, Indian second language learners of English, and English native speakers differ in employing refusal strategies while taking into account gender, social distance, and level of imposition. It showed striking differences in the frequency, number, and hierarchical use of strategies employed, and all were bound by their cultural communication styles, showing strong pragmatic transfer from the subjects' first languages. The findings highlight the importance of sociocultural context in constructing cross-group pragmatic engagement.

In investigating the Jordanian Arabic dialect and American English, Huwari *et al.* (2023) explored how the refusal strategies differ between the two languages. The study revealed that both used indirect refusal strategies at different intensities, such as the Jordanians being more subversive, whilst the Americans used direct means for rejection. This comparison signifies the underlying role of cultural norms in shaping pragmatic behaviour like refusal. In contrasting how the speech act of refusal is realised in Egyptian English and American English, Nelson *et al.*'s (2002) study showed a comparable pattern of strategies employed by both groups when making refusals.

In a similar study, Alkhawaldeh *et al.* (2023) analysed refusals in Jordanian Arabic and Castilian Spanish with a focus on invitations. Both groups preferred indirect strategies, but they employed different strategies. Jordanians used gratitude and swearing as adjuncts, while the Spanish speakers used positive regards and expressions of regret. The findings explain the need for additional cultural nuances and draw an analogy between the Spanish and Arabic constructs of refusal strategies, where avoiding conflict is a dominant theme.

In examining how native speakers of Arabic and Hebrew, as multilingual speakers, managed requests and refusals in English, Shafran and Stavans (2023) found that native speakers of Arabic and Hebrew as a second language shared a similar preference for indirect requests and direct refusals. However, intra-group variations for certain linguistic features were identified, indicating the particular cultural and linguistic background used when making pragmatic decisions. This study shows that multilingualism is very complex in terms of refusal strategies. In a recent study, Nordin et al. (2024) examined the refusal strategies used by various Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds when turned down by an invitation from a person of a higher rank. The results showed that both groups of participants were found to resort to both forms of politeness, indicating some common ground regarding their desire to be indirect. Nevertheless, there was a divergence with regard to the selection of some of the strategies, which showed the different cultures and languages within Iraq. The study claims that gender, level of education, and even the area within Iraq are other crucial variables that can be influential with regard to employing refusal strategies.

The studies reviewed demonstrate the rich diversity of refusal strategies across Arabic dialects, shaped by cultural norms, social dynamics, gender, and language proficiency. While some patterns, such as the preference for indirectness in face-threatening contexts, are common, significant variations exist based on context and dialect. These findings provide a valuable foundation for investigating refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic, which could reflect its unique blend of cultural and linguistic characteristics. Further research could enhance our understanding of how Emirati Arabic speakers navigate refusals and contribute to the broader literature on pragmatics and sociolinguistics in the Arab world.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses of refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic. For primary data collection, a WDCT was used.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

The DCT included eight scenarios that were aimed at capturing realistic refusal situations for interactions with friends, relatives, and parents. These scenarios were meticulously crafted to cover a wide range of social contexts and relationships, which is an important aspect of Emirati culture. Google form was used to prepare the DCT, and it was shared with 600 university students from the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the University of Sharjah. To control for any biases in the participants' responses before responding to the situations, they were informed about the research aims that their identity would be kept confidential and that the data would only be used for research purposes. However, only 45 male and 49 female participants responded to the DCT.

#### 3.3 Participants

The study consisted of 94 Emirati Arabic speakers (45 men and 49 women) between the ages of 18 and 30. They are BA and MA students studying at the University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates.

#### 3.4 Validation

To maximise the validity of the DCT scenarios, the researchers prepared the first draft of the DCT and circulated it to three experts in Arabic sociolinguistics. They were asked for input on the situations'

appropriateness for eliciting refusal behaviour and their appropriateness for the linguistic, cultural, and situational context specific to Emirati society. They received feedback, and the situations were reframed to better represent the refusal situations.

### 3.5 Coding Reliability

To maintain consistency and reliability of the coding of the responses, the three researchers independently analysed a set of pilot data using Beebe et al.'s scheme of refusal strategies. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus. This led to an inter-rater reliability of 0.90, which was found to be reasonably sufficient, thus confirming the reliability of the coding scheme.

### 3.6 Analytical Framework

The study adopts the refusal strategy framework proposed by Beebe et al. (1990), which classifies the types of refusals into three broad categories of refusal strategies. These major categories are direct strategies, which include straightforward refusals, like saying “No,” and indirect strategies, which can include excuses, justification, or regretful statements, and adjunct, which are gratitude and appreciation statements that accompany the refusal. This framework was selected because it is the most comprehensive framework of refusal strategies, and it was found suitable for the analysis of other Arabic dialects, such as Jordanian Arabic and Iraqi Arabic (Section 2). Therefore, we believe it is the most suitable for collecting refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to analyse the data. In the quantitative analysis, the frequency of each refusal strategy was calculated to identify patterns and trends, particularly variations across genders and strategies. The data were analysed using Chi-Square to determine significant differences between male and female participants in their use of refusal strategies and across strategies. In the qualitative analysis, an in-depth qualitative analysis was conducted to explore the contextual and cultural factors influencing the choice of refusal strategies. This involved examining the nuances of participants' responses to highlight the sociolinguistic features specific to Emirati Arabic.

## 4 Results

The results of Chi-square statistical analysis ( $\chi^2$ ) answer the first two research questions related to the strategies of refusal employed in Emirati Arabic and the impact of gender on strategy use or strategy choice (Tables 1–3). As for the third research question regarding how refusal strategies vary across situations in Emirati Arabic, frequencies and percentages were calculated and tabulated (Table 4).

Regarding the first research question about the refusal strategies used by Emirati Arabic speakers, Table 1 shows that the Emirati participants primarily relied on indirect refusal strategies. The results show that the indirect strategies recorded the highest frequency (1,164), representing 56.37% of the total strategies used. Following this, direct strategies were used with a frequency of 502, representing 24.31% of the responses. The participants also refused to express refusal in 26 scenarios, accounting for 1.26%. Besides, the participants produced a variety of adjuncts with 373 occurrences, which constituted 18.06%.



Table 1 also shows the frequency of occurrence of the sub-categories of the main strategies. Under the indirect strategies, which are the dominant ones, the excuse was the most used strategy, which recorded almost 50% of the total number of strategies (532 occurrences). This was followed by regret statements, recording 19.07% with 222 occurrences. The participants also produced statements of alternatives, wishes, and promises with percentages of 9.97, 8.33, and 7.22%, respectively. Other indirect strategies were used to a lesser extent. As for the direct strategies, nonperformative ones dominated the scene, with 99.80% of the total direct strategies. It is important to note here that the nonperformative strategies included saying “No” (15.4%), expressing negative willingness/ability (57.3%), and an Emirati-specific pattern of seeking forgiveness (27.3%).

The results also show that the Emirati participants produced several adjuncts and some instances of refusing to refuse. The most frequent adjuncts were religious, as they were mainly represented by swearing by God, prayers to the hearer, and expressions of God’s will, with percentages of 32.71, 23.86, and 23.32%, respectively. Other adjuncts, including expressions of gratitude and congratulations, were used to a lesser extent. Moreover, the participants refused to perform the act of refusal in 26 scenarios, most of which included requests from the participants’ mothers, which reflects their reluctance to refuse a parent’s request, as they are commanded to be obedient to them in Islam.

The study also revealed that the participants produced a few initiators in the forms of greetings (e.g. Good morning), address terms (e.g. Mom), and terms of endearment (e.g. my dear). Table 2 shows that endearment was the most used term, representing almost half of the initiators. The address terms followed this and, finally, the greetings. It must be noted that most of the greetings were religious, particularly in the form of “Peace be upon you السلام عليكم” [ʔas.sa.la:.mu ʔa.laj.kum].

**Table 1:** Refusal strategies by the Emirati participants

|  | No.          | %            |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| Performative   | 1            | 0.20         |
| Nonperformative (saying no)                            | 77           | 15.4         |
| Nonperformative (negative willingness/ability)         | 287          | 57.3         |
| Nonperformative (Emirati-specific seeking forgiveness) | 137          | 27.3         |
| <b>Direct</b>  | <b>502</b>   | <b>24.31</b> |
| Statement of regret                                    | 222          | 19.07        |
| Wish   | 97           | 8.33         |
| Excuse   | 532          | 45.70        |
| Statement of alternative                               | 116          | 9.97         |
| Condition  | 24           | 2.06         |
| Promise  | 84           | 7.22         |
| Principle  | 19           | 1.63         |
| Philosophy   | 1            | 0.09         |
| Dissuade interlocutor                                  | 35           | 3.01         |
| Acceptance that functions as refusal                   | 25           | 2.15         |
| Avoidance  | 9            | 0.77         |
| <b>Indirect</b>  | <b>1,164</b> | <b>56.37</b> |
| <b>Consent</b>   | <b>26</b>    | <b>1.26</b>  |
| Positive opinion                                       | 12           | 3.22         |
| Empathy  | 9            | 2.41         |
| Pause fillers  | 1            | 0.27         |
| Gratitude  | 30           | 8.04         |
| Swear by God   | 122          | 32.71        |
| God’s will   | 87           | 23.32        |
| Congratulations  | 21           | 5.63         |
| Prayer to the hearer                                   | 89           | 23.86        |
| Evil-eye   | 2            | 0.54         |
| <b>Adjunct</b>   | <b>373</b>   | <b>18.06</b> |
| <b>Refusal</b>   | <b>2,065</b> |              |

The values in bold are the categories and the ones not in bold type are the subcategories.

**Table 2:** Initiators by the Emirati participants

|                     | No.        | %     |
|---------------------|------------|-------|
| Greetings           | 24         | 15.79 |
| Address terms       | 56         | 36.84 |
| Terms of endearment | 72         | 47.37 |
| <b>Initiators</b>   | <b>152</b> |       |

The values in bold are the categories, and the ones not in bold type are the subcategories.

The data analysis also provided answers to the second research question concerning the effect of gender on the use of refusal strategies. As shown in Table 3, no statistically significant differences were observed in relation to the direct strategies or the scenarios in which the participants refused to perform the act of refusal. As for the indirect strategies, the male participants significantly produced more strategies than the female participants overall. However, when the sub-strategies were considered, it was found that the female participants produced a significantly higher number of statements of alternatives and promises, while the male participants produced significantly more statements of principle, avoidance, and dissuading the interlocutor. Table 2 also shows that females used statements of regret than males (127 and 95, respectively);

**Table 3:** The effect of gender on the use of refusal strategies

|                                      | Males      |              | Females      |              | Total        |              | $\chi^2$       | <i>p</i>                        |
|--------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
|                                      | No.        | %            | No.          | %            | No.          | %            |                |                                 |
| Performative                         | 1          | 0.48         | 0            | 0.0          | 1            | 0.20         | 1.428          | <sup>FE</sup> <i>p</i> = 0.412  |
| Nonperformative                      | 206        | 99.52        | 295          | 100.0        | 501          | 99.80        |                |                                 |
| <b>Direct</b>                        | <b>207</b> | <b>23.31</b> | <b>295</b>   | <b>25.06</b> | <b>502</b>   | <b>24.31</b> | <b>0.845</b>   | <b>0.358</b>                    |
| Statement of regret                  | 95         | 17.76        | 127          | 20.19        | 222          | 19.07        | 1.109          | 0.292                           |
| Wish                                 | 40         | 7.48         | 57           | 9.06         | 97           | 8.33         | 0.951          | 0.329                           |
| Excuse                               | 256        | 47.85        | 276          | 43.88        | 532          | 45.70        | 1.837          | 0.175                           |
| Statement of alternative             | 42         | 7.85         | 74           | 11.76        | 116          | 9.97         | 4.937*         | 0.026*                          |
| Condition                            | 13         | 2.43         | 11           | 1.75         | 24           | 2.06         | 0.664          | 0.415                           |
| Promise                              | 28         | 5.23         | 56           | 8.90         | 84           | 7.22         | 5.814*         | 0.016*                          |
| Principle                            | 18         | 3.36         | 1            | 0.16         | 19           | 1.63         | 18.501*        | <0.001*                         |
| Philosophy                           | 1          | 0.19         | 0            | 0.0          | 1            | 0.09         | 1.177          | <sup>FE</sup> <i>p</i> = 0.460  |
| Dissuade interlocutor                | 24         | 4.49         | 11           | 1.75         | 35           | 3.01         | 7.427*         | 0.006*                          |
| Acceptance that functions as refusal | 10         | 1.87         | 15           | 2.38         | 25           | 2.15         | 0.366          | 0.545                           |
| Avoidance                            | 8          | 1.50         | 1            | 0.16         | 9            | 0.77         | 6.729*         | <sup>FE</sup> <i>p</i> = 0.014* |
| <b>Indirect</b>                      | <b>535</b> | <b>60.25</b> | <b>629</b>   | <b>53.44</b> | <b>1,164</b> | <b>56.37</b> | <b>9.535*</b>  | <b>0.002*</b>                   |
| <b>Consent</b>                       | <b>16</b>  | <b>1.80</b>  | <b>10</b>    | <b>0.85</b>  | <b>26</b>    | <b>1.26</b>  | <b>3.691</b>   | <b>0.055</b>                    |
| Positive opinion                     | 7          | 5.38         | 5            | 2.06         | 12           | 3.22         | 3.011          | <sup>FE</sup> <i>p</i> = 0.120  |
| Empathy                              | 0          | 0.0          | 9            | 3.70         | 9            | 2.41         | 4.934*         | <sup>FE</sup> <i>p</i> = 0.030* |
| Pause fillers                        | 0          | 0.0          | 1            | 0.41         | 1            | 0.27         | 0.536          | <sup>FE</sup> <i>p</i> = 1.000  |
| Gratitude                            | 10         | 7.69         | 20           | 8.23         | 30           | 8.04         | 0.033          | 0.856                           |
| Swear by God                         | 49         | 37.69        | 73           | 30.04        | 122          | 32.71        | 2.253          | 0.133                           |
| God's will                           | 28         | 21.54        | 59           | 24.28        | 87           | 23.32        | 0.356          | 0.551                           |
| Congratulations                      | 8          | 6.15         | 13           | 5.35         | 21           | 5.63         | 0.103          | 0.748                           |
| Prayer to the hearer                 | 27         | 20.77        | 62           | 25.51        | 89           | 23.86        | 1.050          | 0.306                           |
| Evil-eye                             | 1          | 0.77         | 1            | 0.41         | 2            | 0.54         | 0.203          | <sup>FE</sup> <i>p</i> = 1.000  |
| <b>Adjunct</b>                       | <b>130</b> | <b>14.64</b> | <b>243</b>   | <b>20.65</b> | <b>373</b>   | <b>18.06</b> | <b>12.336*</b> | <b>&lt;0.001*</b>               |
| <b>Refusal</b>                       | <b>888</b> |              | <b>1,177</b> |              | <b>2,065</b> |              |                |                                 |

$\chi^2$ : Chi-square test; FET, Fisher Exact test.

\*: Statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

The bold values refer to the major strategy types.



**Table 4:** The situational variations in the realisation of refusal

| # | Scenario  | Direct | Indirect | Consent | Adjunct | Total |
|---|---|--------|----------|---------|---------|-------|
| 1 | Declining a wedding invitation from a friend      | 80     | 135      | 2       | 114     | 331   |
| 2 | Refusing to lend money to a colleague             | 74     | 135      | 3       | 33      | 245   |
| 3 | Declining a dinner invitation from a relative     | 51     | 158      | 2       | 61      | 272   |
| 4 | Refusing to offer a ride to a friend              | 65     | 157      | 1       | 28      | 251   |
| 5 | Refusing to fix some things at a neighbour's home | 63     | 162      | 0       | 16      | 241   |
| 6 | Declining a trip invitation from a friend         | 54     | 146      | 1       | 51      | 122   |
| 7 | Declining a mother's request to go out            | 51     | 130      | 16      | 30      | 227   |
| 8 | Refusing to help a friend at a community event    | 64     | 141      | 1       | 40      | 246   |

however, these differences were not statistically significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Regarding the adjuncts, the overall pattern showed female dominance, mainly due to significantly higher use of empathetic statements.

As can be shown in Table 4, the quantitative analysis revealed some interesting findings concerning how the Emirati use of refusal strategies varied per situation. First, regarding the total number of refusal strategies used per situation, Table 4 reveals that declining a wedding invitation (Situation 1) and declining an invitation to dinner (Situation 3) recorded the highest number of instances. However, declining a trip invitation by a friend (Situation 6) registered the least number of strategies. Second, declining wedding invitations by friends (Situation 1) and refusing to lend money to a colleague (Situation 2) recorded the highest frequencies. In contrast, declining an invitation to dinner with a relative (Situation 3) and declining a mother's request to go out (Situation 7) recorded the lowest direct strategies. Third, Situations 3, 4, and 5 recorded the highest indirect strategies while declining the mother's request (Situation 7) was the lowest. Fourth, it is observed that the situation that asked the participants to decline a wedding invitation by a friend yielded the highest number of adjuncts, particularly in the form of prayers to hearers. In contrast, refusing to offer a ride to a friend and refusing to fix something at a neighbour's home recorded the lowest frequencies of adjuncts. Finally, refusing to decline the request was overused in situation 7, where the participants were asked to decline a mother's request to go out with her.

The differences in the strategy choice per situation suggest that Emiratis alter their responses according to the social relationships and the nature of the given request. As observed, wedding and dinner invitations (Situations 1 and 3) recorded the highest number of strategies used, which could be attributed to the fact that these events are socially considered of great value. Therefore, the participants used more strategies and varied them to mitigate the face-threatening acts. On the other hand, the inability to directly refuse a mother's request (Situation 7) was combined with the overuse of consent markers and several indirect strategies. This tendency highlights the prescribed Islamic cultural norms that emphasize obedience and respect for one's parents. Direct strategies were used in cases in which face is not the main concern of the respondent, such as when lending money to a friend.

The qualitative data analysis supports the quantitative analysis as it provides illustrative examples of the refusal strategies used by Emirati Arabic speakers. We qualitatively present samples of the most common strategies. As seen below, the analysis reveals that indirect strategies of refusal, such as excuses, expressions of regret, and promises, are more common and consistent with the Emirati cultural values of politeness and social harmony.

## 4.1 Indirect Refusal Strategies

Regarding the participants' use of indirect strategies, which were the most frequent, the participants' use included the sub-strategies of excuse, statement of regret, statement of alternatives, wish, promise, dissuade interlocutor, and acceptance which functions as refusal. Illustrative examples are provided in (1)–(7).

Example (1) – excuse in situation 6

[Al-wālda qālat lā] الوالدة قالت لا

**English Translation:** My mother said “No.”

Example (2) – statement of regret in situation 2

[ʾāsifa mā ʾaqdar] اسفه ما اقدر

**English Translation:** I'm sorry, I can't.

Example (3) – statement of alternative in situation 5

وعليكم السلام، للأسف لست متاحاً هذا العصر. لكنني سوف أسأل أحد آخر يمكنه أن يساعدك  
[wa ʕa.laj.kum as.sa.la:m, li.l.ʔa.sa.f las.tu mu.ta:han ha:ða: al.ʕa.sʕr. la.kin.ni: saw.ʔa.ʔa.lu ʔa.ha.dan  
ʔa:xa.ra jum.ki.nu.hu ʔan ju.sa:ʕi.du.ka]

AssalumuAlikum I'm sorry I'm not available this afternoon, but I'll ask someone else to help you.

Example (4) – wish in situation 2

ودي اني اساعدك بس سامحني ما عندي هالمبلغ حالياً  
[wid.di: ʔan.ni: ʔa.sa:ʕi.dik bas sa:miħ.ni: ma: ʕin.di hal.mab.lay ha:li.jan]

**English Translation:** I wish I could help but forgive me as I don't have this money now.

Example (5) – promise in situation 7

سمحي لي يا الغالية، عندي شغل اليوم، لكن إن شاء الله يكون وياح يوم ثاني  
[sim.ħi.li: ja: al.ʔa:li.jah ʕin.di ʕuɣ.lal.jawm la.kin ʔin ʕa:ʔalla:h ba.ku:n wa.jja:ʕf jawm θa:ni:]

**English Translation:** Excuse me, my dear, but I'm busy today. But I'll join you another day God's willing.

Example (6) – dissuade the interlocutor in situation 6

كل مره نفس الكلام واخر شي مواعيد عرقوب الله يحفظكم  
[kull marra nafs il-kala:m wa:ʔaxir ʕi mawa:ʕid ʕirqu:b alla:h ja:ħfʕðʕkum]

**English Translation:** Every time the same words, and finally Irqūb's appointments. May God protect you.

Example (7) – Acceptance that functions as refusal in situation 1

إن شاء الله بحاول أحضر [ʔm ʕa:ʔ alla:h baħa:wil ʔa:ħðʕur]  
**English Translation:** I will try to attend, God's willing.

The examples above (1)–(7) emphasise that the use of indirect refusal strategies was highly frequent by Emirati Arabic speakers to ensure politeness and protect the harmony of social relationships. Example (1) provides evidence for using *an excuse* where the respondent assigns refusal to an external higher authority الوالدة قالت لا [Al-wālda qālat lā]. Thus, shifting the burden to their mother reduces the possibility of conflict, which aligns with Emirati cultural values, such as respect for decisions made by higher authorities, especially one's parents. In Example (2), a *regret* expression is used to convey inability and soften the refusal with an apology (اسفه) [ʾāsifa]. This strategy is sensitive to the hearer's feelings, maintaining cultural norms of politeness. Example (3) offers a *statement of alternative*, where, in addition to refusing the request, the speaker suggests a possible solution لكنني يسأل حد يساعدك [la:km 'bas.ʔal ħad ʕsa:ʕid.ak]. The respondent suggests a possible solution: asking someone else to help him. This approach reveals that the speaker is considerate and reflects the values of Emirati society, which encourages indirect support when direct assistance is not possible.

In Example (4), the speaker employs a *wish* to show emotional involvement in refusing the request: ودي اني اساعدك بس سامحني ما عندي هالمبلغ حالياً [wid.di: ʔan.ni: ʔa.sa:ʕi.dik bas sa:miħ.ni: ma: ʕin.di hal.mab.lay ha:li.jan]. The speaker reinforces empathy and preserves goodwill by expressing a strong desire to help. Example (5) illustrates the use of a *promise*, where the speaker commits to fulfilling the request in the future: سمحي لي يا الغالية، عندي شغل اليوم، لكن إن شاء الله يكون وياح يوم ثاني [sim.ħi.li: ja: al.ʔa:li.jah ...

ʔin ʃa:ʔalla:h ba.ku:n wa.jja:tʃ jawm ʔa:.ni:]. This indicates a strong desire to help by giving that promise. This strategy reflects optimism and a sense of responsibility, while the inclusion of the religious phrase “إن شاء الله” [ʔm ʃa l.la:h] underscores the cultural reliance on religion to mediate future outcomes. Example (6) illustrates the use of dissuading the interlocutor in the form of criticism. The speaker criticised the hearer for repeatedly giving inaccurate appointments similar to Irqūb, an ancient personality in the Guld history, who is used as an example of a person who breaks his promises. Example (7) illustrates an instance of acceptance that functions as refusal. The speaker mentions that he will try to attend the wedding “بحاول أحضر” without concrete promises or something commitments. This reflects a lack of enthusiasm to attend the wedding.

## 4.2 Direct Refusal Strategies

In addition to the indirect strategies, the participants used some direct strategies although to a lesser extent. The most dominant direct strategies were the nonperformative ones, particularly in the forms of expressing negative willingness/ability and an Emirati-specific pattern of seeking forgiveness (27.5%). These two forms are illustrated in examples (8)–(13) below:

Example (8) – negative willingness/ability in situation 6

ماقدر بطلع مع الاهل

[ma:gdar ba.tʔlaʃ maʃ al.ʔa.hil]

**English Translation:** I can't. I'm going out with my family.

Example (9) – negative willingness/ability in situation 2

اسف ما أروم عندي ظروف خاصة

[ʔa:sif ma: ʔa'ru:m ʃm.di: ʔu'ru:f 'xɑ:.sʔah].

**English Translation:** Excuse me, I can't because of special circumstances.

Example (10) – negative willingness/ability in situation 7

لا الوالدة ما اقدر ابي وياج

[la: l.wɑ:.lɪ.dah ma: 'ag.dar a'ji: wɪ'ja:tʃ]

**English Translation:** No, Mom, I can't go with you.

Example (11) – seeking forgiveness in situation 7

أمايه سامحيني أنا بيكون عندي امتحانات لازم اذاكر

[ʔa.ma:jah sa:.mi.hi:.ni: ʔa.na bi:ku:n ʃm.di: ʔim.ti.ha:.na:t la:.zim ʔa.ʔa:.kir]

**English Translation:** Mom, forgive me. I'll be having exams and must study.

Example (12) – seeking forgiveness in situation 1

السموحة ما اقدر اي مشغول

[is:ɪlmu:ħah ma: ʔagd'ar ʔanɪ: mɪʃyʊ:l]

**English Translation:** Forgive me, I can't. I'm busy.

Example (13) – seeking forgiveness in situation 8

السموحة بس انا ما اعرف ارتب ومشغول بعد

[is:ɪlmu:ħah bɪs ʔana: ma: ʔɑʃɪf ʔartɪb wɪ mɪʃyʊ:l baʃd]

**English Translation:** Forgive me, but I don't know how to arrange it and I'm busy.

The examples above (8)–(13) show that the Emirati participants employed some direct refusal strategies. Example (8) shows that the participant expressed his inability to attend the event “ماقدر” [māgdar] and “ما” [ma: ʔa'ru:m] because he has other family commitments. Respecting family commitments is typical in

Emirati society, where family relations are highly valued. Example (9) also shows an instance of negative willingness/ability in which the speaker expresses his inability to perform an action, but accompanies this refusal by offering reasons for his refusal to mitigate the negative impact of the refusal act “ما أروم عندي ظروف خاصة” [ma: ʔaʔru:m ʕm.di: ʔʕuʔru:f ʕa:sʕah]. Example (10) includes a third example of negative willingness/ability where the speaker refuses to go out with his mother “لا الوالدة ما أقدر أبي وياح” [la: l.wa:l.dah māgdaraʕji: wɪʕa:tʃ]. Example (11) after includes a nonperformative utterance that is specific to the Emirati society in relation to the concept of “forgiveness,” which is “سامحيني” [sa:mi.hi.ni:]. This utterance, along with other formal variants like السموحة [al.sa.mu:ħa], is a typical expression in the Emirati culture that emphasises the importance of seeking the forgiveness of the hearer when the speaker performs the act of refusal. The use of such utterances may stem from the Islamic tradition, which underscores the importance of seeking forgiveness of others if one causes them any harm. Examples (12) and (13) show more instances of this Emirati-specific formula.

### 4.3 Adjuncts

As for the use of adjuncts, they were mainly dominated by religious expressions, as shown in examples (14)–(16) below:

Example (14) – swearing by God in situation 3

والله كان ودي بس يكون خارج الدولة

[waɫ.ħa: ka:n wid.di bas ba.ku:n xa:ridʒ ad.daw.la]

**English Translation:** I swear to God I wish I could, but I'll be abroad.

Example (15) – prayer to the hearer in situation 2

الله يفرج عليك، ودي اسلفك لكن المبلغ مب متوفر عندي

[ʔal.la:h ju.far.riɖʒ ʕa.lajk, wid.di ʔa.sal.lif.ak la.kin al.mab.lay mub mu.ta.waf.fir ʕin.di]

**English Translation:** May God ease your problems. I wish to lend you, but I don't have this money.

Example (16) – God's will in situation 1

سامحني عندي ظرف ولا الود ودي احضر إن شاء الله احضر في الافراح اليه

[sa:miħ.ni ʕin.di ʔʕarf, wa.la: al.wid wid.di ʔaħ.ʔʕur, ʔin ʕa:ʔ.alla:h ʔaħ.ʔʕur fi: al.ʔaf.ra:ħ al.ʕa:ħaħ]

**English Translation:** Forgive me, I have some circumstances or else I wish I could come. God's willing I will come in the upcoming weddings.

The above examples (14)–(16) show the strong religious inclination in Emirati society since most of the adjuncts used are religious in nature. Example (14) includes the common expression “والله” [waɫħaħ], which means “I swear to God” and which is repeatedly used for emphasis. Example (15) includes a prayer to the hearer “الله يفرج عليك” [ʔal.la:h ju.far.riɖʒ ʕa.lajk]. Prayers to hearers are frequently used in the Emirati culture to strengthen interpersonal connections and enhance ingroup solidarity. Example (16) includes the expression “إن شاء الله” [ʔin ʕa:ʔ ʔal.la:h], which is a common expression used in the Arab culture when one discusses a future action. This expression reflects the Islamic tradition that one should always consider and respect God's will when planning for the future.

In addition to the above findings, it was also noted that gender differences reached statistical significance in specific indirect strategies. Examples (17) and (18) show the female participants' stronger tendency to use statements of alternatives and promises, while examples (19)–(21) show the male participants' preference to use statements of principle, avoidance, and dissuading the interlocutor.

Example (17) – statement of alternative in situation 5

ما أقدر. بس بتصل بحد ابي يصلحه لك

[Māgdar, bas battiʕʕil bħad iyyi jrj.sʕal.ħa lik]

**English Translation:** I can't, but I'll call someone to come and fix it for you.

Example (18) – promise in situation 8

اسفه ما اقدر ان شاءالله اقدر اساعدكم في فعاله ثانيه

[ʔa:si.fah ma: ʔag.dar ʔin ʃa:ʔalla:h ʔag.dar ʔa.sa:ʃid.kum fi: fa.ʃa:lij.jah θa:nij.jah]

**English Translation:** I'm sorry I can't. God's willing I will help you in another event.

Example (19) – statement of principle in situation 6

يوم الجمعة يوم الأهل اسمحلي

[ja:w.mal.dʒum.ʃah ja:w.mal.ʔa.hil ʔis.maħ.li:]

**English Translation:** Excuse me, Friday is a family day.

Example (20) – avoidance in situation 7

الصمت [as̥.s̥am.t̥]

**English Translation:** Silence.

Example (21) – dissuading the interlocutor in situation 4

مين يروح الى المول في الظهر الله يعينك يا صديقي

[mi:n jɾru:h ʔi.la: al.mu:l fi: az.zuhr ʔal.la:h ju.ʃi:nak ja: s̥a.di:qi:]

**English Translation:** Who goes to the Mall at noon?!! May God help you, my friend.

It must also be noted that the female participants produced more empathetic statements than the male participants in terms of adjuncts, as illustrated in example (22) below.

Example (22) – empathy in situation 2

اتفهم وضعك، بس الوضع ما يسمح لي هالأيام، لكن ان بغيت بعطيك 1,000 درهم

[ʔat.fa.ham wað̥.ʃak, bas al.wað̥.ʃ ma: jis.maħ li: hal.ʔaj.ja:m, la.kin ʔin byi:t baʃ.t̥i:k ʔalf dir.ham]

**English Translation:** I understand your situation, but I can't these days. However, I can lend you 1,000 dirhams.

The above examples (17)–(22) reflect the gender differences in the realization of the refusal speech act in the Emirati dialect of Arabic. Women seem more willing to please others than men, as women show a stronger tendency to offer alternatives, as in Example (17). Although the female speaker in this example cannot perform the action requested by the hearer, she offers to contact someone else to help. Women also attempt to please others by promising future acceptance, as in Example (18). Although the female speaker cannot participate in organizing the community event, she promises to help at an upcoming event. The tendency to please others is also reflected in the more frequent use of empathetic expressions as in Example (22) in which the female speaker explains that she understands the hearer's situation “أفهم وضعك” [ʔa.tfah.ham wað̥.ʃak]. In contrast, men seem less inclined to please others. Example (19) shows that the speaker declines the hearer's invitation based on the principle that Friday is a family day “اسمحلي” [ja:w.mal.dʒum.ʃah ja:w.mal.ʔa.hil ʔis.maħ.li:]. Example (20) includes an instance of avoidance in which the male speaker decides to maintain silence. Example (21) also shows that male speakers are not as pleasing as women tend to be, as the speaker criticizes the hearer by commenting that it is not common to go to the mall at noon “مين يروح الى المول في الظهر” [mi:n jɾru:h ʔi.la: al.mu:l fi: az.zuhr]. This reflects Emiratis' habit of going to malls later in the day when the temperature is cooler, which makes it more convenient to go shopping.

## 5 Discussion

The findings on refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic presented in the previous section offer a new perspective on how Emiratis use refusals in various social situations. This section examines these results with reference to Emirati cultural norms, values, and religious influences. The main findings include a strong preference for

indirect refusals, gender-based differences, the use of religious expressions, and situational variations in refusal strategies. These results align with broader research on Arabic dialects while also showcasing Emirati society's distinct cultural and social values.

First, the study revealed that Emirati Arabic speakers predominantly use indirect refusal strategies, accounting for 56.37% of all refusals. This finding is in line with previous research on Arabic dialects, favouring indirectness as a politeness strategy to preserve social harmony (see, for example, Benbouya & Rabab'ah, 2022; Rabab'ah et al., 2024). In Emirati society, where interpersonal relationships are highly valued, direct refusals may be seen as impolite or disrespectful. The frequent use of excuses and expressions of regret as indirect strategies highlights the significance of face-saving tools in Emirati culture. Excuses help avoid outright rejection while maintaining relationships, which not only shifts responsibility but also reflects the cultural emphasis on familial authority (Leung et al., 2020). In addition, the use of alternative suggestions and promises indicates that Emiratis aims to soften the impact of their refusals by offering solutions or future possibilities. These findings support the politeness theory, suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987), which confirms that such strategies contribute to social cohesion.

Second, the findings also showed that religious expressions played a significant role in the realisation of refusals by Emirati speakers, particularly within the adjunct category. Swearing by God, offering prayers for the hearer, and referencing God's will were among the most frequently used adjuncts. These findings highlight the deep-rooted influence of Islamic beliefs in everyday Emirati communication. Emiratis often incorporate religious expressions to convey sincerity and minimise conflict. The phrase "إن شاء الله" [ʔm ʃa l.la:h] (God willing) is commonly used to defer agency to divine will, reinforcing humility and respect (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Moreover, the study found that refusal strategies incorporating religious expressions were especially prevalent in interactions involving close relationships, such as declining wedding invitations or requests for financial assistance. This suggests that Emiratis rely on religious language to soften refusals and preserve social harmony. For example, the phrase "الله يفرج عليك" [ʔal.la:h ju.far.riɖ ʃa.lajk]. This expression, which means 'May God ease your problems!', is commonly used when refusing financial requests, expressing empathy while indirectly rejecting the appeal. Such expressions serve as a culturally appropriate way to navigate refusals without offending the addressee (Al-Issa, 1998).

Third, the study identified significant gender-based differences in refusal strategies. While both men and women predominantly relied on indirect refusals, female participants were notably more inclined to use statements of alternatives and promises. In contrast, male participants favoured principles, avoidance, and dissuading the interlocutor. Women's higher use of alternative statements and promises suggests a stronger tendency toward maintaining social harmony and relationships. This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that women in Arabic-speaking societies often employ more elaborate politeness strategies than men (e.g. Alshmaseen et al., 2023). Women also demonstrated greater emotional engagement through empathetic expressions, such as "أتفهم وضعك، بس الوضع ما يسمح لي هالأيام" [ʔa.ta.fah.ham waðˤ.ʃak, bas al.waðˤ.ʃ ma: jis.mah li: hal.ʔaj.ja:m] (I understand your situation, but I can't these days), reflecting their inclination toward reassurance and emotional sensitivity. On the other hand, men's preference for avoidance (1.50%) and dissuading the interlocutor (4.49%) suggests a more assertive approach to refusals. For instance, the phrase "مين يروح المول في الظهر؟" [mi:n jr'u:h al.mu:l fi: aʒ.zuhr]. (Who goes to the mall at noon?) exemplifies how male participants used indirect criticism to reject a request. These findings are consistent with research on other Arabic societies, where men preferred brief and assertive refusals (see, for example, Ababtain, 2021; Abdul Sattar et al., 2009). Furthermore, Emirati men frequently invoked principles such as "يوم الجمعة يوم الأهل" [ja:w.mal.ɖʒum.ʃah ja:w.mal.ʔa.hil] (Friday is a family day), underscoring the cultural emphasis on traditional values and structured social roles.

Fourth, the study revealed that refusal strategies varied depending on the situation. The highest number of refusals occurred when declining wedding invitations and dinner invitations, while the lowest was observed in declining trip invitations. This suggests that certain social obligations (e.g. attending weddings) carry more substantial cultural expectations in Emirati society, necessitating more elaborate refusal strategies (Leung et al., 2020). Direct refusals were most common in rejecting financial requests and declining rides, indicating that Emiratis are more comfortable asserting refusal in transactional situations. In contrast,



refusals directed at mothers recorded the lowest number of direct refusals, reinforcing the cultural norm of familial respect and deference (Al-Asmari, 2024). The study also found that adjuncts were most frequently used when declining wedding invitations, particularly prayers for the hearer. This reflects the cultural practice of offering blessings to soften refusals and avoid causing offence. Given Emirati culture's strong emphasis on social gatherings, refusals in such contexts require additional politeness strategies to mitigate any perceived disrespect (Morkus, 2014).

All in all, the findings of this study align with other research on Arabic dialects while also highlighting distinct characteristics of Emirati Arabic. Similar to Jordanian and Iraqi Arabic, indirect refusals are the predominant strategy; however, the strong reliance on religious expressions and familial justifications distinguishes Emirati Arabic. This suggests that refusal strategies are deeply embedded in local cultural and religious norms. Moreover, the study of refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic reveals a nuanced system of indirectness, religious politeness, and gendered communication patterns. Emiratis emphasise social harmony by employing indirect refusals, religious adjuncts, and culturally appropriate justifications. The observed gender differences reflect broader societal norms, with women prioritising empathy and relationship maintenance, while men tend to favour principled and assertive refusals. These findings contribute to the broader field of pragmatics and cross-cultural communication by offering insight into the speech act of refusal within a unique linguistic and cultural context. In fact, refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic are more than just linguistic choices – they reflect deep-rooted cultural values, social hierarchies, and religious influences. Recognising these elements is essential for fostering effective communication and mutual respect in intercultural interactions.

## 6 Conclusion

This study on refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic has thoroughly examined how Emiratis use different linguistic techniques to refuse requests, offers, invitations, and suggestions while preserving social harmony. The study has contributed to theoretical developments in pragmatics, cultural and sociolinguistic insights, and practical applications for language teaching and cross-cultural communication. Moreover, the research has important implications for future studies in Arabic pragmatics and related disciplines. One of the key contributions of this study is its focus on speech acts in the Emirati Arabic dialect, particularly refusal strategies. It addresses a crucial gap in the literature by examining a Gulf dialect that has not been widely studied in this context. While previous research has investigated refusals in other Arabic dialects, such as Jordanian, Iraqi, and Algerian, Emirati Arabic has remained largely unexplored.

Given its distinct phonological, lexical, and cultural features, this study offers valuable insights into how refusals are expressed in a Gulf Arabic setting. Furthermore, the study enhances the broader theoretical understanding of politeness and face-saving strategies in Arabic-speaking societies. By revealing that indirect strategies account for most refusal strategies in Emirati Arabic, the study supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and reinforces the relevance of politeness theory in Arab cultural contexts. Another key contribution of this study is its identification of culturally specific refusal strategies unique to Emirati Arabic. The findings indicate that religious expressions play a significant role in refusals. These adjunct strategies act as politeness markers, softening refusals while reflecting the profound influence of Islamic values on Emirati communication. The study underscores how religious language functions not only as a linguistic tool but also as a social mechanism for maintaining harmony and avoiding direct confrontation.

The study has also offered insights into gender differences in refusal strategies. The findings show that while both men and women primarily use indirect strategies, women tend to rely more on offering alternatives and making promises, whereas men are more inclined to use principled justifications, avoidance tactics, and attempts to dissuade the interlocutor. These findings add to the growing body of research on gendered communication styles in Arabic-speaking societies. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the study highlights how power dynamics and social distance influence refusal strategies. The findings reveal that refusals directed at higher-status individuals tend to be more indirect and elaborated, whereas those addressed to lower-status individuals are

often more direct. This aligns with existing research on Arabic pragmatics, reinforcing that social hierarchy plays a crucial role in shaping linguistic behavior in the Arab world.

The findings of this study have important implications across several fields, including linguistics, sociolinguistics, language teaching, and intercultural communication. By shedding light on how pragmatics functions in Gulf Arabic, the study provides valuable insights for comparative research on Arabic dialects. It also contributes to politeness and face-saving theories by illustrating the role of indirect strategies and religious expressions in Arabic refusals. Moreover, the observed gender-based differences in refusal strategies offer further evidence of sociolinguistic variations in speech acts among male and female speakers in Arabic-speaking societies. In terms of language education, the study's results can help improve Arabic instruction by emphasising the importance of pragmatic competence. Educators can develop teaching materials highlighting the cultural nuances of refusal strategies, enabling learners to navigate social interactions more effectively. Given the significant role of religious expressions in Emirati refusals, Arabic learners should also be introduced to their pragmatic functions to enhance their communicative skills. Beyond language learning, the findings underscore the potential for miscommunication between Emiratis and non-Arabic speakers who may not be familiar with the indirect nature of refusals in Emirati culture. Expatriates working in the UAE could benefit from training programs that incorporate these insights to improve workplace communication and intercultural understanding.

Future research could build on these findings by expanding the sample size to include a more diverse group of participants from different age groups, professions, and educational backgrounds. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how refusal strategies vary across different segments of Emirati society. Future research may also conduct comparative studies on refusal strategies among expatriate Arabic speakers in the UAE to explore how multilingual and multicultural influences shape pragmatic behaviour. An interesting pointer to future research is to carry out longitudinal research to examine how refusal strategies evolve over time, particularly in response to social and technological changes in the UAE and to investigate generational shifts in refusal strategies to see whether younger Emiratis are adopting different pragmatic patterns compared to older generations. Finally, research may compare Emirati Arabic refusal strategies with those of other Gulf dialects, such as Saudi or Kuwaiti Arabic, to identify regional variations and across different languages spoken in the UAE, such as English, Urdu, and Hindi, to gain insights into cross-linguistic influences and pragmatic transfer.

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