Variation in Dispreferred Responses among Rural and Urban Saudi Arabic Speakers: A Socio-pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract: The study investigates the socio-pragmatic variation in refusals among rural and urban communities speaking Saudi Arabic. A total of 60 male Saudi Arabic speakers participated in a DCT questionnaire, assessing their refusals to invitations and requests. The results showed that both rural and urban speakers primarily use indirect strategies to refuse, involving softening elements to mitigate the impact of the refusal. However, rural speakers tended to use more indirect strategies and show a higher level of concern in their refusals compared to urban speakers. The study also found that individuals in Saudi Arabia are sensitive to social status and relationship distance when engaging in refusal situations. Those of higher social status were less likely to use indirect and softening language. The rural community demonstrated a higher level of concern in their refusals by employing more elaborate responses and greater levels of mitigation compared to the urban community. Understanding these socio-cultural differences in refusal strategies can help prevent misunderstandings and enhance cross-cultural understanding in Saudi Arabian communities.
Keywords: politeness markers, refusal strategies, Saudi Arabic speakers, socio-pragmatics.

Social communication involves maintaining social harmony and avoiding offense or disappointment. However, there are instances where individuals may produce dispreferred responses, which deviate from the expected norm or social expectation (Levinson, 1983). Refusals are a type of dispreferred responses that are perceived as negative or socially undesirable by the recipients, potentially threatening their face or self-image (Houck & Gass, 1999). Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that refusals are considered a threatening speech act due to their potential to harm the interlocutors' positive or negative face. Interlocutors vary the content and forms of their refusal speech acts based on their social and cultural contexts and the nature of initiating speech acts like request, invitation, suggestion (Beebe et al., 1990).

A plethora of research studies has explored the realizations of refusal speech acts across different cultures and languages. Some studies compared and contrasted speech acts of refusal between non-native English speakers and native speakers to highlight potential pragmatic transfer in language interaction (e.g., Al-Kahtani, 2005 [Americans, Arabs and Japanese]; Al-Shalawi, 1997 [Saudi Arabic Vs. English]; Beebe et al., 1990 [Japanese Vs. English]; Félix-Brasdefer, 2002 [Spanish Vs. English]; Jasim, 2017 [Iraqi Arabic Vs. British English]; Morkus, 2014 [Egyptian Arabic Vs. American English]; Yousseif, 2021 [Cairene Arabic Vs. American English]. Others investigated the realization of refusal behavior within a single culture or language to gain insights into intralingual strategies of refusal (e.g., Ababtain, 2021; Alaboudi, 2020; Alateeq, 2016; El-

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Dakhs, 2020 [Saudi Arabic]; Abdul Sattar et al., 2009 [Iraqi Arabic]; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008 [Mexican and Dominican Spanish]). Different studies explored EFL learners' interlanguage speech acts of refusal in various languages and cultures for pedagogical implications (e.g., Al-Eryani, 2007; Alrefaee et al., 2014 [Yemenis]; Al-Mahrooqi and Al-Aghbari, 2016 [Omanis]; Hamouda, 2014; Saud, 2019 [Saudis]; Park & Oh, 2019 [Koreans]). However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, research on cross-cultural variation in the realizations of refusal speech acts across communities speaking the same language is still lacking.

Given Saudi Arabia's global significance in terms of tourism, investment, and employment prospects, research is necessitated to explore the realizations of refusals among rural and urban speakers of Saudi Arabic in their social interaction. Haugh et al. (2021) maintain that interlocutors' variation in refusal speech acts is likely to be influenced by macro-social factors like region, social class, ethnicity, gender, and age. In other contextual situations, variations may be attributed to micro-social factors such as social status and distance (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). Drawing on such intersectional view, the present study attempts to investigate the socio-pragmatic variation in dispreferred responses (i.e., refusals) across rural and urban communities speaking Saudi Arabic. According to Reiter and Placencia (2005), "[s]ociopragmatic variation may by defined as the way in which speakers vary their use of language in similar situational contexts with similar communicative purposes and thus exhibit different interactional patterns" (pp. 192–193). Such a socio-pragmatic study is believed to contribute to having insights into the socio-cultural norms and values of the Saudi Arabic-speaking community (rural and urban) in navigating social expectations and managing face-threatening acts when expressing dispreferred responses. In line with the stated study's purpose, the present study takes a variationist perspective by analyzing the realization patterns of refusals among rural and urban Saudi speakers of Arabic. It attempts to address the following research questions:

1. What are the distinct realization patterns of refusals among rural and urban Saudi Arabic speakers?
2. What is the impact of social status on the realization patterns of refusals among rural and urban Saudi Arabic speakers?
3. What is the impact of social distance on the realization patterns of refusals among rural and urban Saudi Arabic speakers?

Literature Review

Refusal as Dispreferred Response

The concept of preference structure pertains to the patterns and preferences individuals exhibit during conversational turn-taking. Within a sequence of speech acts such as offering, inviting, or requesting, individuals are generally faced with two types of preferred responses: acceptance or dispreferred responses in the form of refusals (Cook, 1989). Preferred responses are usually delivered effortlessly by interlocutors, who keep them brief and straightforward without much responsibility. In contrast, dispreferred responses are characterized by intricate structures and delays, requiring effort from interlocutors as they have the potential to disrupt social harmony (Duran, 2019). As one type of dispreferred responses, refusal is a speech act by force in which an interlocutor "denies engaging in an action proposed by his [peer]" (Chen, et al., 1995, p. 121). Due to the sensitivity of refusal in threatening the interlocutors' face, interlocutors are bound to attenuate their refusal responses in consideration of their community cultural norms and social variables like,

age, gender, social status, and distance (Wang, 2019). The negotiations of the interlocutors' refusal responses are classified on a continuum of directness-indirectness and the varying levels of politeness or impoliteness, depending on the contextual contexts of the eliciting acts and factors such as the social status (power) and the close/distant relationships of the interlocutors (Ren, 2015).

Politeness Theory

Politeness theory is a social behavior theory that focuses on the concept of face, which can be classified into positive and negative aspects. Positive faces refer to an individual's desire to be admired and connected to a social group, while negative faces reflect their need to be independent and free from imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). During their social interaction, individuals' positive or/and negative face are likely to be threatened by speech acts that go against their expectations. Brown and Levinson (1987) labeled such acts as *Face Threatening Acts* (henceforth FTAs). The theory suggests that interlocutors use a strategy to save face, establish, and maintain harmonious social relationships, depending on the social and cultural contexts and the nature of the speech acts involved. The theory proposes four strategies for speakers when enacting FTAs: off-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and on-record baldly. These strategies are perceived in a continuous line of directness and are based on social distance, relative power, and absolute ranking of the imposition. The theory is universally applicable, but its application varies across cultures, subcultures, categories, and groups (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Speech acts of refusal are dispreferred responses to initiating acts of invitations, requests, suggestions, and offers (Houck & Gass, 1999). These acts can cause FTAs for both the speaker and the hearer, damaging their positive or negative face. The hearer's refusal may be a defense mechanism against his negative face desires, while the speaker's refusal may imply disapproval or rejection from a social group. To mitigate FTAs, speakers often use indirectness or a sequence of face-saving moves. This approach helps to soften and mitigate the dispreferred responses, ensuring that both parties feel accepted and valued (Beebe et al., 1990).

Classification of Refusal Strategies

Previous studies on refusal speech acts have identified various strategies used to refuse requests, offers, or invitations (Beebe et al., 1990; Salazar-Campillo et al., 2009; Turnbull & Saxton, 1997). These strategies include delaying responses, asking counter questions, hesitating, showing lack of enthusiasm, suggesting alternatives, distracting the addressee, remaining silent, and giving vague responses. Beebe et al. (1990) developed a widely referenced classification scheme for analyzing and categorizing refusal speech acts, which has been used in numerous studies (Ababtain, 2021; Alaboudi, 2020; Alateeq, 2016; Al-Eryani, 2007; Al-Kahtani, 2005; Alrefaee et al., 2014; El-Dakhs, 2020; among others). The scheme is coded in semantic formulas, which refer to expressions used to perform a refusal and adjuncts, which refer to expressions accompanying a refusal but do not perform it. These formulas are categorized into direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjuncts to refusals. Direct refusals involve a straightforward rejection without any attempt to soften the refusal, while indirect refusals involve strategies to mitigate the force of the refusal and preserve the positive face of the interlocutor. Adjuncts to refusals are expressions used as part of the head act of refusal and cannot enact refusal of their own. Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification scheme provides a useful framework for analyzing the content and forms of refusals in different social and cultural contexts. However, it is important to consider that the realization of refusals can vary based on factors such as social status, distance, and cultural norms,

particularly when studying the socio-pragmatic variation of refusals among speakers of the same language, such as rural and urban Saudi Arabic speakers.

Rural and Urban Cultural Norms of Communication

Traditional values, lifestyle, and social structures in rural and urban areas significantly influence communication norms. Rural communities prioritize community solidarity and local traditions, while urban communities are more diverse and cosmopolitan, influenced by global trends (Evans, 1972). Wan (2015) holds that communication in rural areas focuses on maintaining social harmony and preserving community relationships, while urban communication is more direct and less concerned with preserving traditional values. These differences distinguish collectivistic and individualistic cultures, with collectivistic cultures prioritizing group interests and goals over individual needs, leading to indirect, implicit, and non-confrontational communication (Lyuh, 1992). In individualistic cultures, personal goals and achievements are prioritized, and communication is direct, explicit, and assertive. Direct refusals or disagreements are more common in individualistic cultures.

In collectivistic cultures like Saudi Arabia, maintaining social harmony and avoiding offense or disappointment is highly valued (Al-Shalawi, 1997). Therefore, the realization of refusals in these cultures is often indirect and mitigated. Rural speakers of Saudi Arabic use more mitigated and polite strategies when refusing requests or invitations. In contrast, individualistic cultures, such as those in urban areas, place greater emphasis on personal autonomy and rights. Urban speakers, influenced by cosmopolitan cultural values and exposure to diverse speech communities, employ more direct and straightforward refusal strategies (Gudykunst et al., 1996). Social status and distance also play a role in the realization of refusals. Individuals of higher social status, regardless of their cultural background, are more likely to use more direct refusal strategies due to their power and authority in social interactions. Similarly, individuals closer or more familiar with the person making the request are more likely to use less mitigated and more direct refusal strategies (see Al-Eryani, 2007; Al-Kahtani, 2005; Nelson et al., 2002).

Related Studies on Speech Acts of Refusal

Previous research has extensively examined the speech acts of refusal in different languages and cultures, focusing on comparing and contrasting EFL/SL speakers' strategies for pedagogical purposes (see Al-Kahtani, 2005; Alsairi, 2019; Al-Shalawi, 1997; Beebe et al., 1990; Félix-Brasdefer, 2002). Researchers have examined both the content and forms of refusals, as well as the strategies employed to mitigate their impact. For example, Beebe et al. (1990) compared the refusal strategies followed by Japanese learners of English (JEs) and those employed by native speakers of English (Americans). The study found that Americans tend to use indirect forms of refusals, while Japanese employ indirect strategies when refusing individuals of higher status and direct strategies when refusing individuals of lower status. This difference in behavior can be attributed to the hierarchical nature of Japanese society.

A study by Al-Shalawi (1997) compared the use of semantic formulas in refusals between Saudi and American students. Data was collected from 50 Saudi Arabic speakers and 50 American English speakers using a discourse completion task. The study found significant differences in the use of semantic formulas and explanation content, reflecting cultural values of collectivism in Saudi society and individualism in American society. Saudis used more indirect speech acts, while Americans focused on providing clear explanations.

Félix-Brasdefer's (2002) study compared politeness strategies used by native Spanish speakers and American learners of Spanish. Data was collected from six situations, involving 60 participants of equal status. The study found that social factors, such as the relationship between participants and the situation, influenced the directness of refusal strategies. American learners of Spanish exhibited both positive and negative interlanguage transfer when declining invitations, indicating their unfamiliarity with cultural values and norms associated with the Spanish language. This lack of sociopragmatic competence prevented them from using similar refusal strategies as native Spanish speakers.

Al-Kahtani (2005) conducted a study comparing the expression of refusals in America, Arabs, and Japan using a DCT questionnaire. The research aimed to understand cultural variations in refusals and the challenges faced by second language learners. The study found that participants had different approaches to refusals, with some similarities in certain situations, such as requests. The study aimed to highlight the challenges faced by second language learners in producing such speech acts.

Alsairi's (2019) study analyzed the refusal strategies of Saudi EFL learners in the UK, advanced learners in KSA, and British native speakers. The research aimed to understand how cultural background, social distance, and social power influenced these refusals. Data was collected through role-play and analyzed using Beebe et al.'s refusal strategies classification. Results showed that UK participants were similar to British participants, but Saudi participants in KSA used religious expressions and prayers to soften their refusals.

In the context of Saudi Arabian culture, some studies have been undertaken about the realizations of refusal speech act within the same language, but their focus varies (e.g., Ababtain, 2021; Alaboudi, 2020; Alateeq, 2016; Alrashoodi, 2020; El-Dakhs, 2020; Saud, 2019). For instance, Alateeq (2016) studied the refusal strategies of Saudi Arabic speakers, focusing on male and female speakers. The study collected 180 responses from 30 students using a DCT questionnaire. Results showed that both male and female speakers preferred indirectness over directness to minimize the negative impact of being too straightforward. Additionally, Saudis often used adjunct refusals, such as "functioning acceptance" and "pray", to enact their refusals. These findings highlight the importance of understanding and implementing effective refusal strategies in Saudi Arabian culture.

Saud's (2019) study examined the strategies of undergraduate Saudi EFL learners when performing refusal speech acts and the influence of social status on their refusals. A hundred and fifty students participated in a DCT questionnaire involving 12 situations targeting high, equal, and low social status variables. The study found that indirect strategies were more effective than direct ones, and distinct realizations of refusals were used to address initiating acts. Social power did not significantly affect participants' refusal strategies. The research highlights the importance of understanding social status in speech refusal.

Another study was done by Alrashoodi (2020). The study investigated the differences between Saudi females and males in refusal strategies, using an oral DCT to analyze responses in three request situations. The findings showed that Saudi females outperformed males in terms of frequency, order, content, and directness of refusal strategies. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Alaboudi (2020) and Ababtain (2021), which found that Saudi males were more direct in expressing their refusals.

Previous studies on refusals have shown significant cross-cultural variation in refusal strategies across languages and cultures. These studies have focused on EFL students' refusal strategies for pedagogical implications and gender differences. However, there is a need for further research on cross-cultural variation within the same language and community. This study aims to

fill this gap by investigating the socio-pragmatic variation in dispreferred responses, specifically refusals, among rural and urban speakers of Saudi Arabic. This research contributes to understanding the socio-cultural norms and values of the Saudi Arabic-speaking community, helping navigate social expectations and manage face-threatening acts when expressing refusals.

Methodology

Subject Population and Participants

The study compares the speech communities of rural and urban speakers of Saudi Arabic in Asir and Makkah provinces. Asir, which represents the rural community, is in the southwest of Saudi Arabia and has historically been isolated due to its mountainous terrain. It is known for its pleasant weather and is a popular destination for both domestic and international tourists. Its people are well-known for their hospitality and sociability. Makkah Province, which represents the urban community, is in the west of Saudi Arabia and is renowned for being home to the Sacred House (Al-Kaaba), which attracts millions of Muslims worldwide for pilgrimage annually. Jeddah, the largest city on the Red Sea, serves as the gateway to Makkah and is known for its modernity, diverse population, and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

The study involved 60 male participants, 30 from rural and 30 from urban communities, aged 25–45, who were all males speaking Saudi Arabic. The selection of participants with specific characteristics is expected to improve data validity, as they are believed to have a social background and adhere to established norms of social interaction.

Instrument and Procedures of Data Collection

The study used a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire, a widely used tool in cross-cultural studies on pragmatics speech acts (Cyluk, 2013). The DCT allows for extensive data collection on semantic formulas used in specific speech acts, provides easy access to demographic information, and allows researchers to compare responses based on variables like social status, social power, age, and region (Cyluk, 2013). The validity of the DCT questionnaire was evaluated by two Saudi Arabic-speaking experts in discourse analysis, who found it adequately covered theoretical concepts of dominance, closeness, and task orientation.

Six Advanced EFL students from Asir Province and Makkah Province conducted a Discourse Analysis Task (DCT) questionnaire with potential participants. The questionnaire consisted of demographic details and 10 situations designed to prompt refusals, focusing on social status and social distance. Each situation was introduced and followed by a brief dialogue in Saudi Arabic dialect to encourage natural interaction. Participants were also asked to respond orally, which was recorded to capture spontaneous responses within a limited time frame. This method allows researchers to analyze participants' oral production and captures spontaneous responses within a limited time frame (Cyluk, 2013; Roever, 2011).

Data Analysis

The study used a quantitative and descriptive research design, analyzing participants' responses using Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification of refusal strategies. The responses were categorized into three semantic formula strategies: direct, indirect, and adjuncts to refusal. Each response was counted as a refusal sequence, consisting of pre-refusal strategies, head act refusal

(HA), and post-refusal strategies. The data was analyzed statistically in terms of frequency and percentage. The table below illustrates the frequency of each strategy and their subcategories.

Table 1

An Illustrative Example of Situation Analysis

Stimulus Type: Invitation (high social status)			
Situation 1: It happened that you met in the working building lift your boss who passed you this invitation:			
Boss: We have Nikah contract ceremony for our son the coming Thursday, and you are invited to our house.			
Respondent:			
والله يهنئكم ويبارك لكم	ما يمديني	زوجتي ف المستشفى	والله المعذرة
May Allah bless you all	I can't make it	my wife is in the hospital	Walla (swearing) sorry
Adjunct: Blessing prayer	Direct: Non-performative Negative ability (HA)	Indirect: Excuse/explanation	Indirect: statement of apology/regret

Refusal Strategy	Frequency
Direct	1
Non-performative: Negative ability	1
Indirect	2
statement of apology/regret	1
Excuse/explanation/reason	1
Adjunct to refusal	1
Blessing prayer	1

Results

The study investigates the socio-pragmatic variation in refusals among rural and urban Saudi Arabic speakers, aiming to answer three research questions related to different realizations of refusals among these communities, with the results presented in line with these research questions.

RQ1. What are the distinct realization patterns of refusals among rural and urban Saudi Arabic speakers?

The study analyzed participants' refusal realizations in ten situations using direct, indirect, and adjunct strategies. The total frequency and percentage of refusal realizations in each strategy type are presented in a table for convenience.

Table 2 shows that a total frequency of 2973 refusal realizations was recorded, with rural communities having a higher frequency of 1596 occurrences (53.68) compared to urban communities (46.32). The study found that indirect strategies were the most common, with 1673 occurrences (55.58), followed by adjuncts to refusals at 1030 (34.65). Direct strategies were the least common at 270 (9.13). The rural community used more indirect strategies and adjuncts to refusals than the urban community, with 908 (54.27) and 567 (55.05), respectively. However, the rural community used less direct strategies, with 121 (44.81) occurrences compared to 149 (55.19)

among urban Saudi Arabic speakers. The table also shows that both rural and urban communities used the same semantic formula content, with variations in frequency. The rural community used the "excuse/reason/explanation" and "apology/regret" formulas more frequently than the urban community, i.e., 214 (53.63) and 207 (54.33) against 185 (46.37) and 174 (45.67). The "wish" formula was used more frequently by the rural community with 163 (55.44) compared to the urban community with 131 (44.56). The "negative willingness/ability" formula of directness is used more frequently by the urban community, with 126 being used more than the rural community. Table 2 reveals that the formula of "blessing prayer" was used as an adjunct to refusals in rural communities, with 115 (54.76) being more frequent than in urban communities: "set condition for future acceptance", 197 (6.66); "indefinite reply", 187 (6.32); "pause fillers", 170 (5.72); "statement of positive opinion/feeling", 169 (5.68); "admiration", 163 (5.48); "gratitude/appreciation", 144 (4.84); "statement of alternative", 128 (4.33); "refuser's attitude", 114 (3.83); "shift of response", 87 (2.94); "expression of empathy", 60 (2.02); and "non-performative", 40 (1.35). The frequency of these formulas varies among communities.

Table 2

Total Frequency and Percentage of Refusal Realizations

Community	Rural		Urban		Total	
Semantic formula	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Direct	121	44.81	149	55.19	270	9.13
Non- performative	17	42.50	23	57.50	40	1.35
Negative willingness/ability	104	45.22	126	54.78	230	7.78
Indirect	908	54.27	765	45.73	1673	56.58
Statement of apology /regret	207	54.33	174	45.67	381	12.88
Wish	163	55.44	131	44.56	294	9.94
Excuse/reason/explanation	214	53.63	185	46.37	399	13.49
Statement of alternative	65	50.78	63	49.22	128	4.33
Set condition for future acceptance	114	57.87	83	42.13	197	6.66
Indefinite reply	101	54.01	86	45.99	187	6.32
Shift of response	44	50.57	43	49.43	87	2.94
Adjuncts	567	55.05	463	44.95	1030	34.65
Statement of positive opinion/feeling	93	55.03	76	44.97	169	5.68
Expression of empathy	31	51.67	29	48.33	60	2.02
Pause fillers	98	57.65	72	42.35	170	5.72
Gratitude/appreciation	80	55.56	64	44.44	144	4.84
Admiration	93	57.06	70	42.94	163	5.48
Blessing prayer	115	54.76	95	45.24	210	7.06
Refuser's attitude	57	50.00	57	50.00	114	3.83
Total	1596	53.68	1377	46.32	2973	100.

RQ2. What is the impact of social status on the realization patterns of refusals among rural and urban Saudi Arabic speakers?

The study analyzed participants' dispreferred responses regarding social status variables in invitation and request situations (1–3 and 6–8), presenting their results in table 3 with reference to community and social status variables and strategy type.

Table 3
Frequency and Percentage of Refusal Realizations in Relation to Social Status

Variable Community	High				Equal				Low			
	Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban	
Semantic formula	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Direct	32	45.71	38	54.29	18	41.86	25	58.14	9	33.33	18	66.67
Non- performative	6	42.86	8	57.14	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Negative willingness/ability	26	46.43	30	53.57	18	41.86	25	58.14	9	33.33	18	66.67
Indirect	164	54.67	136	45.33	177	54.80	146	45.20	205	54.96	168	45.04
Statement of regret	32	52.46	29	47.54	42	52.50	38	47.50	50	55.56	40	44.44
Wish	34	54.84	28	45.16	32	53.33	28	46.67	39	56.52	30	43.48
Excuse/reason/explanation	43	58.11	31	41.89	45	54.22	38	45.78	52	55.91	41	44.09
Statement of alternative	5	38.46	8	61.54	13	54.17	11	45.83	16	53.33	14	46.67
Set condition for future acceptance	19	61.29	12	38.71	22	61.11	14	38.89	25	60.98	16	39.02
Indefinite reply	22	56.41	17	43.59	16	57.14	12	42.86	18	46.15	21	53.85
Shift of response	9	45.00	11	55.00	7	58.33	5	41.67	5	45.45	6	54.55
Adjuncts	101	57.39	75	42.61	119	53.60	103	46.40	132	54.55	110	45.45
Statement of positive opinion/feeling	12	57.14	9	42.86	16	57.14	12	42.86	23	56.10	18	43.90
Expression of empathy	8	53.33	7	46.67	8	47.06	9	52.94	0	0.00	0	0.00
Pause fillers	12	66.67	6	33.33	16	50.00	16	50.00	27	56.25	21	43.75
Gratitude/appreciation	14	60.87	9	39.13	19	55.88	15	44.12	24	53.33	21	46.67
Admiration	25	60.98	16	39.02	23	57.50	17	42.50	26	54.17	22	45.83
Blessing prayer	18	51.43	17	48.57	25	52.08	23	47.92	26	54.17	22	45.83
Refuser's attitude	12	52.17	11	47.83	12	52.17	11	47.83	6	50.00	6	50.00
Total	297	54.40	249	45.60	314	53.40	274	46.60	346	53.89	296	46.11

The above table demonstrates that the rural community has a higher frequency of occurrences of social status variables compared to the urban community, that is, 297 (54.40) against 249 (45.60) for the high status; 314 (53.40) against 274 (46.60) for the equal status; 346 (53.89) against 296 (46.11) for the low status. Both rural and urban Saudi Arabic-speaking communities use indirect strategies to signal their refusals to invitation and request, followed using adjuncts to refusals. Direct strategies are employed to a lesser extent, while indirect strategies are more common in the rural community. This highlights the importance of understanding social status in decision-making processes. The comparison of the social status frequency of refusal strategies across the two communities indicates that the rural community utilized higher frequency of indirect strategies in the three social status variables, i.e., 164 (54.67) against 136 (45.33) for the high status; 177 (54.80) against 146 (45.20) for the equal status; 205 (54.96) against 168 (45.04) for the low status. Additionally, the rural community employed adjuncts to refusals more often than urban community. For high status, the rural community had a frequency of 101 (57.39) compared to 75 (42.61) for the urban community. For equal status, the rural community had a frequency of 119 (53.60) compared to 103 (46.40) for the urban community. For low status, the rural community had a frequency of 132 (54.55) compared to 110 (45.45) for the urban community. However, the urban

community used directness more often than the rural community, 32 (45.71) for high status, 25 (58.14) for equal status, and 38 (54.29) for low status.

RQ3. What is the impact of social distance on the realization patterns of refusals among rural and urban Saudi Arabic speakers?

The analysis of the participants' dispreferred responses in invitation and request situations (4–5 and 9–10), which are related to the two social distance variables, rendered the following results.

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage of Refusal Realizations in Relation to Social Distance

Variable	- Distance (-D)				+ Distance (+D)			
	Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban	
Community Strategy Type	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Direct	34	45.33	41	54.67	27	49.09	28	50.91
Non- performative	7	41.18	10	58.82	5	55.56	4	44.44
Negative willingness/ability	27	46.55	31	53.45	22	47.83	24	52.17
Indirect	205	53.95	175	46.05	157	52.86	140	47.14
Statement of regret	38	55.88	30	44.12	45	54.88	37	45.12
Wish	32	53.33	28	46.67	26	60.47	17	39.53
Excuse/reason/ explanation	44	53.01	39	46.99	30	45.45	36	54.55
Statement of alternative	23	48.94	24	51.06	8	57.14	6	42.86
Set condition for future acceptance	31	54.39	26	45.61	17	53.13	15	46.88
Indefinite reply	22	57.89	16	42.11	23	53.49	20	46.51
Shift of response	15	55.56	12	44.44	8	47.06	9	52.94
Adjuncts	104	55.61	83	44.39	111	54.68	92	45.32
Statement of positive opinion/feeling	21	52.50	19	47.50	21	53.85	18	46.15
Expression of empathy	9	47.37	10	52.63	6	66.67	3	33.33
Pause fillers	18	62.07	11	37.93	25	58.14	18	41.86
Gratitude/appreciation	10	52.63	9	47.37	13	56.52	10	43.48
Admiration	7	63.64	4	36.36	12	52.17	11	47.83
Blessing prayer	23	62.16	14	37.84	23	54.76	19	45.24
Refuser's attitude	16	50.00	16	50.00	11	45.83	13	54.17
Total	343	53.43	299	46.57	295	53.15	260	46.85

Table 4 shows that social close relationships (-D) received a higher frequency of refusals occurrences than social distant relationships (+D), with frequencies of 343 (53.43) and 299 (46.57). The rural community had higher frequencies of occurrences for the -D and +D variables compared to the urban community. The "indirect" strategy had the highest frequency of occurrences among

the three refusal strategies, with higher frequencies of 205 (53.95) and 157 (52.86) used by rural community compared to 175 (46.89) and 140 (47.14) by urban community. The strategy of "adjuncts to refusals" comes second, with higher frequencies of 104 (55.61) and 111 (54.68) used by rural community compared to 83 (44.39) and 92 (45.32) by urban community. The "direct" strategy had the least frequency, with higher frequencies of 41 (54.67) and 28 (50.91) used by urban community compared to 34 (45.33) and 27 (49.09) by rural community.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore the ways in which rural and urban Saudi Arabic speakers express refusals and how social status and distance influence their refusal strategies. Using Beebe et al.'s classification of refusals, the researchers found that both rural and urban communities primarily used indirect strategies to refuse invitations and requests. Adjuncts were also commonly used, while direct strategies were less frequent. This variation aligns with the collectivistic culture in the Arab world and Saudi Arabia, which emphasizes maintaining social harmony and avoiding offense when expressing dispreferred responses (Abdul Sattar, 2009; Alaboudi, 2020; Alghamdi & Alqarni, 2019; Al-Shalawi, 1997). The rural community used indirect strategies more often than the urban community, indicating that effective communication in rural communities is centered on maintaining social harmony and preserving relationships, while urban communication prioritizes individual (Wan, 2015). The study also found that the participants utilized various forms of indirect strategies to avoid refusals in Saudi Arabic. They used forms like "statement of excuse/reason/explanation", and "statement of apology/regret" to mitigate the FTAs of their refusals and maintain the positive face of the interlocutors. Examples include 'عندي شغله ضرورية' (I have an urgent task); 'عندي ظروف عائلية' (I have family circumstances); 'اعتذر' (I apologize) and 'للأسف' (sorry!). These strategies were preferred by Saudi Arabic speakers, serving as precursors to their refusals (Alaboudi, 2020; Alateeq, 2016; Alsairi, 2019; Al-Shalawi, 1997). The study also revealed that rural Saudi Arabic speakers prioritize sociability when producing FTAs in social interactions, resulting in higher usage of "wishing expressions" compared to urban communities. Examples of such indirect strategy forms include 'والله ودي اجي ونسترجع الذكريات' (Wallah [swearing] I hope to come and reawaken memories) and 'تمنيت ان استطيع اخدمك' (I hoped to render you help). Other forms of indirect strategies include 'لكن اقدر اعطيك فلوس تستأجر سيارة' (but I can give you money to hire a car [statement of alternative]); 'اذا قدرت اجي' (If I can come [set condition for future acceptance]); and 'تكلم مع مدير المطعم ممكن يفيدك' (talk to the restaurant's manager [shift of initiating act response, that is, only in request situations]). These indirect strategies were more utilized by rural Saudi Arabic speakers for softening their refusals. Also, the findings of the study showed that Saudi Arabic speakers frequently use "indefinite reply" like 'إن شاء الله/بإذن الله' (God willing) in their responses to invitations and requests. These expressions are considered vague as they carry the connotative meaning of "maybe/hopefully" in English (Al-Zubeiry, 2013). Alghazali (2020) suggests that 'إن شاء الله/Inshallah' is used to avoid giving a definite response, with rural participants using this expression more often than urban ones. Additionally, the study found that in Saudi culture, the use of adjuncts strategy type, such as "blessing prayer" and "admiration", was more common in participants' refusals of invitations. Expressions like 'واسال الله ان يبارك لهما' and 'ما شاء الله' were used as illocutionary acts of compliment, establishing social solidarity before enacting FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This strategy was more common among rural Saudi Arabic speakers compared to urban ones. The study revealed that rural Saudi Arabic speakers tend to use phrases 'يشرفنا' (it's out pleasure) and 'شكرًا جزيلًا' (Thank you very much) more often than urban speakers when refusing an invitation, indicating a concern for maintaining a positive image of the

person they are refusing and minimizing negativity in their response. These adjuncts are used as positive politeness markers to express interest or approval towards the interlocutor's invitation (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The study also found that participants from both rural and urban communities often used "pause fillers" phrases '... والله' Wallah [swearing]) and '...لكن' (but…) as well as phrases indicating the "refuser's attitude", such as 'بصراحة/الصدق' (frankly) as mitigating markers before their refusals. They also used "solidarity markers" like 'الله يعينك يا رجال' (May Allah help you man) to show empathy and soften the impact of their refusal. The rural community used direct strategies like "negative willingness/ability" and "non-performative statements" less frequently, suggesting they are more concerned about preserving the interlocutor's self-image during face-to-face negotiations. Examples include expressions like 'مايمديني' (I can't) or 'لا' (No) to convey their refusals.

Similarly, the findings of the study revealed that social status significantly influenced participants' refusals, with variations in frequency and strategies used. Saudi Arabic speakers preferred indirect strategies and adjuncts to soften the impact of their refusals to invitations and requests. This conforms to Al-Shalawi (1997) and Alaboudi's (2020) findings which suggest that Saudis are more sensitive towards social status variations when engaging in FTAs situations. The rural community displayed higher concern in their refusals, employing more elaborate responses and greater mitigation compared to the urban community. For instance, in situation 1 where they had to refuse their boss's invitation to his son's Nikah contract ceremony, participants used expressions such as, 'والله يشرفنا لكن ظروفنا ما تسمح' (wallah, [pause filler] it's our pleasure, [statement of positive feeling] but [pause filler] our circumstances don't allow [excuse/explanation/reason]). The same approach was observed in situation 6, a rural community participant refused a boss's request to work on the weekend, using indirect strategies and adjuncts to soften the FTA of their preferred response. This is an illustrative example ' اعتذر منك يا أبو فلان، لكن انت عارف كيف الضغط الايام هذي واحتاج فترة راحة. تمنيت أن أستطيع اخدمك' (I apologize to you *father of …,* [apology and *a polite addressing marker*] but [pause filler] you know the pressure that we have these days, and I need relaxing time, [excuse/explanation/reason] I wish I could serve you [wish]). This pattern was also consistent in their refusal to an equal-status interlocutor's invitation and request. In situation 2, a rural community participant refused a work colleague's invitation to his son's graduation party, using more mitigating markers to avoid hurting his colleague's positive face. Consider the following illustrative example 'ما شاء الله تبارك الله، الله يبارك له وفيه، لكن معليش ياخي ما ظنتي يمديني' (what Allah wills! [admiration] May Allah bless him, [blessing prayer] but [pause filler] excuse me brother [apology] I don't think I can come [indefinite reply]). The same was in situation 7, where the participant is refusing a colleague's request to write the annual report of the company. This is an example: 'اعتذر منك، الصدق عندي مهام لازم اخلصها شوف خوينا سالم' (I apologize to you [apology], frankly [refuser's attitude] I have tasks that should be finished, [explanation/reason] you may approach our colleague, Salem [shifting response]. The study also revealed that rural community participants used fewer refusal indirect strategies and adjuncts in low-status situations, such as refusing an invitation from a workplace security guard for lunch on his job promotion (i.e., situation 3), using expressions like 'شكرًا على العزومه، إن شاء الله' (Thank you for the invitation [gratitude/appreciation] God willing [indefinite reply]). Similarly, in situation 8 where they are refusing a new archive-section employee's request to sort out files, the participants deployed fewer mitigating markers like, 'اعذرني بس اني مشغول جدًا' (Excuse me, [apology] I'm busy [reason]. The study also found that the urban community tended to employ more direct strategies in these situations. Here are two illustrative examples: (a) 'يا هو! ما قدر مسافر' (Come on! [Expression of empathy] I can't [negative ability]); and (b) 'لا أبدًا' (No, impossible [non-performative]). The study

suggests that socio-cultural factors, such as collectivism and individualism, influence the choice of refusal strategies among Saudi Arabic speakers (Alaboudi, 2020; Al-Shalawi, 1997; Lyuh, 1992).

The findings of the study also showed that close relationships significantly influenced participants' refusal strategies compared to distant relationships. Participants used more softening markers when refusing requests or invitations from close acquaintances, compared to distant acquaintances. This contradicts previous research (see Al-Aryani, 2010; Al-Kahtani, 2005), and can be attributed to cultural norms and values within communities. Social distance is subject to regional variation among speakers of the same language and is influenced by their community's cultural norms and values (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). The situational context of speech acts could also account for the choice refusal strategies. It was also observed that rural and urban communities used different indirect strategies to convey their refusals. Rural participants used more softening markers to mitigate the negative impact of their refusals, while urban participants used fewer. For instance, when refusing an invitation from a childhood friend (-D) as in situation 4, a rural participant used I [admiration] !My God) 'يا الله! لقد اشتقت لهم. اتمنى ان يكون عندي وقت يسمح، اعذرني ياغالي I missed them, [Statement of positive feeling] I hope to have time [wish] excuse me my dear [apology/regret]). In contrast, an urban participant simply said: 'اعذرني الأهل تعبانين' (excuse me [apology/regret] my wife is not well. [excuse/explanation/reason]. Similar patterns were observed in the refusal of a cousin's request to lend a car as in situation 9. Here are two examples found among the urban participants: (a) 'انا احتاجها اذا تباني اوصلك على طريقي طيب' (I need it. [excuse/reason] If you want me to drop you on my way, ok [statement of alternative]); and (b) 'اعتذر السيارة حق اخوي ويحتاجها' (I apologize, [apology/regret] the car belongs to my brother, and he needs it. [excuse/explanation/reason]). As for the distant social relationship (+D), it was found that both communities preferred indirect strategies, but there were variations in the specific forms and contents of the strategies used. For example, when refusing an invitation from a cousin's friend while standing next to the cousin as in situation 5, a participant responded with an expression like, 'للأسف مرتبط مع اخوياي' (sorry [apology/regret] I'm already hanging out with my friends [excuse/reason]). When refusing a stranger's request to pay for his food as in situation 10, a participant said: 'ما عندي المبلغ لكن كلم احد يحول لك على حسابي و بحاسب' (I don't have this amount [explanation/reason] but call someone to transfer for you on my account and I'll pay [statement of alternative]). The findings of the study also revealed that direct strategies were more commonly employed in situations involving a distant social relation (+D). For example, a participant responded to a request with: 'الله يعينك يا خويي ما أقدر' (May Allah help you brother, [expression of empathy] I can't [Negative willingness/ability]).

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the socio-pragmatic variation in refusals among rural and urban communities speaking Saudi Arabic. It used Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification system to analyze participants' refusal strategies. The results showed that both rural and urban communities primarily used indirect strategies to refuse invitations and requests. Adjuncts were also commonly used, while direct strategies were less frequent. The choice of refusal strategies was influenced by socio-cultural factors such as collectivism and individualism. Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that Saudi individuals are particularly attuned to social status disparities when it comes to refusing. It was found that individuals of higher social status were less inclined to use indirect and softening language compared to those of equal and low statuses who highly preferred indirect strategies to maintain harmony. The rural community employed more indirect strategies and showed a higher level of concern in their refusals compared to the urban community. Urban

speakers, influenced by cosmopolitan cultural values and exposure to diverse speech communities, used more direct and straightforward refusal strategies. The study also revealed that Saudi individuals are particularly attuned to social status disparities when it comes to refusing. Rural communities displayed a higher level of concern in their refusals, employing more elaborate responses and greater levels of mitigation compared to urban communities. The study also shed light on the influence of close relationships on the frequency of refusal strategies, with direct strategies being more prevalent in situations involving distant social connections. The findings of the study have several implications. People from different socio-cultural backgrounds, speaking the same language, have different ways of refusing in face-threatening situations. Social status and cultural norms influence how individuals respond to such situations. Understanding these differences can prevent misunderstandings and hostility between different groups. Refusal, like other speech acts, reflects cultural values and can enhance cross-cultural understanding. However, the study had limitations due to sample size and geographical background. Further research is recommended to gain more insights into refusal behaviors of Saudi Arabic speakers and the impact of cultural norms and values on refusal strategies across different regions.

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Appendix

استبانة مهمة اكمال الخطاب (DCT)

Discourse Completion Task Questionnaire (Arabic Version)

عزيزي المشارك.....

نتقدم لك بجزيل الشكر مقدمًا على المشاركة في الاستجابة عن فقرات استبانة البحث والتي لن تتجاوز النصف ساعة من وقتك.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة تباين استراتيجية الرفض للناطقين باللهجة السعودية الدارجة في الحضر والبادية في منطقتي مكة المكرمة وعسير. كما نود أن نؤكد لك بأن المعلومات المدونة والاستجابات سوف يتم التعامل معها بسرية مطلقة، وتستخدم لغرض البحث فقط.

تعليمات: نرجو التعبير شِفاهيًا بالرفض المناسب (Refusal) عن عدد 10 مواقف دعوات وطلبات، ضع نفسك في الموقف نفسه كما هو موضح، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار التباين أو الاختلاف في نوع/ظروف الموقف، المستوى الاجتماعي لصاحب الدعوة أو الطلب (مكانته الاجتماعية: عالية، مساوية، أو أقل مستوى منك)، وكذلك البعد الاجتماعي أو العلاقة بينكم (بعيد عنك وغير مألوف لديك، أو قريب منك ومألوف لديك).

أولاً: المعلومات الديمغرافية:

العمر: ....   المهنة: ....   المنطقة التي تعيش فيها: (مكة المكرمة/عسير)

ثانيًا: مواقف الدعوات (Invitation Situations)

1. صادف أنك قابلت مديرك في مصعد مقر العمل، والذي قدمَ إليك الدعوة الآتية:

المدير: معانا مناسبة عقد قران ولدنا يوم الخميس الجاي وأنت مدعو للعشاء في بيتنا.

أنت ترفض قائلًا:

2. لدى زميلك في العمل مناسبة تخرج ولده من الجامعة وتم دعوتك إليها بالقول:

الزميل: أنت معزوم في حفلة تخرج ولدنا الليلة.

أنت ترفض قائلًا:

3. عند خروجك من العمل، قابلت حارس المبنى الذي أنت تعمل فيه، وقدم لك دعوة لحضور تناول وجبة الغداء بمناسبة ترقيته في العمل.

الحارس: معانا عزومة غداء بكره الساعة اثنين هنا في غرفة الحارس بمناسبة ترقيتي حياك الله.

أنت ترفض قائلًا:

4. صديق الطفولة لديك عنده عزومة عشاء في بيته لعدد من الأصدقاء، وجهه إليك الدعوة الآتية:

الصديق: حياك الله العشاء عندنا، ترا الأصحاب كلهم جايين.

أنت ترفض قائلًا:

5. بينما كنت واقف مع ابن عمك، قابلكم زميل له بالعمل وسلم عليكم، عرفكم ابن عمك على بعض، وهذا الزميل قدم دعوة لابن عمك لحضور مناسبة زواجه الأسبوع القادم ودعاك لحضور الزواج.

زميل ابن عمك: وأنت حياك الله على الزواج ضروري اشوفك في الزواج.

أنت ترفض قائلًا:

ثالثًا: مواقف الطلب (Request Situations)

6. طلب منك مديرك/رئيسك في العمل عمل إضافي في نهاية الأسبوع.

المدير: احتاجك تخلص هذا الموضوع خارج الدوام عمل إضافي لنهاية الأسبوع.

أنت ترفض قائلًا:

7. زميلك في العمل طلب منك مساعدته في كتابة التقرير السنوي.

الزميل: بالله بغيتك في شغله، فزعتك في هذا التقرير السنوي، مطلوب مني بكره.

أنت ترفض قائلًا:

8. في ضوء طبيعة عملك كمدير حسابات المؤسسة مطالب بكتابة التقرير السنوي، مررت بقسم الأرشفة لطلب ملفات تساعدك في كتابة التقرير، طلب منك موظف الأرشيف الجديد مساعدته في تصنيف الملفات.

موظف الأرشيف: يا اخي ساعدني في أرشفة هذي الملفات.

أنت ترفض قائلًا:

9. صادف أن قابلت ابن عمك والذي كانت سيارته قد تعطلت ولديه مشوار لقضاء حاجته، طلب منك سيارتك للمشوار.

<div dir="rtl">

ابن عمك: أعطيني سيارتك مشوار ساعة وأردها لك.

أنت ترفض قائلًا:

10. حصل أن كنت في مطعم، وكان شخص غير مألوف لديك يقوم بدفع الحساب عن طلبه، وفجأة لم يجد محفظته ولا جواله في جيبه، وطلب منك مساعدته في دفع المبلغ.

الشخص: يا اخي ترا محفظتي وجوالي ناسيهم في البيت، بغيتك تساعدني في دفع المبلغ.

أنت ترفض قائلًا:

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Discourse Completion Task Questionnaire (English Version)

Dear participant,

We would like to thank you very much in advance for participating in the response to the research questionnaire items, which will not exceed half an hour of your time.

This research aims to study the variation of refusal strategies among urban and rural speakers of Saudi dialect in the regions of Makkah and Asir. We assure you that the information and responses written will be treated in absolute confidentiality and used for research purposes only.

Instructions: Please state orally the appropriate refusal for the 10 situations of invitations and requests, place yourself in the same situation as described, taking into account the variation or difference in the type/circumstances of the situation, the social status of the invited or requested person (social status: high, equal, or lower than you), as well as the social distance or relationship between you (far from you and unfamiliar to you, or close to you and familiar to you).

A) Demographic Information:

Age: ……………… Occupation: ……………………... Region: Makkah/Asir

B) Invitation Situations:

1. It happened by incident that you met your boss in the work lift, and he invited you saying: "we have marriage contract ceremony for our son next Thursday. You are invited for dinner at our house.

You refuse by saying: ………………………………………………………….. .

2. Your work-colleague has a graduation party for his son who graduated from the university. He invited you saying: "you're invited to our son's graduation party tonight.

You refuse by saying: ………………………………………………………….. .

3. While you were leaving your work, you met the working-building security guard who invited you to have lunch meal on his job promotion.

Security guard: We have a lunch occasion at 2 pm tomorrow in the security guard room on my job promotion.

You refuse by saying: ………………………………………………………….. .

4. Your childhood friend has dinner invitation at his house for a number of your co-friends, he invited you: "you're welcome for dinner, for your information all our friends are coming.

You refuse by saying: ………………………………………………………….. .

5. While standing with your cousin, his colleague at work met you and greeted you. Your cousin introduced you to each other, and this colleague extended an invitation to your cousin to attend his marriage event next week and invited you to attend the marriage.

Your cousin's colleague: "you are welcome to the marriage event; it is necessary to see you at the wedding.

You refuse by saying: …………………………………………………………….. .

C) Request Situations

6. Your manager/boss asked you to work overtime at the end of the week.

Manager: I need you to finish this matter outside of working hours. It's additional work for the weekend.

You refuse by saying: …………………………………………………………….. .

7. Your colleague at work requested your assistance in writing the annual report. Colleague: For God's sake, I want you for a matter. I need your help in writing this annual report, which is due tomorrow.

You refuse by saying: …………………………………………………………….. .

8. In light of the nature of your work as a corporation's accounts manager who is required to write the annual report, you stopped by the archiving department to request files to help you write the report. The new archives employee asked you to help him in classifying the files.

Archive employee: Brother, help me archive these files.

You refuse by saying: …………………………………………………………….. .

9. You happened to meet your cousin whose car had broken down and he had some errands to run. He asked you for your car for the errands.

Cousin: Give me your car an hour's ride and I will return it to you.

You refuse by saying: …………………………………………………………….. .

10. It happened that you were in a restaurant, and a person you did not know was paying for his order, and suddenly he did not find his wallet or phone in his pocket, and he asked you to help him pay the amount.

Person: Brother, I forgot my wallet and cell phone that I forgot at home. I want you to help me pay the amount.

You refuse by saying: …………………………………………………………….. .