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NEGOTIATING NO: REFUSAL STRATEGIES IN ALGERIAN ARABIC AND CHAOUI ACROSS AGE AND DIALECT

Hayır Demenin Müzakeresi: Cezayir Arapçası ve Şaviye'de Yaş
ve Lehçeye Göre Red Stratejileri

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Abstract: Refusal strategies have attracted sustained attention in cross-cultural pragmatics research, yet the internal pragmatic diversity

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of Arabic-speaking nations remains largely uncharted, leaving significant questions about how dialect membership and generational change interact to shape face-management behaviour. This article addresses that gap through a systematic comparison of refusal behaviour in Algerian Arabic and Chaoui, foregrounding the roles of dialect membership and generational positioning in governing the selection and organisation of refusal strategies. This study uses a written discourse completion task (DCT) including 24 scenarios representing four refusal categories drawn from Beebe et al.'s (1990) taxonomy. Data collected from 84 adult native speakers stratified by dialect and age cohort show a shared pragmatic norm mandating justification for refusals across both communities, alongside systematic divergences in face-management thresholds. Chaoui speakers produce direct refusals at a substantially higher rate than their Algerian Arabic counterparts at every age level, a pattern interpreted in relation to distinct communicative cultures. Generational analysis reveals a consistent trajectory from elaborate, face-protective, and formulaically dense refusals among older speakers toward briefer, more direct, and code-switched responses among younger speakers, with evidence of cross-dialectal pragmatic convergence in the youngest cohort. The findings extend the empirical base of cross-cultural refusal research into underrepresented Maghrebi varieties and raise questions about universalist assumptions embedded in canonical refusal taxonomies.

Keywords: *Refusal strategies, Algerian Arabic, Chaoui, face-threatening acts, Cross-cultural pragmatics.*

Öz: Red stratejileri, kültürlerarası edimbilim araştırmalarında sürekli ilgi görmüş; ancak Arapça konuşan ülkelerin iç edimbilimsel çeşitliliği büyük ölçüde haritalanmamıştır. Bu çalışma, Cezayir Arapçası ve Şaviye'de red davranışının sistematik bir karşılaştırmasını sunmakta; lehçe üyeliği ve kuşak konumlanmasının red stratejilerinin seçimi ve düzenlenmesindeki rollerini ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Çalışma, Beebe ve ark.'nın (1990) taksonomisinden alınan dört red kategorisini temsil eden 24 senaryo içeren yazılı bir söylem tamamlama görevi (DCT) kullanmaktadır. Lehçe ve yaş grubuna göre tabakalanan 84 yetişkin anadil konuşucusundan toplanan veriler, her iki toplulukta da redler için gerekçe sunulmasını zorunlu kılan ortak bir edimbilimsel normu, bununla birlikte yüz yönetimi eşiklerindeki sistematik sapmaları ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, kültürlerarası red araştırmasının deneysel

temelini temsil edilmemiş Mağrip çeşitlerine genişletmekte ve kanonik red taksonomilerinde gömülü evrenselci varsayımları sorgulamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Red stratejileri, Cezayir Arapçası, Şaviye, Yüz tehdit eden edimler, Kültürlerarası Edimbilim.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The pragmatic study of refusals occupies a well-established position within speech act theory, yet its empirical base remains disproportionately skewed toward Western, and specifically Anglo-American, interactional contexts. The present article addresses that imbalance by examining how refusals are produced in two speech communities of northern Algeria: speakers of Algerian Arabic and speakers of Chaoui (Tachawit), a Berber variety widely spoken across the Aurès region. The theoretical grounding for this work derives from Austin's (1962) claim that language constitutes action rather than mere description, and from Searle's (1969) elaboration of the conditions governing felicitous illocutionary acts. Within this framework, refusals are face-threatening acts of a commissive-like nature: declining a request, invitation, offer, or suggestion signals that the speaker's preferences diverge from those the interlocutor projected, placing both the speaker's negative face (the right to act without imposition) and the hearer's positive face (the desire to be accepted) at risk. This dual face-threat is precisely what makes refusals interactionally costly and pragmatically consequential.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model supplied the conceptual architecture that has organised refusal research for more than three decades. Their proposal that interlocutors weigh a face-threatening act's severity according to social distance, relative power, and the culturally specific ranking of imposition remains a productive heuristic for cross-cultural comparison, despite substantial critique of its universalist ambition (see, inter alia, Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003). Because refusals occupy the dispreferred slot in the adjacency pair initiated by a request or offer, they virtually always trigger some face-saving manoeuvre, whether mitigation, indirection, elaborate justification, or combinations of these.

The systematic, empirically grounded study of refusal strategies was decisively shaped by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990), whose

taxonomy of direct and indirect semantic formulas, supplemented by adjunct categories such as regret, excuse and reason, alternative, and philosophical digression, became the *de facto* standard for comparative research through the 1990s and beyond. The discourse completion task (DCT) methodology they operationalised alongside this taxonomy proved similarly influential, enabling systematic cross-cultural comparison across speech communities. Early findings identified clear cross-cultural patterning: American English speakers were comparatively more direct in certain refusal contexts, while Japanese interlocutors favoured more elaborate, formulaic face-protective sequences (Beebe et al., 1990; Takahashi & Beebe, 1993).

Subsequent research extended this framework into a wider range of linguistic communities. Nelson, Al-Batal, and Echols (1996) found that Egyptian Arabic speakers relied more heavily on adjunct devices, particularly extended justification and religious formulae, than their American counterparts, consistent with characterisations of Arabic communicative culture as oriented toward relational solidarity and face preservation. This picture was corroborated by Al-Issa (2003) in Jordan, by Afghari (2007) in Persian, and by Félix-Brasdefer (2004), whose study of Latin American Spanish learners of English showed that refusal politeness varies systematically with length of residence in the target-language community, underscoring that refusal strategies are sensitive not only to native sociocultural norms but to the dynamics of language contact and acquisition. Across these studies, a consistent theme emerges: refusal-strategy selection is never purely cognitive or semantic but is fundamentally embedded in the sociopragmatic norms that speakers acquire, often below the threshold of conscious awareness, as part of their broader communicative competence.

More recent scholarship has continued to extend the empirical base of refusal research within Arabic-speaking contexts specifically. Izadi and Zilaie (2015) documented the semantic formulas favoured by Persian speakers, while Benbouya and Rabab'ah (2022) found a marked preference for direct refusal across all interlocutor statuses in Algerian Spoken Arabic, a useful point of comparison for the present findings. Huwari et al. (2023) on Jordanian Arabic and American English, Huneety et al. (2024) on Ammani Arabic monolingual and bilingual speakers, and Nordin, Hamza, and Hussin (2024) on invitation refusals among Iraqi Arabs and Kurds have each confirmed that refusal behaviour within the Arabic-speaking world is far from monolithic, varying systematically by dialect, interlocutor status, and bilingual

repertoire. This accumulating body of dialect-internal research reinforces the rationale for the present study's contrastive focus on Algerian Arabic and Chaoui, two varieties that remain typologically and historically distinct despite their shared national context.

Any investigation of speech act behaviour in Algeria must be grounded in an appreciation of the country's sociolinguistic complexity. The Algerian linguistic ecology is characterised by a historically layered co-presence of Algerian Arabic (Darja), Tamazight in several distinct regional forms, Modern Standard Arabic, and French (Benrabah, 1999; Morsly, 1988; Taleb-Ibrahimi, 1997). Of these, Chaoui (Tachawit), spoken predominantly across the Aurès massif and the wilayate of Batna, Khenchela, and Oum El Bouaghi, constitutes one of the most demographically significant Berber varieties in Algeria and one of the least studied from a pragmatic perspective. Chaoui speakers typically operate within a wider multilingual repertoire that includes Darja and, for many, French, raising theoretically productive questions about the degree to which pragmatic norms transfer across the contact varieties available to them.

Against this background, the present study addresses three interrelated gaps in the existing literature. The first is geographical and varietal: whilst Arabic speech act research has grown considerably since the 1990s, the Maghrebi Arabic cluster, and Algerian Darja in particular, remains underrepresented relative to its demographic and typological significance. The handful of studies engaging pragmatically with Moroccan Darija (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2008; Ghounane, 2012) or Tunisian Arabic have generally focused on address forms or code-switching rather than on the organisation of speech acts as such, and no published study has yet offered a systematic, empirically grounded account of refusal strategies in Algerian Arabic across varied social parameters. The second gap is specific to Chaoui: whilst existing descriptive scholarship on Tachawit has addressed phonology (Naït-Zerrad, 1994), morphology (Chaker, 1983), and dialectal lexicology (Basset, 1923; Mammeri, 1976), its pragmatic dimension remains entirely uncharted, a lacuna made more consequential by the multilingual circumstances in which Chaoui speakers routinely operate. The third, and theoretically most generative, gap lies in the potential for contrastive analysis between Algerian Arabic and Chaoui: in communities across the Aurès-adjacent corridor where both varieties are spoken, speakers shift regularly between them, yet it remains an open empirical question whether this code-switching reflects divergent underlying pragmatic

norms or contact-induced convergence toward a more unified pragmatic repertoire.

Beyond these empirical lacunae, there is a broader theoretical motivation for the present undertaking. The predominance of American English data in the foundational refusal studies has left the resulting theoretical models with an implicit cultural bias rarely subjected to critical scrutiny. Extending the empirical base to speakers of Algerian Arabic and Chaoui, varieties embedded in sociohistorical contexts radically different from those that shaped the canonical models, is not merely an exercise in data accumulation but an opportunity to interrogate the universalist assumptions on which existing taxonomies rest. It is in this spirit that the present article approaches refusal behaviour: not as a peripheral contribution to applied sociolinguistics, but as part of the broader project of building a genuinely cross-linguistic and culturally inclusive pragmatic theory.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study follows an interpretivist sociolinguistic-pragmatic paradigm, which views language use as socially and culturally constructed through interaction (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Adopting a comparative cross-sectional mixed-methods design (a research approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods and collects data at one single point in time), the study addresses two main research questions:

How are refusal strategies realized in Algerian Arabic and Chaoui across different age groups?

To what extent do Algerian Arabic and Chaoui speakers display divergent or convergent pragmatic norms in refusal behaviour?

Refusal strategies were categorised and labelled according to the seven-category semantic-formula taxonomy developed by Beebe et al. (1990), applied here to the Algerian Arabic and Chaoui data. Coding was not performed by a single analyst alone: it was carried out independently by two trained coders, and a 20% subsample was double-coded to establish inter-coder agreement (Cohen's $\kappa = .87$); the full coding and reliability procedure is detailed in the Data Analysis section.

2.1. PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

The study involved eighty-four adult native speakers distributed across two dialect communities and two regions of Algeria. Forty-two participants were speakers of Algerian Arabic (Darja) recruited from Tissemsilt, and forty-two were Chaoui-speaking participants recruited from Batna, a selection deliberately sensitive to the regional and sociolinguistic distinctiveness of the two groups. Participants were selected through stratified purposive sampling, with the primary criterion being that each individual must use the target dialect as their principal medium of daily communication. Within this bounded population, the sample was further stratified according to two sociolinguistic variables: dialect group and age cohort.

Although the primary stratification variables were dialect group and age cohort, educational background and occupation were also documented for every participant at the point of recruitment, so that the comparability of the two dialect samples on these dimensions could be assessed rather than assumed. Across the full sample, 31.0% of participants held a secondary-level qualification, 47.6% held an undergraduate university degree, and 21.4% held a postgraduate qualification; occupationally, 26.2% were current university students, 41.7% were employed in non-academic professions, 17.9% were employed within the education sector, and 14.3% were unemployed or retired. Chi-square tests of independence confirmed that neither educational level, $\chi^2(2) = 0.25$, $p = .881$, nor occupational category, $\chi^2(3) = 0.10$, $p = .992$, differed significantly between the Algerian Arabic and Chaoui samples, indicating that the two dialect groups were adequately matched on these dimensions and that the inter-dialectal differences reported in the Results section are unlikely to be confounded by educational or occupational composition. Nevertheless, because education and occupation were treated as descriptive controls rather than built into the stratified sampling design as independent variables in their own right, their potential influence on refusal-strategy selection, an influence attested in prior pragmatic research (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Irani, 2022), could not be modelled directly within the present design; this constraint is revisited in the Limitations section.

2.2. AGE AS A SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIABLE

Following life-stage models developed within variationist sociolinguistics (Coupland, 2001; Eckert, 1997), age was

operationalised in this study not merely as a demographic category but as a socially meaningful construct associated with particular communicative norms, degrees of cultural authority, and differential exposure to linguistic change. Three cohorts were identified:

Young adults (18–30): speakers socialised within late-modern, digitally mediated environments whose communicative repertoires have been shaped by exposure to social media, globalisation, and rapidly evolving interactional norms.

Middle-aged adults (31–50): speakers who balance the internalisations of traditional communicative values against the institutional demands of professional and familial responsibility, occupying an intermediary position between conservative and modernising pragmatic orientations.

Older adults (51+): speakers whose language use is characterised by conservative, formulaic, and deference-oriented patterns, deeply anchored in culturally and religiously inflected norms consolidated through lifelong socialisation.

2.3. SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION

The total sample of 84 participants was divided equally between the two dialect groups, with 14 participants in each age cohort within each group, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sampling Design of the Study

Variable	Category	N	%
Total Participants	N/A	84	100%
Dialect Groups	Algerian Arabic (Darja)	42	50%
	Chaoui (Tachawit)	42	50%
Age Cohorts (per dialect)	18–30	14	16.7%
	31–50	14	16.7%
	51+	14	16.7%

2.4 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Data were collected by means of a written discourse completion task (DCT), a well-established elicitation instrument in cross-cultural pragmatics research (Beebe et al., 1990; Kasper & Dahl, 1991). The DCT comprised twenty-four scenarios, designed without rejoinders so as not to prime or constrain participants' responses; each scenario

described a social situation and invited participants to write what they would actually say.

The scenarios covered four refusal categories drawn from Beebe et al.'s (1990) taxonomy: refusing requests, refusing invitations, refusing offers, and refusing suggestions. The original scenarios were adapted where necessary to reflect Algerian cultural norms and interactional contexts, and new scenarios were introduced to maintain ecological validity for both speech communities. Table 2 summarises the scenario types and their corresponding interactional contexts.

Table 2. Description and Classification of DCT Scenarios

Scenario Type	Social Context	Interactional Range	Scenario Numbers
Material/resource requests	Money, car, laptop, textbooks	Friends, siblings, colleagues, juniors	1, 4, 5
Social invitations	Tea, coffee, weddings, visits	Friends, relatives, neighbors	6, 7, 8, 10, 11
Offers and gifts	Food, financial help, material gifts	Family, elders, peers	9, 12, 13, 14, 16
Assistance requests	Help with tasks, writing, chores	Juniors, siblings, colleagues	2, 3, 17, 24
Advice/suggestions	Lifestyle, study, appearance, work	Friends, elders, teachers	15, 18, 19, 21, 22
Authority-based requests	Parents, managers, superiors	High power relations	20, 23
Time-constrained obligations	Meetings, events, commitments	Friends, relatives, colleagues	3, 20, 10, 11, 23

2.5. DATA ANALYSIS

All DCT responses were transcribed and segmented into semantic formulas following Beebe et al.'s (1990) taxonomy, with each formula assigned to one of the seven strategy categories reported in the Results section. Coding was carried out independently by two trained coders, both of whom held graduate-level training in pragmatics and native or near-native competence in Algerian Arabic; one coder additionally held native competence in Chaoui and was assisted by a bilingual research consultant when coding the Chaoui subsample. To establish inter-coder

reliability, a randomly selected 20% subsample of the corpus (approximately 420 of the 2,094 coded formulas) was independently double-coded. Agreement between coders was quantified using Cohen's Kappa (Cohen, 1960), yielding $\kappa = .87$, which falls within the "almost perfect" agreement band proposed by Landis and Koch (1977). Disagreements, concentrated primarily at the boundary between excuse/reason/explanation and philosophy/future-acceptance formulas, were resolved through discussion between the coders until full consensus was reached; the remaining 80% of the corpus was then coded by a single coder applying the reconciled scheme.

Quantitative analysis proceeded in two stages. First, descriptive frequencies and percentages were calculated for each refusal strategy by dialect group (see the Comparative Frequency of Refusal Strategies subsection) and by age cohort within each dialect (see the Age as a Pragmatic Variable subsection). Second, because a percentage difference alone cannot establish whether an observed distributional divergence exceeds what would be expected by chance, inferential statistical testing was conducted to formally evaluate whether the distribution of refusal strategies differed significantly by dialect and by age cohort. An omnibus chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was computed across the full 7 (strategy) $\times$ 2 (dialect) contingency table; because this test was significant, follow-up 2 $\times$ 2 comparisons were then conducted for each strategy category against all remaining categories combined, with adjusted standardized residuals inspected to identify the categories driving the overall association. Because the corpus-level sample sizes are large ($N = 1,004$ for Algerian Arabic; $N = 1,090$ for Chaoui), statistical significance was interpreted alongside effect size, using Cramér's V .

3. RESULTS

The following section presents the distribution and qualitative analysis of refusal strategies across Algerian Arabic and Chaoui, based on the semantic formulas identified in the DCT responses.

3.1. COMPARATIVE FREQUENCY OF REFUSAL STRATEGIES IN ALGERIAN ARABIC AND CHAOUI SPEECH COMMUNITIES

Table 3. Distribution of Semantic Formulas: Algerian Arabic (N = 1,004), Chaoui (N = 1,090)

Refusal Strategy (Beebe et al., 1990)	Algerian Arabic (%)	Chaoui (%)	Δ (Delta %)	Interpretation
Excuse/Reason/Explanation	36.5	36.0		Convergence
Direct Refusal	18.5	28.0	+9.5	Major Divergence
Regret/Apology	14.7	12.0		Minor Divergence
Gratitude/Positive Feeling	13.6	7.0		Notable Divergence
Alternative	8.2	9.0	+0.8	Convergence
Philosophy/Future Acceptance	5.2	4.0		Negligible
Partial Acceptance	3.2	4.0	+0.8	Convergence

Table 3 shows both similarities and differences in the use of refusal strategies between Algerian Arabic and Chaoui speakers. The two groups converged in the use of Excuse/Reason/Explanation, Alternative, and Partial Acceptance strategies, indicating relatively similar pragmatic behaviour. Minor divergence appeared in Regret/Apology and Philosophy/Future Acceptance, suggesting only slight variation between the groups. In contrast, Gratitude/Positive Feeling showed notable divergence, while Direct Refusal demonstrated major divergence, with Chaoui speakers using direct refusals more frequently than Algerian Arabic speakers. Collectively, the findings reveal partial pragmatic convergence alongside noticeable variation in certain refusal patterns.

To formally evaluate whether the descriptive divergences reported above exceed what would be expected by chance, an omnibus chi-square test of independence was conducted across the full 7×2 contingency table of strategy by dialect. This test was statistically significant, $\chi^2(6, N = 2,094) = 48.69, p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .153$, indicating a small-to-medium overall association between dialect group and refusal-strategy selection. Follow-up 2×2 comparisons for each strategy category, evaluated against a Bonferroni-corrected alpha level of .0071, are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Chi-Square Tests of Independence for Refusal Strategy Distribution by Dialect

Refusal Strategy	AA (n)	Chaoui (n)	$\chi^2(1)$	p	ϕ	Significance
Excuse/Reason/Explanation	366	392	0.04	.851	.004	n.s.
Direct Refusal	186	305	25.51	<	.110	$p < .0071$

				.001		
Regret/Apology	148	131	3.12	.077	.039	n.s.
Gratitude/Positive Feeling	137	76	24.74	< .001	.109	$p < .0071$
Alternative	82	98	0.35	.553	.013	n.s.
Philosophy/Future Acceptance	52	44	1.31	.252	.025	n.s.
Partial Acceptance	32	44	0.85	.357	.020	n.s.

The inferential results converge closely with, and in one respect refine, the percentage-based interpretation offered above. The Direct Refusal and Gratitude/Positive Feeling categories, the two strategies showing the largest percentage divergence, were both statistically significant even under the conservative Bonferroni-corrected threshold, confirming that these distributional differences are unlikely to be artefacts of sampling variability. By contrast, the Regret/Apology category, which showed only a 2.7-percentage-point difference and had been provisionally labelled a “minor divergence” on descriptive grounds alone, did not reach statistical significance, $\chi^2(1) = 3.12, p$

3.1.1. REFUSAL STRATEGIES BY ALGERIAN ARABIC SPEAKERS

The most salient feature of the Algerian Arabic data is a robust preference for indirect realisation. Across the twenty-four scenarios, participants consistently packaged their negative responses within elaborated turns that combine justification, apology, and relational affirmation, a pattern that suggests that, within this speech community, the social meaning of how one refuses is as consequential as the refusal itself. A total of 1,004 semantic formulas were identified and coded across all forty-two participants.

Excuse, reason, and explanation formulas constitute just over one third of all coded instances, establishing them as the primary strategic resource for refusal in Algerian Arabic. Direct refusals rank second, at a considerably lower frequency, followed by regret/apology and gratitude/positive feeling, categories that function predominantly as face-protective adjuncts accompanying the core refusal move rather than as refusal moves in their own right. Alternatives and partial acceptances occur less frequently but remain pragmatically significant contributors to the broader mitigation landscape.

The qualitative character of these justification sequences deserves particular attention. Across the scenarios, the vast majority of participants supplied some form of justification, invoking time

pressure, pre-existing commitments, health constraints, financial limitations, or institutional rules. In the scenario involving an uncle's request for a ride to a distant wilaya, for instance, several male respondents explained that they do not drive outside the city or that their vehicle is unreliable for long-distance travel. These justifications were expressed through formulations such as:

/wallah ʔi:r semhli rani daj mama ʔbi:b rahi tstena fja/

(“I am very sorry, I am taking my mother to the doctor, she is waiting for me”)

This response encodes an external, circumstantial constraint that displaces the locus of responsibility from the speaker's personal preferences onto situational demands. In the scenario involving a request for help with baking, female participants typically invoked pending examinations or professional deadlines, for example:

/ʕandi ixtibarat rani nwadzed lhom/

(“I have exams, I am preparing for them”)

Here, refusal is framed as the inevitable consequence of external obligation rather than personal unwillingness.

Pre-refusal expressions of regret and apology were recurrent across scenarios, functioning as interactional groundwork for the forthcoming negative response. Forms such as /semhili/ (“pardon me” / “forgive me”) frequently appear at the opening of a turn, preparing the interactional ground before the refusal itself is delivered. In contexts perceived as particularly face-threatening, notably financial requests, some participants articulate a principled stance rather than a situational excuse. For instance:

/ma nsel:iff mablay kbi:r lttfel/

(“I never lend such amounts to children”)

This formulation frames the refusal as the expression of a personal value rather than a case-specific decision, and is thereby rendered more difficult to contest. This principled-refusal strategy, classified under “philosophy / future acceptance” in Beebe et al.'s taxonomy, though relatively infrequent overall, acquires particular salience in morally inflected scenarios.

Religious blessings and expressions of goodwill also function throughout the data as relational frame-setters that allow speakers to signal genuine care for the interlocutor even as they deliver a negative response. The pattern:

/allah jaʃtik essaħ:a bsaħ ma nqdarf nzi/
 (“May God grant you health, but I cannot come”)

This is illustrative, it opens with a benediction that affirms relational warmth, then pivots to an unambiguous but softened refusal. Taken together, these patterns confirm that Algerian Arabic speakers characteristically embed refusals within sequences of justification, expressed regret, and relational affirmation rather than producing isolated negative responses.

3.1.2. REFUSAL STRATEGIES IN CHAOUI SPEAKERS

The Chaoui corpus displays a notably different configurational profile. A total of 1,090 semantic formulas were coded across forty-two participants. The immediately striking feature, relative to the Algerian Arabic data, is the substantially higher proportion of direct refusals, a finding that points toward a different threshold of interactional acceptability, one in which a clear negative response carries less inherent social risk than is the case in Algerian Arabic. Table 3 presents the overall distribution.

Excuse and explanation formulas remain dominant at 36%, placing the Chaoui group in close alignment with their Algerian Arabic counterparts on this point and suggesting that the broad imperative to justify a refusal transcends the dialect boundary. The most consequential divergence lies in the second-ranking category: direct refusals account for 28% of all formulas in the Chaoui corpus, a proportion nearly ten percentage points higher than the equivalent figure for Algerian Arabic, establishing directness as a comparatively normalised option within this speech community. Regret and apology follow at 12%, with alternatives and gratitude functioning as supportive softeners rather than primary strategic resources.

The qualitative texture of Chaoui justifications also differs from the Algerian Arabic pattern. Whereas Algerian Arabic speakers tend toward emotionally elaborated, multi-clause justificatory sequences, Chaoui justifications are characteristically concise and operationally focused on external constraints. For example, in one scenario, a respondent replied:

/semħaj ulma lmaqsert nem ʃez asa awqumxes qites as jest an ʃa ullah/
 (“I am so sorry, sister, your company is precious, but I am not feeling well today; some other time, God willing”)

In another case, a participant explained:

/wallah xsey anmeslqa wanutla flabas lumur bsaħ autqawixfa adasy
yri lfyalat hijað/

(“Honestly, I really wanted us to meet and talk through things about work, but I cannot make it, I have other matters to attend to”)

Both instances illustrate that even when Chaoui speakers produce justificatory sequences, they do so with relatively minimal emotional elaboration compared to their Algerian Arabic counterparts.

The most distinctive feature of the Chaoui corpus is the routine use of bare negative particles /alyghef/ (“no” / “I refuse”) and /aha/ (“no”), which together account for 28% of the total formula count. This pattern is especially pronounced in peer-level interactions and situations characterised by low power distance, where speakers appear to feel little social obligation to mitigate their refusal. For instance, in a scenario where an older woman offers her seat, several female participants responded:

/alyghef ghim wallah shi amntes am shem/
 (“No, sitting or standing is the same for me”)

Or more economically still:

/aha ntes tbadigh/
 (“No, I am standing”)

Within the Chaoui corpus, such responses are unremarkable; their counterparts in the Algerian Arabic data are consistently accompanied by considerably greater mitigation. Finally, alternatives (9%) and gratitude (7%) function as brief relational markers, signalling goodwill without substantially reducing the directness of the refusal.

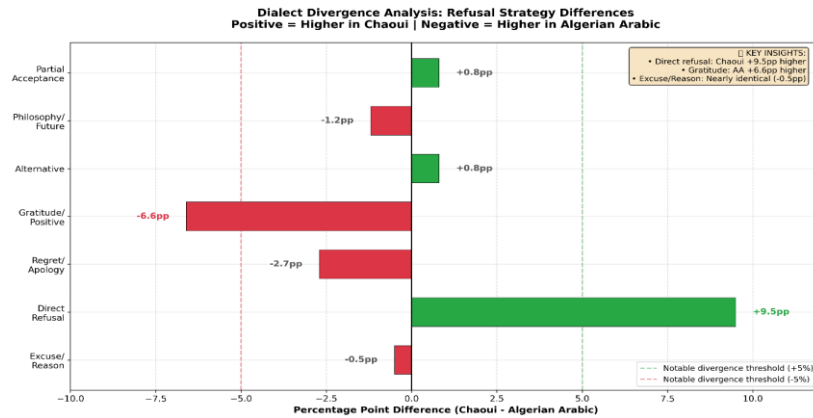


Figure 1. Dialect Divergence Analysis

Two patterns of convergence are discernible. First, the near-identical proportion of excuse and explanation formulas, 36.5% in Algerian Arabic and 36.0% in Chaoui, suggests that the underlying pragmatic norm mandating justification for a refusal is shared across the two dialect communities; both groups understand a refusal as an act requiring accounting. Second, both communities show a consistent gendered pattern: female participants invest more heavily in apology, gratitude, and relational softening than male participants, indicating that the association between feminine interactional style and face-protective behaviour operates as a cross-dialectal phenomenon within the Algerian context.

The most significant divergence, at approximately ten percentage points, concerns the frequency of direct refusals. In Algerian Arabic, a bare negative response tends to be reserved for contexts of clear authority or strongly held personal principle; in Chaoui, directness is a routine pragmatic option across a considerably wider range of situational types. A secondary divergence concerns the overall texture of the refusal turn: Algerian Arabic speakers characteristically produce longer, more multi-layered responses that embed the refusal within religious blessings, expressions of emotional investment, and extended justificatory sequences, whereas Chaoui speakers favour brevity and communicative directness, supplying concise reasons and moving efficiently to closure. These contrasts are sufficiently systematic and pervasive to suggest that they reflect distinct underlying communicative cultures rather than individual stylistic variation.

3.2. AGE AS A PRAGMATIC VARIABLE

As shown in Figure 2, the cross-generational distribution of refusal strategies in both Algerian Arabic and Chaoui is presented according to the age cohorts in the sample, highlighting variation in strategy use across different generations within the two speech communities.

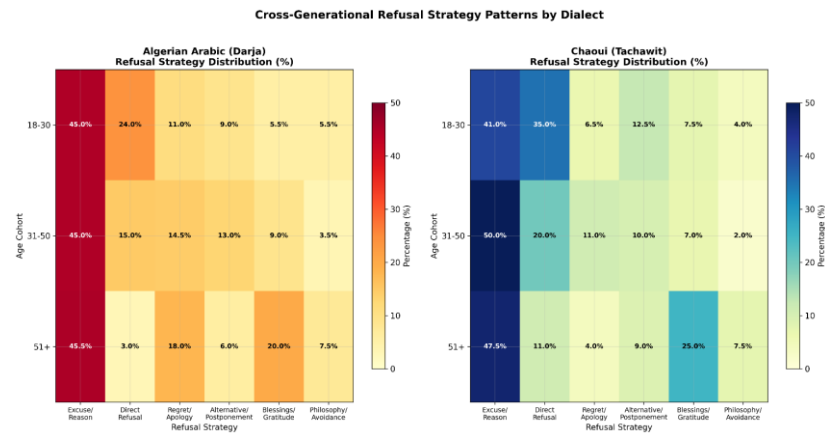


Figure 2. Generational Differences in Refusal Strategies by Dialect

3.2.1. YOUNG ADULTS (18–30): BREVITY, INFORMALITY, AND DIGITAL INFLUENCE

The youngest cohort in both dialect groups exhibits a pragmatic orientation toward efficiency and communicative transparency. Their responses are typically short, syntactically simple, and situationally specific, rarely displaying the multi-layered emotional elaboration that characterises the older cohorts.

Young Chaoui adults record the highest direct refusal rate across any subgroup in either dialect, at 35%, while their Algerian Arabic peers produce direct refusals in 24% of instances, itself substantially above the all-ages group average for Arabic. Both groups show a comparatively elevated frequency of code-switching, with French insertions and occasional English borrowings appearing in otherwise Arabic or Chaoui turns. Uniquely within this cohort, some respondents propose digital alternatives when declining task-based requests, a response type entirely absent from the older cohorts and indicative of how digital communicative culture is reshaping pragmatic expectations among younger Algerian speakers. Brown and Levinson's (1987) social

distance variable provides a productive explanatory framework here: younger adults interact primarily within peer networks where relational distance is low and the perceived imposition of a refusal is correspondingly reduced, making elaborate face-work and extended apologising not only unnecessary but at times interactionally inappropriate.

3.2.2. MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS (31–50): NEGOTIATION BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Middle-aged speakers occupy a pragmatically distinctive position, old enough to have thoroughly internalised traditional Algerian communicative norms, yet professionally and institutionally situated in contexts that reward clarity and efficiency. Their refusals characteristically reflect this tension, as the distributions in Figure 2 reveal.

Middle-aged speakers are the cohort most likely to produce what might be called "double-justification" refusals, responses that stack two independent reasons together, as if mutually reinforcing arguments are needed to render the refusal beyond challenge. This pattern is particularly salient among the middle-aged Chaoui group, for whom excuse and explanation formulas account for 50% of all coded instances, the highest justification rate recorded in any age-by-dialect subgroup across the entire dataset. The lexical item "work" functions in this cohort as a primary social shield: invoking professional obligation as the basis for a refusal renders it interactionally unquestionable by mobilising an institutional imperative that is widely understood to override personal preference. Religious formulae are notably frequent in this cohort, serving not as empty fillers but as genuine face-saving devices that redirect moral responsibility toward divine dispensation, as in:

/xdemti rani msxun ma nqdarf nji/
 /inshallah nqul leblasa okhra/
 /wallah ma nqdarf daba/
 /baraka Allah fik bsah ma njif/

3.2.3. OLDER ADULTS (51+): DEFERENCE, MORALISATION, AND CULTURAL ANCHORING

For participants aged 51 and above, the act of refusing is a high-stakes social manoeuvre that commands maximum face-saving investment

and that reflects the deepest internalisation of traditional Algerian communicative norms.

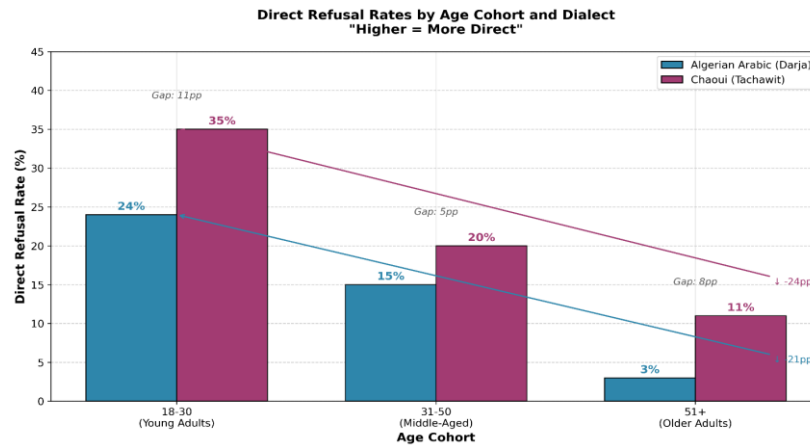


Figure 3. Direct Refusals by Age and Dialect

As shown by Figure 3, the near-total avoidance of direct refusals among older Algerian Arabic speakers (3%, the lowest figure recorded in either dialect across all three cohorts) is the most striking finding. Even among older Chaoui speakers, the equivalent figure of 11% remains the lowest within the Chaoui dataset, yet already exceeds the young adult Algerian Arabic rate, illustrating once more the systematic inter-dialectal gap in tolerance for directness. Blessings and terms of endearment account for 20% of formulas in the older Algerian Arabic group and 25% in the older Chaoui group, functioning as relational lubricants that attenuate the face-threat of the refusal while simultaneously affirming the emotional bond with the interlocutor.

Older speakers are also the only cohort who regularly articulate philosophical or moralising statements as embedded components of their refusals. Rather than simply explaining why compliance is impossible, they situate the refusal within a broader moral or cultural value system: formulations of the type 'one should not borrow what one cannot return' place the refusal in an ethical domain that is effectively beyond contestation, since to challenge it would require challenging a shared norm rather than merely a personal decision. Among older male Chaoui speakers, an additional patriarchal dimension is occasionally visible: some participants redirect the request back into family hierarchy, asking the requestor to 'bring your father' before any

financial commitment can be discussed, thereby deferring the decision to an authority figure whose consent is treated as a prerequisite.

3.3. IMPLICATIONS FOR GENERATIONAL SHIFTS

Table 5 synthesises the age-related patterns across both dialect groups, enabling a holistic view of the generational trajectory.

Table 5. Generational Shifts in Refusal Behaviour: Algerian Arabic and Chaoui

Feature	Young Adults	Middle-Aged Adults	Older Adults
Average turn length	Short	Medium	Long
Emotional elaboration	Low	Moderate	High
Use of philosophical principles	Rare	Occasional	Frequent
Code-switching	High	Moderate	Low
Religious formulae	Occasional	Frequent	Very frequent
Sensitivity to power distance	Moderate	High	Very high

The generational gradient is consistent and unambiguous in both dialects: moving from older to younger speakers, refusals become shorter, less emotionally elaborate, more tolerant of directness, and more frequently realised through code-switching. What distinguishes the two communities is not the direction of this trajectory but its overall level (at every age point, Chaoui speakers are more direct than their Algerian Arabic peers) and its magnitude, which is greater in Chaoui than in Arabic. A particularly theoretically significant finding concerns the younger cohorts specifically: young Algerian Arabic speakers are becoming meaningfully more direct, converging toward the operational directness that has historically characterised Chaoui communicative behaviour. This cross-dialectal convergence at the younger end of the age spectrum raises the possibility that contemporary urban life, shared media consumption, and digital communication practices are generating a more unified pragmatic style among Algerian youth that cuts across inherited dialect boundaries, an observation that warrants dedicated investigation in future research.

The generational trajectory described above was likewise evaluated inferentially rather than on percentage contrasts alone. Within each dialect, direct-refusal rates differed significantly between the youngest and oldest cohorts, both for Algerian Arabic, $\chi^2(1) = 60.88, p < .001, \phi$

= .302, and for Chaoui, $\chi^2(1) = 57.80$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .282$, confirming that the apparent-time trajectory toward greater directness is a statistically robust pattern rather than an artefact of small-sample percentage variability. The cross-dialectal gap in directness was also significant at both ends of the age spectrum, among young adults, $\chi^2(1) = 9.77$, $p = .002$, $\phi = .118$, and among older adults, $\chi^2(1) = 15.56$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .149$, indicating that the Chaoui/Algerian Arabic divergence in directness, while attenuated among the youngest speakers relative to the oldest, remains statistically detectable across the generational range rather than dissolving entirely.

4.DISCUSSION

The findings reported in this study make several contributions to ongoing debates in cross-cultural pragmatics. At a general level, they expand the empirical base of refusal research by focusing on two underrepresented Algerian speech communities. The results demonstrate that patterns identified in canonical studies cannot be treated as universal or culturally neutral baselines, but as culturally specific configurations whose generalisability must be empirically demonstrated rather than assumed.

At a more specific level, the near-identical frequency of excuse and explanation strategies in Algerian Arabic (36.5%) and Chaoui (36.0%) is particularly noteworthy. It suggests that the pragmatic norm requiring justification for refusals operates as a shared socio-cultural principle that transcends linguistic boundaries. Refusal, in this sense, is not performed as a simple act of non-compliance, but as a socially accountable action that requires explanation. This convergence is significant given the typological differences between the two varieties (Semitic and Berber), indicating that the norm is more plausibly rooted in socio-cultural rather than structural-linguistic factors.

By contrast, the divergence in direct refusal strategies (nearly a ten-percentage-point difference between the two groups and consistent across situational types) points to distinct face-management thresholds. The higher tolerance for directness among Chaoui speakers aligns with ethnographic accounts of Berber communicative practices that value clarity and explicitness in interaction (Galand, 1988; Sadiqi, 2003), though this remains a working hypothesis pending further validation. Importantly, the observed difference cannot be reduced to individual

variation or situational effects, as it remains stable across social contexts, genders, and age cohorts, albeit with varying magnitude.

The age-related findings further contribute to sociolinguistic theories of pragmatic change. Labov's (1994) apparent-time framework, when applied to pragmatic rather than phonological variation, predicts that younger cohorts reflect emerging norms while older speakers preserve more conservative patterns. The present data support this prediction: older speakers in both communities rely more heavily on indirect, elaborated, and face-protective refusals, whereas younger speakers prefer greater directness, brevity, and situational specificity. The convergence observed among younger speakers (particularly Algerian Arabic speakers shifting toward the more direct patterns historically associated with Chaoui) suggests that emerging pragmatic norms may be shaped less by dialect-specific socialisation and more by shared exposure to global communicative practices, particularly through digital media. This is consistent with research showing that digital communication environments encourage more direct, efficient interactional styles, especially in low-distance peer contexts (Georgakopoulou, 2016; Herring, 2007).

5. CONCLUSION

The study at hand provides, for the first time, a systematic comparative account of refusal strategies in Algerian Arabic and Chaoui. It shows that these two speech communities share a common pragmatic foundation while also exhibiting meaningful differences in face-management strategies, and it identifies a possible generational shift toward increased directness among younger Algerian speakers. In doing so, the study contributes to a more cross-linguistically grounded and culturally inclusive theory of pragmatics.

These findings carry implications beyond the Algerian context. By documenting systematic intra-national variation between two historically co-territorial but typologically distinct speech communities, the study challenges the tendency within politeness and speech act research to treat national or linguistic boundaries as proxies for pragmatic homogeneity. The results also carry practical relevance for intercultural communication training, translation, and language pedagogy in Maghrebi contexts, where miscalibrated expectations about directness can generate friction between Arabic- and

Berber-speaking interlocutors. More broadly, the generational patterns documented here suggest that refusal behaviour continues to evolve under the pressure of digital communication and changing social norms.

5.1. LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, data were elicited through a written Discourse Completion Task, which captures metapragmatic judgments rather than naturally occurring speech, so the findings may not fully generalise to spontaneous interaction. Second, although educational background, occupation, region, and gender were documented, they were not built into the stratified sampling design, so their independent contribution to refusal-strategy selection could not be modelled directly. Third, the categorisation of refusal strategies involved interpretive judgment; this was addressed through independent double-coding of a 20% subsample (Cohen's $\kappa = .87$). Finally, because the inferential tests treated semantic formulas nested within 84 participants as the unit of analysis, following standard DCT-based practice (Beebe et al., 1990), statistical power may be modestly inflated relative to models accounting for within-participant clustering. Future research should triangulate these findings with naturally occurring interactional and mixed-methods data.

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