



The Effect of Personality Traits and Gender on EFL Learner's choice of Refusal Strategies

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Abstract. The aim of the present study was to identify the strategies used by EFL learners while performing the speech act of refusal and to find its relationship with their Big Five personality traits including Neuroticism, Extroversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. It was also aimed to investigate the effect of gender on the choice of refusal strategies. Research participants consisted of 162 EFL learners who responded to NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) and Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The NEO-FFI was piloted to see whether it was valid and reliable for the subjects of the study. Based on the result of the pilot study, some modifications were made and 32 items were removed. The data thus gathered was then analyzed. Standard linear regression analyses indicated personality traits were significantly related to the choice of some refusal strategies by EFL learners. As results revealed personality traits accounted for 34 percent of variance in EFL learner's choice of refusal strategies and 7 out of 27 used strategies indicating some relationship with personality traits. These strategies were *No*, *Joke*, *Lack of enthusiasm*, *Let interlocutor off the hook*, *Gratitude*, *Statement of principle*, and *Swearing*. Finally a t-test indicated significant difference between male and female performance on 7 refusal strategies including: *Criticize the requester*, *Hedging*, *Postponement*, *Statement of regret*, *Statement of empathy*, *Statement of principle*, and *Unspecific reply*.

Keywords: Refusal strategies, personality traits, speech act, NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), Discourse Completion Task (DCT).

1. INTRODUCTION

Deep studies in recent years have led to some shifts in our understanding of language learning and teaching. So there has been some tendency to the more communicative point of view, which regards language more than grammatical rules. Hymes (1967) believed that speakers of a language should have more than grammatical competence in order to be able to communicate appropriately in a specific context. They should also know how to use the language to accomplish their purposes. So he introduced the concept of Communicative Competence (CC). Later Canale and Swain (1980) redefined communicative competence and subdivided it into four components namely grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. In 1990, Bachman proposed a new comprehensive model of communicative competence, more precisely communicative language ability which involved not only grammatical competence but also pragmatic competence as one of its crucial components. According to Bachman (1990), knowledge of language functions and speech acts fall under the pragmatic knowledge. Rintell (1997, p. 98) also mentioned that "pragmatics is the study of speech acts".

To further explain the issue, it's necessary to mention that speech act theory is a theory of language use which examines the functional dimensions of language. It was developed by Austin and Searle in 1950. Paltridge (2000) defined speech act as an utterance that serves a function in communication. Some examples are apology, greeting, request, complaint, invitation, compliment, and refusal.

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As one type of speech act, refusal is a face threatening act occurring when a speaker says 'no' to a request, suggestion, invitation or offer, which can be direct or indirect. Indirect refusal consists of some strategies such as excuse, wish, regret, statement of alternative, etc. and direct strategies such as definite no or negative ability (Cohen, 1996). Refusal speech act is very important as misunderstanding or breakdown in communication may occur if the nonnative speaker does not know how to refuse a request in the target culture.

In addition to speech act as an important element in human communication, personality can also play an important role in this regard. One of the most popular personality models is the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) model, proposed by Costa and McCrae (1992) which is a hierarchical organization of personality traits. They believed people's personality is a combination of five traits with some traits playing important roles in their communication behavior. Golberg (1981) has named these factors as the "Big Five". These Big Five traits are Neuroticism (N), the tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anxiety, depression, and social fear; Extraversion (E), the tendency to be talkative, warm, active, energetic, optimistic, sociable, and assertive; Openness to experience (O), the tendency to be imaginative, creative, flexible, and open-minded; Agreeableness (A), the tendency to be cooperative, compassionate, generous, and honest; and Conscientiousness (C), a tendency to be organized, decisive, purposeful, and act dutifully (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005).

Regarding the refusal speech act, most studies have investigated cross-cultural pragmatics (Abarghoui, 2011; Al-Kahtani, 2005; Allami & Naemi, 2011; Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990) in which the ways speech acts are realized vary across languages. Also many studies have investigated the way people's personality traits affect different aspects of their lives such as academic achievement (Hakimi, Hejazi, & Lavasani, 2011), academic performance (Hazrati-Viari, Rad, & Torabi, 2012), emotional intelligence (Petrides et al., 2010), and Learning English and math (Homayouni, 2011). Based on the Chung and Pennebaker (2007), Tausczik and Pennebaker (2010) studies, there is a relationship between one's personality traits and his communication. They showed that the way people communicate is an indicator of personality traits. According to Kuriscak (2010), individual differences in personal characteristics is one of the factors which influences speech act realization. In this trend, Appling, Briscoe, Hayes, and Rudolph (2013) conducted a study in order to identify the correlation between big five personality dimensions and speech act labeling through social media status updates. They found that speech acts predict personality and that certain speech acts (illocutionary acts) are associated with certain traits. They found that Conscientiousness and Extraversion were predicted Assertives. Neuroticism was negatively associated with Commissives. Agreeableness was negatively associated with Assertives. Openness did not significantly predict any speech act. Thus, Assertives was the most prevalent speech act across most personality traits. So the researchers came to the result that using different refusal strategies by EFL students may also be affected by individual's personality and to the researcher's best knowledge, no study has ever tried to find a connection between refusal type of speech act and personality traits.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and the used refusal strategies by Iranian EFL learners. Despite numerous studies made on refusal strategies and personality traits in recent years, little if any has been done on the relationship between the Iranian EFL learner's personality traits and their use of refusal strategies. Another objective of the study is to investigate the effect of gender on using refusal strategies. A number of studies (Arani, 2013; Ghazanfari Bonyadi, & Malekzadeh, 2013; Mckelvie, 2000; Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001; Parvaresh, Bidaki, & Farahani, 2014; Shams & Afghari, 2011) have investigated the effect of gender on using request and refusal speech acts in which their result have varied. As far as the results have varied in term of the effect of gender and there is a scarcity of research considering this variable; so the present study has also taken into consideration gender differences in refusal utterances and intended to examine whether

gender makes any difference in the choice of refusal strategies. Therefore, this study particularly intended to answer the following questions:

1.1. Research Questions

1. Is there any relationship between personality traits and refusal strategies used by EFL learners?
2. Is there any significant differences between males' and females' choice of refusal strategies?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Speech act of refusal, as the focus of this study, is a response to an initiating act. Beebe et al. (1990) proposed that refusal is a complex speech act to realize and it requires a high level of pragmatic competence. Gass and Houck (1999) also believed that it is complex since it requires "face-saving maneuvers to accommodate the noncompliant nature of the act" (p. 2). So misunderstanding or breakdown in communication may occur if the nonnative speaker does not know how to refuse a request in the target culture. Therefore in cross cultural communication, refusals are as a 'sticking points'. Refusals are very important because of their communicative role in social interaction. When one learns a second or foreign language, it is important to master pragmatic competence, specifically speech acts since they facilitate the process of communication. More precisely, uses of refusal strategies in the native and target language should be mastered by the second and foreign language learner which enables them to develop communicative competence and interact with native speakers appropriately.

Comparative studies have already revealed that the same speech act may be realized differently across cultures and languages. As Rubin (1981) believed different languages and cultures have different criteria of appropriateness of speech act strategies.

One of the major investigation into the speech act of refusal is a study conducted by Beebe et al. (1990). Using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), they compared the refusal pattern produced by native speakers of Japanese and native speakers of English. The subjects were 60 including 20 native speakers of Japanese, 20 Japanese speaking in English, and 20 American native speakers of English. They examined pragmatic transfer in refusals and considered the interlocutor's status in relation to each other as being higher, equal, and lower status. Using the taxonomy of refusal strategies, they found pragmatic transfer from Japanese to English in the order, frequency, and content of the semantic formulas. For example, unlike American speakers, the native speakers of Japanese and the Japanese learners of English used more direct strategies if the interlocutor's status was lower and ESL Japanese learner also used vague contents of excuse/ explanation which is a Japanese native pragmatic norm.

Al-Kahtani (2005) in his study on "refusal realization in three different cultures", also investigated the differences between Americans, Arabs, and Japanese in performing the speech act of refusal with respect to the order, frequency, and content of semantic formulas. The aim of the study was to find out the differences in realizing refusals in different cultures and the problems second or foreign language learners encounters when producing speech acts in the target language. The results showed that the participants performed refusals in different ways in some of the situations. So the researcher concluded different cultures have different ways to realize speech acts and that such differences may result in pragmatic failure or misunderstanding when they interact with each other.

From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, Fraser (1990) and Smith (1998) believed that refusals are complicated and they extremely depend upon some factors such as gender, power, level of

education, and social distance. In the case of speech act of refusal, Ghazanfari, Bonyadi, and Malekzadeh (2013) investigated cross linguistic differences in refusal speech act performed by native Persian and English speakers, considering gender differences. The researchers collected the data through examining 100 Persian and English movies and analyzed the dialogues in movies. They considered the frequency and content of the semantic formulas regarding the speaker's gender and types of eliciting acts and sign of distribution. Watching the movies, they transcribed and analyzed the utterances native speakers employed in their refusal. The result indicated that Persian speakers used *hedges*, *postponement*, *nonverbal avoidance*, *excuse*, and *unspecific reply* more than English speakers, but they utilized *regret*, *non-performative statement* and *lack of enthusiasm* less than English speakers. There were also some differences between the Persian and English languages regarding refusal utterances and gender. The result revealed that women utilized *performative verbs*, *regret*, *excuse*, and *unspecific reply* formula more than men and men used *non-performative statements*, *self-defense*, and *postponement* formula more than women.

In another study, Parvaresh, Bidaki, and Farahani (2014) examined the difference between the type of refusal strategies used by males and females. They also considered variables such as age, education levels, and politeness systems. They found that male and female subjects differed significantly only in their use of '*statement of regret*' type of refusal strategies in which females used this strategy much more than males. Also a significant difference was found among the age groups, different educational backgrounds and different politeness systems. In a similar trend, Arani (2013) investigated whether the age and sex of Iranian EFL learners had effect on their utilized refusal strategies. In contrast, she found that gender did not have any significant effect on using refusal strategies by EFL learners.

In addition to the studies done on refusal speech act, there are few studies considering the effect of gender and even these few have led to controversial results. That's why the present study has also taken into consideration gender differences in refusal utterances and tries to examine whether gender makes differences between male's and female's choice of refusal strategies.

With regard to personality traits, many studies have examined the area and the effect of such traits on different aspect of individual's life. Some of these studies are discussed below.

In a study carried out by Homayouni Porahmad, Nikpour, and Mosavi (2009), they investigated the relationship among personality dimensions and learning English. The result revealed that there were significant and positive relationships between learning English and Introversion and negative relationships between learning English and Extroversion.

In another correlation research, Petrides et al. (2010) examined the relationships between trait emotional intelligence and the Big Five personality traits in two Dutch samples. They found that Neuroticism was the strongest correlate of emotional intelligence in both samples, followed by Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Openness to experience. The result of regression analyses indicated that there was more than 50 percent overlap between trait emotional intelligence and the higher-order personality dimensions.

Hazrati-Viari, Rad, and Torabi (2012) also conducted a study and examined the effect of personality traits on academic performance and academic motivation. 250 college students participated in the study and were asked to fill out the NEO-FFI and AMS-C (academic motivation scale) questionnaires. The result revealed, openness predicted only intrinsic motivation and conscientiousness predicted both of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Conscientiousness and openness predicted academic performance. Also, they concluded that motivation plays a mediating role between personality traits and academic performance.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

215 EFL students participated in the main phase of the study including females and males. They were chosen from among the students of Vali-e-Asr University of Rafsanjan using the stratified random sampling method. Student's field of study included English Literature, English Translation, and Language Teaching. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 26. 162 EFL students filled in the two questionnaires from among the 215 participants and their responses were used in further analysis. Table 1 displays the distribution of the participants' gender.

Table 1. The distribution of participants' gender.

Gender	percentage	N
Female	73.5%	119
Male	26.5%	43
Total	100%	162

3.2. Instruments

The two data collection instruments employed in the present study were the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO- FFI).

3.2.1. Discourse Completion Task/ Test (DCT)

The first data collection tool was a questionnaire in the form of written open-ended DCT proposed by Beebe et al. (1990). It was first developed by Blum-Kulka (1982). DCTs are described as "written questionnaires including a number of brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialogue with an empty slot for the speech act under study" (Kasper & Dahl, 1991, p. 221). Kasper and Dahl (1991) believe that DCT is the most popular data elicitation method in speech act research.

DCT includes 12 natural refusal situations which are incomplete dialogues. The participants are asked to answer a DCT which consists of three requests (items 1, 2, and 12), three invitations (3, 4, and 10), three offers (7, 9, and 11), and three suggestions (5, 6, and 8). Each group of situations consists of three different variables: social status (high, equal, low), gender (male, female), and social distance (distant, equal, close).

3.2.2. NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI)

The second instrument was NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) questionnaire; it was the short form developed from the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R: Costa & McCrae, 1992). NEO-FFI contains 60 items which involve questions about typical behavior or reaction. It measures the Big Five personality factors including Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness to experience (O), Conscientiousness(C), and Agreeableness (A) in which each 12 items measure one trait. A 5-point Likert scale is used for coding participant's responses including strongly disagree (=1), disagree (=2), no idea (=3), agree (=4), and strongly agree (=5). This questionnaire has been translated into several languages and is employed in many countries. In order to ensure full understanding of the items, the Persian translation of the NEO-FFI is administered.

3.3. Pilot study

The researchers run a pilot test with a small set of subjects from the target population before administrating the NEO-FFI questionnaire to the main sample. One hundred subjects both females and males participated in the pilot study. They responded to the 60 items of the NEO-FFI after reading the instruction of the questionnaires carefully. Their responses were entered in the SPSS software for the purpose of pilot study. Around half of the items, 23 out of 60, were reversed-keyed in the NEO-FFI in order to control for acquiescence bias (Aluja, Garcia, Rossier, Garcia, 2005; Saucier, 1998). To investigate the validity of NEO-FFI questionnaire, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted. In order to select the appropriate number of factors, unrotated EFA was conducted. The NEO-FFI items were subjected to principal components analysis. This extracted 18 factors with eigenvalues over 1, which explained a total of 69.5 % of the variance in the NEO-FFI. A scree test (Cattell, 1966) was also used to specify components to be retained. An inspection of the scree plot indicated the presence of 5 factors for further investigation which explained 37.4 % of the variance. As far as this method will not always show the best results (Costello & Osborne, 2005), parallel analysis (Horn, 1965) was conducted which indicated six factors with eigenvalue exceeding the corresponding criterion values for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size. Thurstone believed that simple structure solution is more interpretable, replicatable, and useful in scientific work (Horn, 1967). So, the researchers conducted several rotated factor analyses and extracted three, four, five and six factors and compared these to obtain a simple structure in which the item loading on one factor was high (above .3) and there was no or few item crossloadings. Varimax rotation of the factors indicated that a five factor structure provided the best structure. Considering the original NEO-FFI questionnaire, the researchers compared it with the loading structure of the items. Items 49, 4, 27, 42, 13, 22, 47, 48, 52, and 53 were found that loaded on a component different from their corresponding components. Items 8, 14, 23, 34, 39, and 57 did not load on any components. Items 9, 19, 24, 33, and 46 had minus loading on one or two components and item 3 cross loaded on two components. So these items were deleted from further analysis in the main study. The remained items (38 items) from factor analysis were 38 items. To investigate reliability of the questionnaire, the internal consistency of the NEO-FFI was examined. Internal consistency is commonly measured with Cronbach alpha (Knapp, 1991). So a Cronbach alpha was run on a sample size of 162 EFL students. The obtained Cronbach alpha was 0.58 which falls below the acceptable value, as Nunnally (1978) believed 0.7 is an acceptable reliability coefficient. To maximize the internal consistency of the instrument, the least reliable items were removed from further analysis. As Wille (1996) proposed the internal consistency of one instrument is modified and maximized by removing the least reliable and consistent items. So to increase the reliability of the instrument, the least reliable items i.e. items number 6, 16, 26, 36, 41, 51, 7, 12, 38, and 29 were removed from further analysis. Fortunately it led to a satisfactory increase in reliability and boosted it to 0.73 which is an acceptable value. As Table 2 displays, after removing the least reliable items, 28 items were left.

Table 2. Remained Items of the NEO-FFI questionnaire

Components	No. of items	Items
Neuroticism	5	1, 11, 21, 31, 56
Extraversion	4	2, 7, 32, 37
Openness to experience	4	18, 28, 43, 58
Agreeableness	3	44, 54, 59
Conscientiousness	12	5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60

Considering the number of items per factor is the crucial point. In a scale which measures only one factor, four items for the factor is needed. In a scale with more than one factor, a minimum of three items per factor is the usual case in order to identify the subscales properly. There is also some exception in which two items per factor is also acceptable (Raubenheimer, 2004). As the above table shows all of the factors had the recommended number of items.

3.4. Procedure

All subjects were given the Persian version of the NEO-FFI questionnaire (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and indicated their degree of agreement to each item in a 5-point Likert scale. Based on the results of pilot, 10 minutes were enough to complete the NEO-FFI questionnaire. After completing NEO-FFI questionnaire, the respondents were asked to answer the DCT (Beebe et al., 1990) and filled out the incomplete dialogues quickly. The data were gathered during the class hour. Needed to say the DCT questionnaire takes about 20 minutes.

Participant's responses were collected for data analysis and analyzed to determine which refusal strategies were used by EFL students. The researcher coded their responses according to the taxonomy of refusal strategies proposed by Beebe et al. (1990) and then the coded responses were studied and confirmed by two Ph.D. experts in the field. Later on, the collected data were entered in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 18) software in the form of frequency count of refusal strategies and then the participants' responses to NEO-FFI questionnaire were added to undergo the relevant statistical analysis.

3.5. Data analysis

The collected data from the participants were analyzed and were coded as direct refusal, indirect refusal, and adjunct to refusal based on the Beebe et al. (1990) classification system. Regarding the refusal strategies found in the collected data, these three categories proved broad. Then the refusal responses of the participants were analyzed based on the same classification system but with additional categories suggested by Beebe et al. (1990). Participant's responses consisted of sequences of semantic formulas. According to Cohen (1996), a semantic formula refers to "a word, phrase, or sentence that meets a particular semantic criterion or strategy; any one or more of these can be used to perform the act in question" (p.265). For instance, in the situation in which the respondents had to refuse a request from a classmate asking to borrow the note of a missed class, the participants gave responses such as "Sorry, I need to read it tonight" which were coded as consisting two units [regret] and [excuse]. In another situation in which the respondents were offered a piece of cake by a friend, the participants gave responses such as "Thanks so much, I have eaten like a pig" which were coded as [gratitude] and [joke].

One point worthy of mentioning is that two new categories of the semantic formulas were identified including swearing and apology which were not already included in the Beebe's et al. (1990) classification of refusal strategies. For example:

"I'm sorry, I swear (Swearing) to God, I can't come"

"apologize me, I can't." (Apology)

After the coding process was completed, the refusal strategies used by the EFL learners were entered in SPSS software in form of frequency of the semantic formulas. In order to answer the first research question, the relationship between personality traits and refusal strategies used by EFL learners, the researcher used several regression analyses. To reply the second question, the researcher used t-tests in order to determine whether gender makes difference in the use of refusal strategies or not.

4. RESULTS

Using regression analysis, the researchers checked multicollinearity and normality assumptions. So the Pearson correlation coefficient, the tolerance level, and the variance inflation factor (VIF) values between the predictive variables were checked in order to ensure that the assumption of no multicollinearity was not violated. Analyses of Pearson correlations showed that none of the correlations reached the .7 threshold, no two variables were highly related. Checking tolerance levels and the VIF also showed that tolerance levels were not below .1 and the VIF values were beneath 10. Therefore, the assumption of no multicollinearity had been met. Another assumption, normality of the questionnaire was assessed by obtaining skewness (symmetry of the distribution) and kurtosis (peakedness of the distribution) values. Both skewness and kurtosis values of the research variables were within the acceptable limit of -2 and +2 (Bachman, 2004) suggesting a normal distribution.

Considering the broad categories of refusal strategies, direct, indirect and adjunct to refusal strategies, the following Table 3 displays descriptive statistics for each of the research variables including personality traits and refusal categories.

Table 3. Mean and variance, maximum, minimum of research variables

variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	variance
Neuroticism	6.00	25.00	15.08	17.21
Extroversion	7.00	20.00	14.09	8.14
Openness to experience	7.00	19.00	13.05	7.36
Agreeableness	4.00	15.00	10.64	5.58
Conscientiousness	25.00	60.00	45.37	55.04
Direct refusal	0	11	3.60	7.39
Indirect refusal	9	30	18.98	19.60
Adjunct to refusal	0	2	3.36	7.96

In order to discover which refusal strategies had a significant relationship to learner's personality traits, linear regression analyses were applied. Using linear regression analyses, at first the broad categories of strategies direct strategies, indirect strategies, and adjunct to refusal were considered. In three separate analyses using the enter method, frequency of direct strategies, indirect strategies, and adjunct to refusal were entered as dependent variables with the Neuroticism (N), Extroversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C) scores entered as predictor variables.

As Table 4. Shows, in terms of direct strategies, regression results indicated that direct strategies did not significantly predict the five personality traits: N, E, O, A, and C.

Table 4. Regression analysis of the direct strategies and personality traits

	<i>Standardized beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Neuroticism	.11	1.41	.15
Extroversion	.15	1.84	.06
Openness to experience	.02	.26	.79
Agreeableness	.11	1.45	.14
Conscientiousness	-.04	-.53	.59

Considering indirect strategies, regression results showed that these strategies significantly predicted the Extroversion trait: $b = -.21$, $t = -2.68$, $p < 0.05$. Indirect strategies also explained a significant proportion of variance in Extroversion scores, $R^2 = .05$, $F = 2.46$, $p < 0.05$ (Table 5).

Table 5. Regression analysis of the indirect strategies and personality traits

	Standardized beta	t	Sig
Neuroticism	-.14	-1.69	.09
Extroversion	-.21	-2.68	.008
Openness to experience	.08	1.02	.30
Agreeableness	.003	.04	.96
Conscientiousness	.13	1.69	.09

As Table 6 shows, in terms of adjunct to refusal, the results indicated that these strategies predict Neuroticism, $b = -.16$, $t = -1.94$, $p \leq 0.05$. Adjunct to refusal strategies explained a significant proportion of variance in Neuroticism scores, $R^2 = .08$, $F = 2.60$, $p < 0.05$.

Table 6. Regression analysis of the adjunct to refusal and personality traits

	Standardized beta	t	Sig
Neuroticism	-.16	-1.94	.05
Extraversion	-.09	-1.13	.25
Openness to experience	.14	1.80	.07
Agreeableness	.07	.99	.32
Conscientiousness	.11	1.46	.14

Each of these broad categories consisted of additional categories suggested by Beebe et al. (1990), which were used for coding participant's responses to the DCT situations. It was observed that EFL learners used a wide range of strategies. Totally, 27 strategies were employed when refusing a request, a suggestion, an invitation, and an offer by EFL learners. In a more specific way, in order to know which types of direct, indirect and adjunct to refusal strategies predict the personality traits, 27 separate analyses were done. The utilized strategies were entered as dependent variables with the Neuroticism (N), Extroversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C) scores entered as predictor variables. As displays in Table 7, the result indicated that seven out of 27 strategies showed some relationship with some of personality traits. These strategies were *No*, *Joke*, *Lack of enthusiasm*, *Let interlocutor off the hook*, *Gratitude*, *Statement of principle*, and *Swearing*.

Table 7. Regression analysis of 27 refusal strategies and personality traits.

	No			Joke			Lack of enthusiasm			Let interlocutor off the hook			Statement of principle			Gratitude			Swearing					
	Beta	Sig	R2	Beta	Sig	R2	Beta	Sig	R2	Beta	Sig	R2	Beta	Sig	R2	Beta	Sig	R2	Beta	Sig	R2			
N																								
E	.17	.03	.05				-.21	.01	.05										-.21	.01	.06			
O										.15	.04	.04												
A																								
C				-.20	.009	.07							.17	.03	.03							-.17	.03	.04

Result from regression analyses revealed personality traits accounted for 34 percent of variances in the choice of refusal strategies.

As Table 7 shows, the beta weight and statistical significance were analyzed and examined. Based on the results, Neuroticism showed significant relationship with *Gratitude* strategy ($p \leq .05$), and only six percent of the variance in this strategy was explained by the Neuroticism trait ($R^2 = .06$). One unit increase in Neuroticism came to the .21 decrease in using *Gratitude* strategy.

It was also found that only one of the five personality traits, Extroversion showed significant relationship with *No* and *Lack of enthusiasm* strategies, $b = .17$ ($p \leq .05$) and $b = -.21$ ($p \leq .05$) respectively. R squared value indicated that just five percent ($.05 \times 100 = 5\%$) of the variance in each of the dependent variables, *No* and *Lack of enthusiasm*, is explained by the Extroversion trait. The result indicated that for one unit increase in Extroversion, there was a beta weight of .17 increase in using *No* strategy and .21 unit decrease in using *Lack of enthusiasm* strategy.

Another trait, Openness to experience personality trait indicated a significantly positive relationship ($b = .15$, $p \leq .05$) with *Let interlocutor off the hook* strategy, and only four percent of variance in this strategy was explained by Openness to experience.

Conscientiousness also revealed statistically significant relationship with three strategies including *Joke*, *Statement of principle*, and *Swearing* ($p \leq .05$) which respectively seven, three, and four percent of the variance in these strategies were explained by the Conscientiousness, and one unit increase in Conscientiousness caused .2 and .17 unit decrease in *Joke* and *Swearing* strategies respectively and .17 unit increase in *Statement of principle* strategy. In contrast, Agreeableness did not show any significant relationship with refusal strategies.

To reply the second research question, 27 t-tests were carried out in order to compare the performance of male and female subjects in the use of these 27 refusal strategies. The results indicated that there was difference between male's and female's choice of seven refusal strategies including: *Criticize the requester*, *Hedging*, *Postponement*, *Statement of regret*, *Statement of empathy*, *Statement of principle*, and *Unspecific reply*.

In terms of *Criticize the requester* strategy, mean performance of male and female subjects differed; as shown in Table 8, male participants used this strategy more than females.

Criticize the requester

Table 8. Group Statistics.

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Criticize requester	Male	43	.93	.936	.143
	female	119	.61	.690	.063

Table 9. Independent sample t-test.

		T	df	Sig
Criticize the requester	Equal variances assumed	2.33	160	.02

Concerning other six strategies including: *Hedging*, *Postponement*, *Statement of regret*, *statement of empathy*, *Statement of principle*, and *Unspecific reply*; the result showed that female participants used these strategies more than males (see table 10). As table 11 shows, the result of independent sample t-test indicated that the difference between male and female performance was significant in these six strategies.

Table 10. Groups' Statistics.

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Hedging	male	43	.00	.000	.000
	female	119	.18	.431	.040
Postponement	male	43	.44	.666	.101
	female	119	.71	.894	.082
St. of regret	male	43	2.33	1.936	.295
	female	119	3.03	1.811	.166
St. of empathy	male	43	.00	.000	.000
	female	119	.06	.270	.025
St. of principle	male	43	.16	.433	.066
	female	119	.39	.652	.060
Unspecific reply	male	43	.00	.000	.000
	female	119	.06	.236	.022

Table 11. Independent samples t-tests.

		T	d.f.	Sig
Hedging	Equal variances not assumed	-4.67	118	.000
Postponement	Equal variances not assumed	-2.08	99.54	.03
St. of regret	Equal variances assumed	-2.13	160	.035
St. of empathy	Equal variances not assumed	-2.37	118	.019
St. of principle	Equal variances not assumed	-2.51	112.37	.013
Unspecific reply	Equal variances not assumed	-2.71	118	.008

5. DISCUSSION

To answer the first research question, whether there is relationship between personality traits and refusal strategies used by EFL learners, several standard linear regression analyses were conducted. Result from regression analyses revealed that there were some relationship between personality traits and the choice of refusal strategies by EFL learners. The results indicated that personality traits accounted for 34 percent of variance in EFL learner's choice of refusal strategies.

According to Table 7, Conscientiousness explained 14 percent of variance in refusal strategies. To be more specific, Conscientiousness accounted for seven percent of variance in *Joke* strategy and four percent of variance in *Swearing* strategy; of course the relation between these two strategies and Conscientiousness was negative. As Hirsh, De Young, and Peterson (2009) believe conscientious people have high level of moral principle, perfectionism, and self-control and they are less likely to tell a dirty joke and swear. It was also found Conscientiousness accounted for three percent of variance in *Statement of principle* strategy and the relation between them was positive. Oldham and Morris (1995, p.62) proposed that "having strong moral principles and being certain" is one of the interests of the Conscientious character style.

Another trait, Extroversion showed some relationship with two strategies including *No* and *Lack of enthusiasm*. Extroversion accounted for five percent of variance in *No* strategy and the relation between them was positive. As Nguyen (1998) (cited in Nguyen, 2006) believes personality is one of the factors which affects directness and indirectness in human interaction. He states extroverted persons tend to use more directness in their communication than the introverted one, so extroverted people have more tendency to express their feelings and use direct strategy. Extroversion also explained five percent of variance in *lack of enthusiasm* in which the relation between them was negative. Apparently extroversion had a negative relation with lack of enthusiasm strategy due to the fact that extroverts tend to be enthusiastic and excited (Wikipedia).

It was also found Neuroticism explained six percent of variance in *Gratitude* strategy while the relation between Neuroticism and *Gratitude* was negative. Concerning this strategy, due to the fact that the speech act of refusal belongs to the commissive category, this result was in line with the finding of Appling et al. (2013) in which they found that Neuroticism was negatively associated with commissives. As Emmons and McCullough (2004) found gratitude was positively related to the positive affect and life satisfaction and negatively related to negative affect and neuroticism. Reynolds (2002) also suggested that "neurotic persons are not characterized by gratitude" since "neurosis is unrealistic but gratitude is a natural response to taking a realistic look at the world, including our place in it" (p.39).

Openness to experiences also showed positive relationship with *Let interlocutor off the hook* and explained four percent of variance in this strategy. In contrast, Agreeableness didn't show any significant relationship with the use of refusal strategies.

To reply the second question, whether there is any significant differences between male's and female's choice of refusal strategies, several t-tests were conducted in order to investigate gender differences in refusal utterances. The result indicted that there were gender differences regarding the use of some refusal strategies which was in contrast to Arani's (2013) finding in which she found that gender did not have any significant effect on using refusal strategies by EFL learners.

According to Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dansen (2002), the term gender refers to the behavior that a society regards it as proper characteristic from men and women. Also men and women's roles in a society and society's perceptions are related to the way they behave and produce utterances.

The result indicated women used *Hedging*, *Postponement*, *Statement of regret*, *Statement of empathy*, *Statement of principle*, and *Unspecific reply* with more observed frequency than men. Moreover, females are more probably to be sensitive. As William and Best's checklist (1982) proposed females express more *Statement of regret* in order to refuse their partners.

Concerning the use of *Statement of regret* and *Unspecific reply* with more observed frequency for females, the results of the present study is in line with the finding of Ghazanfari et al. (2013). In terms of using *postponement*, Ghazanfari's et al. finding shows the reverse result in which men used *postponement* formula more than women. Also Parvaresh et al. (2014) found the same result concerning the use of *Statement of regret* type of refusal strategies in which females used this strategy much more than males. Considering this strategy, the result showed the mean performance of female was 3.03, while for male it was 2.33.

As Lackoff (1975) in Holmes (2001) proposed the use of *Hedging* as one of the identifiers of women's speech. She believed that the use of hedging indicated speaker's lack of confidence, and women use hedging when they are uncertain. Based on Lackoff researches, women use hedging devices and they are tentative in their conversation. Some researchers discovered that women use three times as many hedges as men, and some researchers found no differences (Holmes, 2001).

Another finding of the study was that men used *criticize the requester* formula more than women. Male used *criticize the requester* due to the fact that men used more direct language than women (Craver). "Men are more direct and less concerned about feelings, while women often approach issues in a more circuitous fashion (Sherwood cited in Travers, 2012)".

6. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between personality traits and the refusal strategies used by Iranian EFL learners. It also investigated the effect of gender on the choice of refusal strategies. One hundred and sixty two students filled out the questionnaires of the study including NEO-FFI and DCT.

Regression analyses indicated significant relationship between personality traits and the use of some of refusal strategies by EFL students. As results showed personality traits accounted for 34 percent of variance in EFL learner's choice of refusal strategies and seven out of twenty-seven strategies indicated some relationship with personality traits. These strategies were *No*, *Joke*, *Lack of enthusiasm*, *Let interlocutor off the hook*, *Gratitude*, *Statement of principle*, and *Swearing*. To investigate whether there is any significant difference between males and female's choice of refusal strategies, several t-tests were conducted. The result showed significant difference between male's and female's performance on seven refusal strategies including: *Criticize the requester*, *Hedging*, *Postponement*, *Statement of regret*, *Statement of empathy*, *Statement of principle*, and *Unspecific reply*.

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