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Abuarrah, Sufyan; Lochtman, Katja

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Gendered refusals in the Palestinian Arabic culture: implications for multicultural diverse educational contexts

Sufyan Abuarrah[a] and Katja Lochtman[b]

[a]Al-Najah National University, Nablus; [b]LIST, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium

ABSTRACT

In many societies, single-sex education is embedded in a culture that maintains women subordination with possible ramifications to their language performance and role in society. This paper seeks to explain the cultural grounds for Palestinian female direct refusals in their L1 culture and the consequences for their linguistic behaviour in multicultural educational contexts. For data collection, the study employed a self-reporting survey followed by interviews with 10 Palestinian female study abroad students. Results showed that fear of gossip-mongering, reputation and family, and inter-group anxiety constricted the females' refusals pushing them to terminate communication at an earlier stage in their home educational context. However, in a western study abroad context, the students were more responsive to the culturally diverse context. They conceived their home culture as constraining their refusal performance at home, becoming more self-sovereign and their reactions were more engaging, elaborated and less direct in the foreign educational context.

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Speech acts; gender; Palestinian culture; study abroad contexts

Education based on gender segregation exists as early as the first grade in the Palestinian schools. According to Rubenberg (2001), most of the schools in Palestine 'have separate physical facilities for boys and girls' (p. 160). Although gender segregation possibly affects the quality of education afforded to women in Palestine, Rubenberg commented, 'it certainly contributes to the lifelong segregation of the sexes at the social level and the concomitant subordination of females' (2001, p. 160). In the present study, we, therefore, believe that single-sex education may, to a large extent, shape women's language perception and production in the Palestinian Arab culture (PAC). Culture in return is believed to contribute to women subordination, which constrains their language performance. Abuarrah (2011) already found that Palestinian females (PFs), when compared to male and female British speakers and male Palestinian speakers, were the most direct in their linguistic performance of refusals. PFs were more likely to terminate communication with members of the opposite sex, particularly strangers, at an early stage through strategies such as the direct *no* and negative willingness (e.g. *I can't*).

The present study tries to understand the interplay between culture and linguistic performance in multicultural diverse educational contexts such as studying abroad. To this end, the study seeks to answer one main question: What are the cultural values

CONTACT Katja Lochtman Katja.Lochtman@vub.be LIST, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium
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underlying females' choice of direct refusals in opposite-sex interactions in PAC? A question, furthermore, is whether such values are subsumed by PFs in multicultural diverse educational contexts. We assume that in the Arab world, certain culturally influenced values – such as family, honour or religion – are highly conducive of PFs' choice of linguistic behavioural strategies. Since such values also seem to guide the educational system in Palestine (Rubenberg, 2001; Van Dyke & Randall, 2002), we would like to discuss the extent to which these values will be of influence to interactions between members of the opposite sex in more diverse educational contexts. The results are believed to be illuminating to Palestinian educators and policymakers to make changes towards a more liberal education system.

In the attempt to respond to the research questions above, the current study builds upon the findings by Abuarrah (2011) about PFs direct refusals and adopts a self-reporting survey followed by interviews. The methodology section shall explain our selection of the research instruments and participants. Before we do this, the following parts briefly discuss the Arab culture and the speech act of refusals. A speech act is an act that a speaker performs when making an utterance, i.e. the utterance not only presents information, but an action is performed as well, e.g. a refusal, a promise, a request.

The sections of this introduction shall unravel the intricacies of the Arab culture and identify women's role and identity in the Palestinian society. After that, the speech act of refusals is defined and explained in terms of its categorization and face threat following Searle (1979). The third subsection will review the literature on refusals with particular reference to the Arab culture and language education.

The Arab Culture

Women in the Arab world sample their environment in a very distinctive way. To construe their role in society, and therefore to be able to understand their language performance, we need to explain their culture, i.e. the culture of the Arab world. Hofstede (2001) identifies the Arab world as a collectivistic culture. According to Mills & Clark (1982), collectivism is identified as to what a particular community considers a communal behaviour of a group. The Arabs have Standard Arabic as a common language. They share a socio-political experience and memory of place and history (Barakat, 1993). According to Kurman (2001, p. 1705), a collectivistic society 'tends to foster an interdependent self that is part of a comprehensive social relationship and that is partially defined by others in that relationship'. Collectivistic cultures are usually described as 'high context' (Cragan, Wright, & Kasch, 2009; Galin, 2016; Jandt & Pedersen, 1996) 'in which the communicators assume a great deal of commonality of knowledge and views, so that less is spelled out explicitly, and much more is implicit or communicated in indirect ways' (Cragan et al., 2009, p. 145).

Group relations in line with family and religion articulate the Arab culture distinctively from, for example, the British or American cultures which, according to Hofstede (2001), are considered individualistic. Group relations manage collective self-esteem which becomes essential to maintain effective links between the members of the same community and mandate their self-identity which is influenced by others' expectations in a particular communicative conduct (Ting-Toomey, 1989). For example, certain concepts and terms foster the collective identity of the Arab culture such as *wasta* (roughly translates as *intermediacy)*. The use of *wasta* marks the importance of kinship within an

intimate circle or even within a larger political sphere (Joseph, 2003). This concept *per se* is significant as it shows the individual as part and parcel of the group's collective mind. Within the group, *wasta* can secure favouritism of the individuals of that group to get jobs or promotions, to facilitate businesses, and to solve problems at governmental or non-governmental rulings.

Harrison and Dye (2008) claim that 'in more collectivist cultures, people give priority to their family and communal identities' (p. 145). The family in the Arab culture shapes and reshapes its members' personality or self-perception and representation. The relationship between the family and the individual is reciprocal. The family, mostly extended in the Arab world, emphasizes the role of the individual as complementary to the group and in harmony with its values and rules. According to Joseph (2003), 'persons are encouraged to view themselves as linked with, reciprocally shaped by, and mutually responsive to family and relatives' (p. 200). The family in return, according to Anishchenkova (2014) promotes and reinforces ties between the family members and therefore formulates a cohesive structure. According to Barakat (1993, p. 93):

> The fact that the family constitutes the basic unit of social organization in traditional contemporary Arab society may explain why it continues to exert so much influence on identity formation. At the center of social and economic activities, it remains a very cohesive social institution, exerting the earliest and most lasting impact on a person's affiliation.

Besides family, it is important to appreciate the role of religion in the Arab collective mind. In the Arab world, family and religion are inextricably linked. Zaharna (2009) takes the Arab culture as monolithic since it is united by the centripetal powers of religion and language. According to Metacalfe (2006, p. 105) , 'Islam is an all-embracing concept depicting humans' relationship to God and represents a program of life'. However, although cultural practice is not always determined by Islam, still it is encouraging men–women segregation (Metacalfe 2006). Religion in the Arab world is central to the formation of the Arabs' identity and lifestyle. To this point in time, some practices like marriage and divorce are religious. The practice of marriage and divorce outside the religious institution is not acceptable. Religion also displays in language performance in greetings, opening of ritual speeches, and even in wedding invitations. For example, in certain highly face-threatening situations like requesting, if compliance is unlikely, some people would use the phrase *inshallah* (if Allah is willing …) to play it safe or to express avoidance.

One important code linked with family relations and religious belief is reputation (sometimes referred to as *fame* or *honour* in this study). According to Eid (2007), 'in Arab countries, parental concerns with family reputation are usually fed by the community's collective and multifaceted gaze, which brings deviant individuals and families into social disrepute' (p. 97). The family members act according to specific rules to keep the unity, face and reputation of the group intact. Reputation and honour are intertwined with what is best known in the Arab world as *sharaf* (honour). That could be of the tribe or the family. Stereotypically, the one who either maintains or loses the honour of the family or the tribe is the woman. Hence, she should be self-conscious of what others may say or think of her. For Arabs, a girl's honour is an asset that should be conserved and protected to the degree that some are made to believe it is as precious as blood, and this justifies what some consider murder in the name of honour.

Group relations, family and religion shape gender roles in the Arab world (Metacalfe, 2006). According to Hopkin and Saad-Eddin (2006), 'gender is the social construction of the biological differences that divide human beings into two categories' (p. 173). The distinction between men and women in the Arab world is not only biological. At the group level, women are supposed to have a different role to men. In some communities, some people still believe, women would have a secondary role to men, thus forming a male-dominated and patriarchal society. In Islam, this may not be described as a difference, but men and women having complementary roles in the society. The woman's role is more domestic. Women are socialized from infancy and assumed to have socially domesticated female tasks (Abu-Rabia-Queder and Oplatka, 2008). As a wife, her duties include obedience, respect and fidelity to her husband who has different obligations such as providing for the family and disciplining the children (Hopkin & Saad-Eddin, 2006). These factors are conducive to women's sense of low self-esteem and efficacy. According to Arar and Abramovitz (2013), Arab women's sense of self-esteem and efficacy was found to be lower despite their education and experience which are sometimes better than those of their male counterparts.

Family and religion are important factors that are present in the discussion over the role of education in the Palestinian society. The Palestinian education system – throughout gender segregation – perpetuates the impact of family and religion on gender relationships and results in serious disparities (Rubenberg, 2001). According to Arar (2014) (following Shah, 2010), the Arab family, for example, has been a space for exercising power, thus a space of women oppression. This, according to Arar (2014), creates a paradoxical reality questioning the role of school in creating equal gender relations while not supported by the family and parents at home. These factors are conducive to women's sense of low self-esteem and efficacy. According to Arar and Abramovitz (2013), Arab women's sense of self-esteem and efficacy was found to be lower despite their education and experience which are sometimes better than those of their male counterparts.

The Speech Act of Refusal

Speech acts theory is becoming increasingly important in cross-cultural communication studies. What makes speech acts ideal for the purpose of our study is the assumption proposed by Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones (1989) that they are explicable of social values and relationships. Refusals have been categorized as commissives following the classification of speech acts by Searle (1979) (Barron, 2007; Fe'lix-Brasdefer, 2006). A list of commissives in addition to refusals may contain: undertaking, engaging, promising, threatening, certifying, accepting, agreeing, consenting, and renouncing (Vanderveken, 1990). A refusal could be defined as a denial on the part of the hearer to perform an action proposed by the speaker. It normally pairs with other acts, namely requesting, offering, inviting or suggesting (cf. Chen, Ye, & Zhang, 1995; Gass & Houck, 1999). Refusals are also face-threatening acts (Chang, 2009) and display variation according to the speaker/ hearer's status, distance and the situation's degree of imposition. Houck and Gass (1995) maintained that refusals are complex speech acts as they could include long negotiation of the speech event, hedging and verbal or non-verbal avoidance.

Studies on Refusals in Cross-cultural Contexts

Refusals have been studied thoroughly in cross-cultural contexts (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Bresnahan, Cai, & Rivers, 1994; Fe´lix-Brasdefer, 2004, 2008; Gass & Houck, 1999; Kown, 2004; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996; Nelson, Carson, Al Batal, & El Bakary, 2002). Most of these studies employed a discourse completion test (DCT) for data collection. They mainly tried to ascertain the choice of refusal strategy according to the parameters of the speakers' status, degree of familiarity and rate of imposition. These studies reported comparable findings in terms of choice of semantic formula and degree of indirectness. For example, the study by Beebe et al. (1990) reported that American English and Japanese are different in refusal performance in terms of the level of indirectness and the influence of status. While Americans tended to be more indirect when refusing high, equal, or low-status persons, Japanese favoured a more direct strategy when refusing a lower status person. Another example is the study by Kown (2004) which investigated content and frequency of semantic formula in refusals between American English and Korean according to status. Kown found that English and Korean had more differences than similarities. Korean refusals were vaguer and less direct than American English refusals. Koran speakers tended to be more reluctant through the overuse of pauses and apology markers; they also tended to mitigate more and show more sensitivity towards higher status relations.

The research on refusals in Arabic, contrary to other speech acts like requests and apologies, is scarce. One study by Nelson et al. (2002) reported some similarities and differences between American English and Egyptian Arabic. A DCT was adopted and modified from Beebe et al. (1990) to gather responses from speakers of both languages. The study addresses three important points: directness/indirectness (1), use of strategy (2), and effect of status, gender and country on the level of indirectness and choice of refusal strategy (3). The study did not find any significant differences between American English and Egyptian Arabic on the use of semantic formula and level of indirectness; both languages used comparable formulae and similar levels of indirectness in addressing high and low-status speakers.

More attention has been given to the speech act of refusal in pedagogical settings in Arabic language. Some important studies are Al-Issa (2003) and Al-Eryani (2007). Al-Issa (2003) studied refusals between American English, Jordanian Arabic and English as performed by Jordanian learners. Al-Issa administered a DCT based on field notes where he designed 12 DCT scenarios followed by oral interviews with some of the participants. Evidence of transfer was shown in the choice and content of semantic formula and length of response. Al-Eryani (2007) on the other hand examined refusals performed by Yemeni learners of English. The study used a DCT following Beebe et al. (1990) and compared American English and Yemeni Arabic native speakers' refusals. Despite the high level of fluency of Yemeni EFL learners, they tended to deviate from the norms adopted by native speakers of English, falling back on the linguistic and cultural norms of their native language.

A major reference in this research is Abuarrah (2011). This study compared PA and British English performance of refusals according to the type of semantic formula, level of indirectness[1] and modification. British English used more reprimands, statements of regret and statements of alternative. PA, on the other hand, employed more direct *no*, negative willingness, counter requests and wish statements. The content and order of

semantic formulae were also different in both languages. For example, reprimanding was communicated through blaming in PA and change of behaviour in British English. Both languages did not agree on a similar order when speakers had to perform refusals through a number of strategies. After the direct no, for example, negative willingness and regret statement were used, consecutively, in PA vs. British English.

Abuarrah (2011) also considered the influence of gender on speakers' choice of refusals' level of indirectness to tone down the impact on their interlocutors. Gender was more significant in PA. PFs used twice the number of direct *no* and negative willingness strategies as compared to male speakers (mean = .40, SD = .51 and .23, SD = .42, respectively) ($p< 0.05$). As such, they were the most direct, followed by Palestinian male speakers, British male speakers, and British female speakers as the least direct.

Some implications of culture on women were examined in several studies conducted in the Palestinian context (Arar, Masry-Harzalla, & Haj-Yehia, 2013; Abu-Rabia-Queder & Arar, 2011; Arar & Abramovitz, 2013; Abu-Rabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008). Arar et al. (2013), for example, examined whether the movement of female Palestinian students to study in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem or Jordanian universities has any long-term effects on their identity and behaviour. The study found that students' experienced senses of belonging or alienation depended, even partially, on the predominant culture of the country where they studied. Most importantly to the present study, Arar et al. (2013) found that graduates of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem 'engage with and confront identity issues, empowering them to reconsider their value and belief systems and relations with others' (p.1). These studies are insightful on the influence of culture on women's empowerment in education and career advancement. Still, they are different from the present study in terms of scope, that is the performance of refusals in PA and study abroad context.

The first reported studies are problematic in terms of the method of data collection, the DCT. Though this method is used to assess language performance cross culturally (Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Rose, 1992; Schauer & Adolphs, 2006; Tran, 2004), it still has many drawbacks. For example, DCTs are inconsiderable of the cultural framework of a group's language behaviour. They explain the choice of semantic formula or level of indirectness with no attempt to examine culture, group values or identity. For that, they need to be supplemented with other instruments, such as interviews. The present study takes culture and other forms of context-based behaviour into consideration in order to understand females' performance of refusals in PAC and multicultural study abroad contexts. Another problem is the authenticity and naturalness of the data gathered through DCTs, which are elicited in reaction to envisioned scenarios written by the researchers. The present study uses a different kind of instrument where naturally occurring data are provided through situations of refusals narrated by the speakers themselves. Besides, the present study provides some remarks to understand gender relations and the interplay of gender and education beyond the Atlantic perspective.

Methodology

This study employed a self-reporting survey followed by semi-structured interviews to illuminate the cultural perspectives of PFs' performance of refusals in PAC and multicultural contexts (see Appendix for details). A DCT, as suggested before, forms no ground for our understanding of the cultural underpinnings of a language behaviour in a social surrounding, particularly when unsolicited by other tools of data collection. For this

reason, and others mentioned in section 1.3 above, we believe, following Sadiqi (2007), that a study of gender and culture as mirrored in language and communication should be grounded, deconstructed and analysed in real-life experiences and conditionings. According to Mangal and Mangal (2013, p. 456), self-reporting is a method of 'extracting information about the subjects of the study from the subjects themselves'. The survey was employed to collect refusals from naturally occurring real-life situations. It was administered to 15 participants. Only 10 participants fully responded to the survey and their reactions are sketched in Table 1. For the study abroad context, the study applied the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) by Kelley and Meyers (1995) in order to examine the PFs' adaptability to the new environments, and therefore, to ascertain whether their conceptualization of the native culture travels with them. The model involves the categories of flexibility and openness, resilience, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy. For the analysis of the interviews, we also adopted Mayring's (2000) approach to qualitative content analysis. This method has the possibility of making use of ex-ante categories that are derived from the researchers' prior knowledge about the field and the informants. Based on the CCAI, this deductive category application was used for the qualitative content analysis of the data. The survey and interviews from the participants as expatriates were transcribed and a systematic coding protocol was used in order to establish the contextual meaning of what was being said (Mayring, 2000).

Participants and Procedure

The participants are student sojourners from the Department of English at An-Najah National University. Some received training for 4 months abroad; others had longer stays as MA students in Britain. As we investigated refusals in diverse cultural and educational contexts compared to the L1 culture, the length of stay of the participants abroad is less important. Therefore, the researchers chose all students who have been on internships through Erasmus programmes in different European countries like Britain, Norway and Italy.

The self-reporting survey asked the participants to retrieve from memory refusal situations they experienced in PAC and equal contexts of their study abroad. In PAC, they were requested to report their refusals to strangers in opposite-sex and same-sex interactions. The rationale for considering same-sex situations, though they lie outside the scope of this study, was to control sex as a possible factor of females' different language behaviours. The informants were requested to narrate the situations as occurred to them with the exact wording they applied in both contexts. The survey also requested information about the cultural factors the informants thought most determinable of their reactions. As the survey may not be sufficient to gain insight into the students' attitudes, interviews always followed the informants' self-reports. The researchers asked for clarification or details of students' responses on the role of culture or any other factors the informants felt were necessary to explain their language behaviour.

Data Analysis

The refusal responses are listed in Table 1. The responses in the surveys by each participant in both contexts are compared according to the use of strategy. The interviews were transcribed by the first author, a native speaker of Arabic language, who conducted the interviews and

Table 1.: Participants' situations and remarks on Culture 1 and Study abroad contexts (Each number refers to one participant).

	Opposite-sex situations (PAC)	Refusal in PAC	Same-sex situations (PAC)	Multicultural/study-abroad situations	Refusal in multicultural/study abroad contexts
1	At the border crossing (Allenby Bridge between Jordan and Palestine), a guy I never met before came to me and requested me to help him with his luggage.	No, I cannot.	I would accept, or at least I would refuse more politely.	On a vacation in Prague, a German guy asked me to join him for dinner that night.	I already have plans. My stay at the city is pretty short (hiding my real reason which he will not understand because of cultural differences).
2	A guy invited me to have some candy chocolate.	No, thanks, I don't want.	I would accept.	A similar situation happened to me, a guy gave me flavoured mint.	I did not say no, though I was hesitant.
3	A male acquaintance, I consider a stranger to me, offered to take me home in his car.	No way, of course no. Are you joking? What kind of joke is that?	I would refuse but in a nicer way.	If it were a similar situation	I would say no more politely.
4	A guy asked me about something (requesting for information).	I don't have any idea.	I will be more helpful	He wanted to have a hug.	We cannot. In our culture, this is unacceptable (in a friendly way).
5	A guy (not completely stranger to me) asked me for a cup of coffee in a public place.	No, sorry. I can't.	If it were the same situation. (If I have to say no): sorry, maybe another time (make it open for future acceptance).	It actually happened to me, a guy invited me for a cup of coffee.	I accepted the invitation, but I didn't go.
6	A guy asked for my notebook.	No, I cannot.	A female asked me to fill in a questionnaire for her. I said: frankly I would love to have my cocktail undisturbed	If it were a similar situation	I would say No, I can't.
7	An interview and a talk in front of the camera	No, sorry. I cannot.	A girl wanted to have my mobile phone because she wanted to call someone. I agreed and gave it to her.	If it were the same situation	I would respond in a different way. Actually in most cases, I would agree and respond positively to any kind of request, of course if it is not 'haram'.
8	After a brief conversation, he asked if he can add me on his Facebook	I hardly use Facebook, it's a waste of time, even I deactivated my account.	After winning a book in a contest, a girl wanted to swap books. 'I like my book, I heard a lot about it, but if you like after I finish reading it, I can give it to you.'	Invitation for dinner by someone I formally know	" . . . I very much apologize for not being able to come, even though I'd love to come and see you and meet your stepdaughter. Please accept my apologies for not being able to come, and hopefully I'll see you on other occasions . . . "

(*Continued*)

Table 1.: (Continued).

	Opposite-sex situations (PAC)	Refusal in PAC	Same-sex situations (PAC)	Multicultural/study-abroad situations	Refusal in multicultural/study abroad contexts
9	Invitation to see a play by a new colleague, somewhat stranger to me.	Sorry, I cannot go out except with work groups, also cannot go out alone and I am working on my thesis. I hope you understand.	A saleswoman suggested giving me an overview of a new product. 'I said: honey, I am in a hurry, another time maybe, sorry'.	A classmate invited me out.	I just said no with no excuses or statements of regret.
10	A guy asked me to carry some cigarettes across the borders with Palestine.	Sorry I cannot, honestly.	A lady asked me to help her move some stuff from her over-weighted luggage to my bag, so she can pass at the airport. 'Excuse me aunt, I cannot, so sorry'.	Invited to go climbing by a guy.	'No, thank you'.

categorized the data; the second author acted as a critic of data analysis and categorization of themes following the principles of Qualitative Content Analysis (Mayring, 2000). By observing the participants' responses to our questions, different categories emerge where each was suggestive of one theme underlying the participants' refusals reported in the surveys. The most common themes or categories were fear of gossip-mongering, family and reputation, inter-group anxiety, and religion.

Results and Discussion

Considering the data from the participants' self-reporting of refusal situations and interviews, the discussion of the results sets out to:

(1) Explain refusal explicitness: All of the responses in PAC in Table 1 support the conclusion by Abuarrah (2011) with regard to the level of directness and choice of strategy for refusal performance. The female participants used direct refusals, particularly applying the direct *no* and negative willingness (e.g. I cannot) with no supplementary strategies to reduce the impact of the refusal or make it less face-threatening.
(2) Explain the role of culture in refusal performance. This section will explain the participants' refusals following themes of gossip, family, reputation, inter-group anxiety and religion in PAC. The themes, though explained under separate headings, are interconnected and interdependent.
(3) Apply the CCAI by Kelley and Meyers (1995) in order to examine the expatriates' adaptability to the new environments and perception of culture in study abroad context. CCAI provides a frame for evaluating the expatriates' adaptability to the hosting cultures. We believe this inventory is important to assess the level expatriates free themselves from their L1 cultural values to be able to engage in interactions in diverse multicultural contexts.

The situations in Table 1 trigger different settings and generate reactions to different speech acts like inviting, offering, and requesting. They fall into different categories from least imposing situations, such as an invitation to have chocolate, to most imposing situations, such as helping with luggage across borders or an invitation to go out. They vary according to the benefit to the speaker/hearer, expenditure to the speaker/hearer, and cultural appropriacy/inapprpriacy. It is suggested that a situation that is to the benefit of the hearer, less costly, and culturally appropriate is less imposing. On the other hand, a situation that is to the benefit of the speaker, more costly, and culturally inappropriate is most imposing (see Figure 1 for a categorization of the situations according to the degree of imposition). The offer to have some chocolate, for example, is to the benefit of the

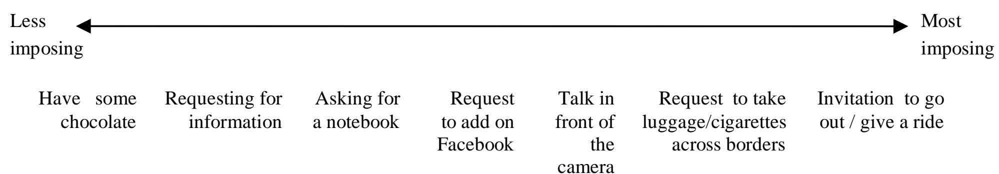

Figure 1. The situations according to the degree of imposition in PA.

hearer; the request to help with luggage across the border, however, is to the benefit of the speaker. Requesting for information and asking for a notebook to copy notes from a lecture inflicts cost on the hearer to varying degrees. Such situations seem less likely to trigger responses like refusals if they occur in certain circumstances such as same-sex interactions (as suggested by some participants). A boy asking a girl to go out in the Arab culture is considered taboo and most likely inflicts a refusal, whereas a request for a notebook in a public place like a classroom setting, normally, does not. That the female participants chose to react with a refusal to all interactions with members of the opposite sex in PA should invite us to think beyond the situation itself; that is, the driving force behind their refusals cannot be the degree of imposition, benefit to speaker/hearer or cost to the speaker/hearer. Although the impact of these factors on the informants' refusals cannot be denied, it is suggested that refusals are also culturally driven.

Refusal Explicitness

The self-reporting of refusals by the female participants corroborates the findings by Abuarrah (2011). Most of the participants reported that they have reacted to the situations by using direct refusal strategies, more particularly, *direct no* or negative willingness such as *I can't, I will not, I don't want to*.

Refusals are generally treated as commissives, i.e. they commit the speaker to performing/not performing an action (Barron, 2007; Fe´lix-Brasdefer, 2004; Garcia, 2007; Hatch, 1992; Olshtain & Celce-Murcia, 2000). Refusals could also be interpreted as assertives to represent a state of being, explicate a feeling and make manifest the speaker's attitude or stance towards a topic or an issue. According to Vanderveken (2002), in assertives, 'the words must correspond to the objects of reference as they stand in the world' (p. 33). The acts of refusals by the female participants were mostly assertives as they represented their feelings and intentions. Refusals in this case solely express the participants' intentions not to comply with the issued directives (requests, suggestions, and invitations). They are explicit to the extent that the addressees are not required to take the burden of inferring the responses as refusals or construct any other assumptions of the speaker's meaning as a different speech act. One of the participants explained here refusal explicitness: 'If I don't say no directly, the other party will take it as if there is an intention to accept'.

The utterances as they appear in Table 1 are not only felt to be explicit and unambiguous but also very face-threatening. In normal situations where a refusal is most likely, a speaker tones down the act by providing expressions of regret, reasons, and hedging (Tanck, 2002). So, the direct *no* and negative willingness by the participants, when unsolicited by any other supplementary strategies or modification, upgrade the force of the utterance and make it more face-threatening.

As appears from the responses in PAC in Table 1, the participants performed refusals in same-sex situations more elaborately. Their responses ranged from acceptance to more elaborated and less face-threatening responses. For example, respondents (1), (2) and (7) would comply by the issued speech act if it were performed by a female speaker; respondents (3) and (4), if they have to refuse, they would do that more politely; respondent (5) used a statement of regret *'I am sorry'* and a promise of future acceptance; respondent (6) used the strategy of hinting though it was highly face-threatening. This could be seen as additional (though indirect) evidence that the sex of the speaker and

distance relations are most conducive of explicit, very direct, and highly face-threatening acts of refusals in PA, thus confirming the findings by Abuarrah (2011).

Given that a human being is rational, and therefore the choices he/she makes are for a reason (Thomas, 1989), we become inclined to understand the socio-cultural bases of such linguistic behaviour as a desire by the participants to terminate the act of communication at a very early stage. It is mandatory therefore to think of and describe the responses within the frame of culture, the Palestinian culture. By investigating the participants' responses in the self-reporting survey and interviews, a plethora of themes emerged, namely gossip-mongering, reputation, inter-group anxiety and religion. The following sections should provide an understanding of how such themes are explanatory of the cultural underpinning and conditioning of refusals in PA.

Gossip-Mongering

Gossip is an oral narrative discourse where at least two present interactants talk about one or more than one absent party/ies. In Arabic language, gossip is synonymous with collocations like [qi:la wa qala] (Literally: says and said, roughly: hearsay) and [lata wa ʕadʒna] (literally: kneading and kneading, roughly: to talk about something voluntarily and repeat that over and over again). These collocations were used frequently by the participants during the interview. Some morphological and semantic analysis of such collocations illuminates their cultural significance to refusal performance in PA. [qiila] and [qaala] are derived from the Arabic verb *qala* (to say). One verb is in the active voice, the other is in the passive voice. The use of active and passive voice suggests that the gossipmonger could be anyone, known or unknown to the person who is the topic of gossip. The source of gossip, therefore, becomes unstoppable and uncontrolled as anyone can engage in this act. The verb [latta], according to Al-Maany (a dictionary of Arabic language), denotes meanings such as to talk uselessly and aimlessly, to render something unworthy or make it cheap and to crush something into small pieces. The verb [ʕadʒna] denotes meanings like to mix repeatedly and to speak loudly of something. Again, this collocation communicates meanings like: unconstrained, uninhibited, and repetitive saying; to go in details about something; to talk uselessly of something; and to undervalue something or render it unworthy to the attention of the audience. Women, being the topic of gossip when they engage in a conversation with foreigners, are stigmatized, disapproved by the society and tainted by the malicious spread and mention of their names. In support of this conclusion is Waddington's (2012) association of gossip with guilt where its negative connotations and social disapproval are projected on to others, in our case, on to the participants themselves.

The participants' fear of gossip-mongering is justified by what the terms imply in the Arab culture. PFs apprehend the disclosure of their names in public, by relatives and strangers alike. This is so to the extent that one participant considered the fear of gossip 'more important than halal and haram'[2]. Hence, the participants are pushed to end the communication with strangers at the earliest point possible before they draw the attention of the surrounding public. With this kind of language behaviour, the speakers want to play it safe. They do not want to be blemished by the society being the object of gossip about what they do or say. In support of this point is the argument by Crabtree (2007) that

the fear of gossip prompts women carefully to apply rigorous self-discipline. One of the participants, for example, reported that she had to avoid the whole communication with a male stranger when he asked her whether she is a relative of somebody he knew. This kind of language behaviour is very common in PA akin to asking about the weather when strangers intend to communicate with strangers. It is a strategy used to break the ice and reduce distance. Another participant claimed that she 'wanted to keep the door closed; no chance for relations before they even start'. Some other remarks by the participants in relation to the theme of gossip are:

(1) 'It is culture, if you were not direct, it will be interpreted differently'.
(2) 'I don't want to let males into my circle for fear of gossip'.

Reputation and Family

Fear of gossip-mongering is not sufficiently evident of the cultural underpinnings of PFs' refusals unless it is considered in light of reputation and family relations. The terms reputation or honour refer to women's desire to keep their social standing respectable (Wheeler, 2004). Some of the remarks by the participants suggestive of the influence of reputation and family relations on their refusals are:

(1) 'I don't want others to have a first impression of me as an easy person'.
(2) 'Most of the girls I know would make first bad impression about me (sic.)'.
(3) 'People are afraid of bad ideas, culture, values and traditions'.
(4) 'It is because of honor and reputation'.
(5) 'We are used to this from infancy, if he is a stranger; it should be a "no"'.
(6) 'The parents are raised this way, and they do raise their children in the same way'.

From the remarks given above, the participants' perception of the male stranger with a desire to talk is normally negative. A close and elaborated interaction with male strangers is tabooed due to the females' environment that fosters segregation between the sexes. The impression, that the participant 'is an easy person' (remark 1), renders her undervalued, untrustworthy and indigenous even by her peers of the same sex (remark 2). The code of *honour* may apply equally to both men and women; still, sexuality is more prominent a component of their social relations and, paradoxically, men are supposed to guard and protect them from foreigners or out-group members. So, when the participants refused to talk to strangers, or at best terminated communication at a very early stage, they were trying to assure their self-image as virtuous through 'the assiduous avoidance of shame' (Eid, 2009, p. 87). They were ready to deflect any accusations throughout the direct refusals, even before these accusations are made, to prove their affiliation with the accustomed norms and traditions of their families and the code of good upbringing (Cassandra, 2008) (see, for example, remarks 3, 4, 5, and 6). This way, the participants were imposing their own limitations of their own to anticipate any potential hazards. The first impression, if snowballed through unconstrained and uninhibited gossip, it would be devastating to their honour or reputation. In line with this finding is a study by Wheeler (2004). Wheeler investigated the barriers to Arab females' internet use. Their reputation

restricts women from interacting openly and closely on the internet with members of the opposite sex for fear of damaging their social standing as virtuous.

It was evident through the interviews with the participants that no matter what the content of the request, offer or invitation by the male stranger is, the cultural context is more important. That is, whoever sees or hears a female interacting with a male stranger may assume that this kind of communication is not innocent. The participants believe that a mention of their names may endanger their familial relations. To engage openly and closely with a male stranger implies a sense of freedom. Some may assume that this sense of freedom is self-affirmation, and therefore an affirmation of sexuality. It may be assumed that the participants are challenging the codes of the society or the bonds with the family. In light of this observation stands Giddens (1992, p. 18) remark that 'sexuality is a social construct, operating with fields of power, not merely a set of biological promptings which either do or do not find direct release'. We presume that sexuality is tied with women being always guarded by the family and their identity totally immersed in the collective mind of the society. Once their self is made more prominent, they are stigmatized and become unworthy of their families and society's attention. In light of this finding and as suggested by Arar (2014), the Arab family exercises power and acts as a space of women oppression. It, thus, does not only restrict their language behaviour as in our case but also can have implications on their schooling, education and career advancement (; Abu-Rabia-Queder and Oplatka, 2008; Arar et al., 2013).

Inter-group Anxiety

Inter-group anxiety is defined as a feeling of discomfort which people experience when they anticipate or engage in intergroup communication (Corenblum & Stephan, 2001). According to Gudykunst (1995), when anxiety is high, communication is to the minimum. Vorauer, Main, and O'Connell (1998) also maintained that when members from the in-group communicate with members of the out-group with a high level of anxiety, there are chances of negative perception or stereotyping of the out-group members. In our case, the in-group members are the participants. The out-group members are the male strangers. Communication between both groups was observed to be to the minimum through very direct refusal strategies and the desire to end communication very early or, sometimes, before it even starts. From remarks 1 and 2 below, the participant's fear of strangers inhibited the communication process. The high level of anxiety or feelings of discomfort were produced when male speakers tried to establish interpersonal intimacy trying to initiate communication with the participants. Such feelings of anxiety lead to the stereotyping of male attempts to engage in a conversation as with bad intentions (see remark 1 in section 3.3 above), and therefore their alienation from any act of communication. The intra-group communication or same-sex interaction, however, is conceived positively; that is, the participants were less alarmed by the first bad impressions and less anxious when communicating with female strangers (see remark 3 below).

(1) 'It is psychology. Fear of strangers is there in general'.
(2) 'We are used to this from infancy, if he is a stranger; it should be a "no"'.
(3) 'We feel more relaxed with girls like us because this is the way we are raised'.

Religion

Besides the factors mentioned above, religion was present in a very limited number of responses to the survey and interviews afterwards. We presumed that religion is a factor for anxiety and discomfort of women when communicating with men is the Islamic upbringing which forbids the mixing of sexes. Our presumption arises from our understanding of the Shria'a (the Divine law) that sex-mixing could lead to *fitnah* (temptation that could lead to evil consequences). In Surat Al-Ahzab (The Combined Forces), verse (53) is suggestive of the unlawfulness of men-women mingling; God stipulates that men, when communicate with non-relative women, should not do this face to face. The verse says: 'For anything ye want, ask them from before a screen: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs'.

In spite of what we postulated from the discussion above of the influence of Islam on PFs performance of refusals, most of the participants mentioned religion as a secondary factor or did not mention it at all. Remark 1, for example, takes religion as secondary to gossip. While remark 2 considers the factor of religion less important, remark 3 does not consider this factor at all. The envisioned impact of religion, therefore, is far from direct in opposite-sex communication in the Palestinian context. This finding is barely distinguishable from the conclusion by Metacalfe (2006) that Islam does not always influence the cultural practices though it encourages separation between men and women.

(1) 'Fear of gossip is more important than halal and haram'.
(2) 'Religion is one factor, but not the most important one'.
(3) 'Religion cannot change relations'.

Refusals in Multicultural Contexts (Study-Abroad)

Study abroad comprises a multiplicity of contexts where learners can experience diverse patterns of communication and develop their intercultural competence (Taguchi, 2015). In order to ascertain whether PA culture is part of the participants' refusal behaviour in study abroad settings, it is imperative to consider their responses in relation to their intercultural competence. Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2008) define intercultural competence as 'the knowledge of how to interpret and produce a spoken or written piece of discourse within a particular sociocultural context' (p. 161). Relevant to this study is the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) by Kelley and Meyers (1995) which involves the measures of flexibility and openness, resilience, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy. The measures examine the extent to which an individual is tolerant of a different culture (openness), maintains equilibrium in a new setting (resilience), pays attention to the verbal and nonverbal cues in the other language (perceptual acuity), and keeps sense of self as distinct and unique in the new culture (personal identity). These concepts are applied descriptively in this study to assess the participants' adaptability and cultural adjustment in the study abroad contexts. Though the data may not be sufficient to test the four measures empirically, still they are illuminating to the cultural orientation of the participants in this study. Consider the following remarks by the participants as elicited by the self-reporting survey and interviews.

(1) 'Because here in our society, our culture and traditions are different and perhaps people around us will misunderstand the situation. However, *I know* in a study abroad context, there is a different culture, different tradition and different kind of people. No one would care about what I am doing'.
(2) 'I *know* that it is a different culture and I know that a direct answer would be offensive'.
(3) 'To some extent, I freed myself from the restrictions of my culture and accepted the request/invitation'.
(4) 'It is *totally* different. Different mentality'.
(5) 'We are *willing* to negotiate, listen till the end, and in case the request is inappropriate, we will have to turn it down'.
(6) 'Outside the country, I become more open. There will not be any room for gossip or bad reputation'.
(7) 'Because *I know* they can accept refusals more easily and they don't take things personal as Arabs do, so I didn't have to give excuses'.
(8) 'It was a bit different provided they were from different cultures'.
(9) 'I didn't feel I am obliged to do the favour. It wouldn't be wrong to say "no" in the western culture'.

By observing the remarks above, it is evident, though indirectly, that the participants applied the three categories successfully. They are suggestive of the participants' adaptability to the new environments/cultures in the study abroad contexts. The participants as expatriates show flexibility and openness to the new cultures and language environments. One example is remark 6: 'outside the country, I become more open'. Another example is remark 5: 'I am willing to negotiate and listen till the end'. Relevant to openness and flexibility is the participants' agreeableness through traits such as kindness, altruism, and affection. For example (from Table 1), though not willing to comply, one participant accepts the invitation (situation 5), others reacted rather positively and friendly, though the situations are inappropriate in PA (situations 4 and 7). The participants also maintained an emotional equilibrium throughout the epistemic 'I know' (in italics, repeated in remarks 1, 2, and 7), the optimal adverb 'totally' (in 4), and the assertive adjective 'willing' (in 5). The choice of these words shows much commitment by the expatriates and reflects much confidence when they communicate in study abroad contexts. Considering perceptual acuity, the participants demonstrated attentiveness to interpersonal relations (as in remark 4 referring to speakers of the other language as with 'different mentality'). The participants also demonstrated sensitivity to the new contexts by applying more elaborate responses as in situation 8 below (from study abroad situations, in Table 1):

> … I very much apologize for not being able to come, even though I'd love to come and see you and meet your stepdaughter. Please accept my apologies for not being able to come, and hopefully I'll see you on other occasions …

This utterance seems unnecessarily elaborated; still, it applies different strategies such as statements of regret, apology, reason and promise of future acceptance. Such strategies are missing in the response to a very similar situation in PA, situation 9 below. In this situation, though the participant applied the strategy of giving an apology, she was more assertive through applying the strategy of negative willingness twice (in italics).

> Sorry, *I cannot go out except with work groups*, also *cannot go out alone* and I am working on my thesis. I hope you understand.

Participants also reflect personal autonomy through a strong sense of identity and personal values and beliefs. Some examples are remark 3: 'I freed myself from culture (sic) ' (referring to PAC), and remark 1: 'No one would care about what I am doing'. Another example is remark 9: 'I didn't feel obliged to'.

Applying the concepts of openness, resilience, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy with success implies that most of the participants are conscious of the study abroad contexts and that, therefore, their language behaviour should be different. The expatriates demonstrated 'cultural intelligence'; a model suggested by Earley and Ang (2003). This model addresses three main components of intercultural competence, namely knowledge, motivation and behaviour (Ramirez, 2016). The expatriates exhibit a repertoire of knowledge that is enough to engage in communication in study abroad contexts appropriately and effectively through the choice of appropriate refusal strategies (knowledge). They are also motivated to communicate with trust and confidence (motivation) and capable of adapting their language behaviour in situations involving cultural differences (behaviour).

At this point, we can conclude with confidence that PAC does not travel with the expatriates in study abroad contexts or even seem to challenge their communication styles abroad. One reason is the feeling that PAC is constraining the participants' communicative choices. The expatriates are no longer under the same constraints in study abroad contexts; they are more self-sovereign free from the same cultural aspects constraining their mother tongue language behaviour. Even in the situations which could be considered highly inappropriate or taboo, like inviting a girl out or give a hug in public places, such acts did not receive a direct refusal in study abroad contexts as they would if they were experienced in PAC. For example, in (2) (from study abroad situations, Table 1), the informant was invited to go out by a German 'guy'; in return, she gave a false statement as a reason for her refusal. This situation supports the claim that the hosting environments are less submissive of the expatriates' communicative styles and are viewed positively by them (see remarks 3, 4, and 7, for example).

Although religion was not viewed by the participants as a genuine constraining factor of their language performance in PAC, it had a more significant role in study abroad contexts. For example, situation 7 (Table 1) establishes religion as a determining factor with confidence (unlike remarks 1–3, from PAC refusals, in section 3.5). We can claim therefore that religion operates at a totally different level from gossip, reputation and family. When such factors disappear in study abroad contexts, religion becomes a more determining factor and therefore its role is more noticeable. This is a preliminary finding based on one situation only. So, we suggest the role of religion in study abroad contexts as a topic for further research. In line with finding is Abu-Rabia-Quedera & Arar (2011). According to them:

> Apparently, distance from home does not mean distance from patriarchal control and Muslim women students are still compelled to observe the rules of their tradition and religion with even greater rigor, meaning that they cannot violate gender norms in the 'unsafe' space that universities in Western countries represent (p. 367).

To conclude, in study abroad contexts, the Palestinian expatriates have a better chance to rethink their identities and, therefore, our expectations of their norms of social interaction are different. This finding corroborates the results of many studies on an array of contexts

in Europe and the United States (e.g. D'Urso, 1997; Krywulak, 1995; Knight & Schmidt-Rhinehart, 2002; Isabelli, 2001; Papatsiba, 2006). It also substantiates a previous finding by Arar et al. (2013) that Palestinian women can confront identity issues in multifaceted and culturally diverse communities. It does not agree however with the findings by Al-Issa (2003) and Al-Eryani (2007). The Jordanian and Yemini learners were influenced by their mother tongue norms of refusals and were more direct than their American counterparts. One possible reason for such a difference is the level of language proficiency that could be different between Palestinian expatriates and Jordanian/Yemeni learners.

Conclusion

This qualitative study tried to evaluate the cultural grounds for PFs' directness of refusal performance with strangers in opposite-sex acts of communication in PAC and English in study abroad contexts. A self-reporting survey followed by interviews with 10 female students who experienced study abroad contexts in Western countries was employed for data collection. The findings show that PFs are more direct than Palestinian males (the norm in Standard Arabic) in their performance of refusals. The aspects of fear of gossip-mongering, reputation and family, and inter-group anxiety were found to constrain the participants' refusals in PAC. The study also examined the Palestinian female expatriates' refusals in diverse multicultural educational contexts. The participants as expatriates in study abroad contexts showed some adaptability to the hosting environments. The female expatriates felt more self-sovereign, open to the new environments and interacted more positively and friendly. The PAC did not influence the expatriates' performance of refusals abroad except for the theme of religion. Since religion also guides the educational system in Palestine (Rubenberg, 2001; Van Dyke & Randall, 2002), these results are believed to be illuminating to Palestinian educators and policymakers to make changes towards a more liberal education system. The Palestinian education system – throughout gender segregation – perpetuates the impact of family and religion on gender relationships and results in serious disparities (Rubenberg, 2001; Van Dyke & Randall, 2002), which creates a paradoxical reality questioning the role of school in creating equal gender relations as one of its democratic educational goals. Segregation is therefore believed to lead to women's sense of low self-esteem and efficacy. Sex-mixing at school could, therefore, be the first step towards gender equality in PAC. These findings are preliminary, however, and further research should embrace this topic in more depth.

Notes

1. Indirectness is measured on a scale from 1 to 14, where 1 is the least indirect (elliptical phrases), and 14 is the most indirect (hints).
2. What is lawful or prohibited in Islam.

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Appendix.

Self-reporting survey:
Dear colleagues and students,

Below is a self-reporting survey to gather data for a study on refusal performance by female speakers of Palestinian Arabic in L1 and study abroad contexts. You are kindly and thankfully requested to narrate refusal situations in Palestinian Arabic and study abroad contexts. We also appreciate your responses to some questions/items given in the survey.

A large number of participants is required to be able to generalize the findings of this study, so can you recruit others on your mail list (Palestinian females with experience in study abroad context) to respond to this survey?

Thank you all and we look forward to your responses.

Best regards

1. Describe a situation where you had to say no to a request/offer/invitation by a male stranger:
____-
____-
____-
______

2. How exactly did you respond? (Use the same words- in Palestinian Arabic)
____-
____-
____-
____

3. A situation where you had say no to a female stranger?
____-
____-
____-
______

4. How exactly did you respond? (Use the same words- in Palestinian Arabic)
____-
____-
____-
______

5. How does culture influence your responses in both situations?
To male speakers:
____-
____-
____-
______

To female speakers:
____-
____-
____-
______

6. Did you experience similar situations in study abroad contexts?
Yes
No

7. How would you react if the situations happened in study abroad context? Please describe the situation and report what you said exactly in those situations.

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8. Is the reaction different or similar to the situations in Palestinian Arabic?
Why different?

Why similar?