Introduction & Background of the Study

Researchers who have done investigations in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) have emphasized that the native language of the learners has a great role in acquiring the second language (Yamagashira, 2000). In his book Linguistics Across Cultures, Lado (1957) talks about the second language students’ complete reliance on their first or their native language “the forms and meanings of the native language and culture in a second language learning situation” (as cited in Gass & Selinker 1994, p. 53).

One of the branches of SLA is Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) and one of its major purposes is to discover how non-native speakers of a language can understand and execute specific speech acts in a target language (TL) and how they obtain the pragmatic competence of that language (Kasper, 1992). Those studies which have been conducted in the field of ILP have discovered that despite the learners’ capability to acquire the grammatical forms of the second or target language (TL), they still cannot totally understand the sociocultural rules which govern the correct use of the target language (Keshavarz, Eslami, & Ghahreman, 2006).

In the past thirty five years, linguists have studied the realization strategies of speech acts among a large number of languages and cultures and those studies in ILP have shown that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners’ performance of speech acts is usually not the same as that of the native speakers because of the insufficient awareness of TL’s sociolinguistic rules (Kwon, 2004). Thomas (1983) has mentioned that this unawareness unavoidably leads to communication breakdown and he has named this failure as ‘pragmatic failure’ that can be divided into two types: (a) pragmalinguistic failure and (b) sociopragmatic failure. The first one has to do with the linguistic failure and is considered rather less troubled to control. However, the second one refers to “the social conditions placed on language in use” (Thomas, 1983, p. 99) that is not easily controlled or changed. Sociopragmatic failure is seen as a more serious problem than linguistic incompetence since if a second language
learner commits a linguistic error in a target language, he or she is just seen as a less proficient speaker of that language. In case of any pragmatic mistake; however, he or she might be seen as a rude or an impolite person (Thomas, 1983).

The concept of speech act was introduced firstly by the great language philosopher Austin in 1962, which he has dealt about some important properties of language; when someone is saying something his or her speech can involve doing something else. For instance, when someone says “I am sorry.” the speaker is not only uttering a sentence but also performing an act of apologizing or refusing (Austin, 1962). Those speech acts that have been focused on by the researchers to date generally include requests, apologies, compliments, expressions of gratitude, and refusals. There are also some other relevant concepts which are consisted of the pragmatic competence (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983), politeness theories (Brown & Levinson, 1987), communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1971), and other theories of culture and intercultural communication such as (Hofstede, 1991). Major studies of the great language philosophers such as Austin (1962) and Searle (1975) are considered to be the basis or the root for the understandings of speech acts in many research studies.

One of those speech acts in which usually communication breakdowns can easily happen is the refusal speech act, which is known as a face-threatening acts (Brown, & Levinson, 1987). This is due to the reason that the speaker or the addressee is going to make an attempt in refusing something which will engage him or her in the act that has been started by another interlocutor (Chen Ye, & Zhang, 1995). The complexity refusal has made a great impact on the non-native speakers and made it more difficult for them to learn it in the target language when they speak with others since many social characteristics such as age, schooling, and rank have impact on the way someone refuses something (Fraser, 1990). Even some native speakers of a language may face problems when it comes to refusal and it
is even more problematic and awkward when it comes to a TL. This is common especially with the EFL learners since they might not always be able to perform the refusal in a proper way when they speak English and this inappropriate performance would make serious problems such as misunderstanding and making a negative impression when they speak and interact with native speakers of English language (Wannaruk, 2008).

Wolfson (1989) referred to pragmatic transfer as ‘sociocultural transfer’, which is regarded to be seen as one of the most vital parts that causes the improper performance in the TL and that happens when EFL learners are using rules from the L1 culture in the foreign language. Pragmatic transfer has been studied in many separate speech acts in several languages and it has been evident that pragmatic transfer exists in L2 speech performance where EFL learners transfer their L1 norms into their L2 such as in (Keshavarz et al, 2006; Byon, 2004). For example, Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990) emphasized on the evidence of existing pragmatic transfer in Japanese when they studied Japanese EFL learners’ refusals. The results of the study found that the content of excuses in both Japanese and English which were made by Japanese EFL learners were less specific than the ones which were reproduced by the American subjects of the study. Another significant transfer was that the Japanese EFL learners’ responses changed according to the high or low status of the interlocutor and this was due to the social status awareness or their responses were culture-specific to Japanese, which they transformed from Japanese into English (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990).

Various factors affect the occurrence of pragmatic transfer such as learners’ awareness of language distance between his or her target and native language (Takahashi, 1996), second language ability and learning background (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987), teaching or instruction impact (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper, 1982), and time of staying or residence in the target language’s community (Félix-Bradsefer, 2004).
Long or Extended negotiations might be involved due to the difficulty of the refusals, and their form and content may differ according to the eliciting speech act. Since failure can cause serious problems in the interpersonal relations of the participants of the dialogues, those who refuse something are usually using some strategies in order not to hurt the feelings of the one who has requested, invited, offered or suggested something (Keshavarz, et al. 2006). Despite all of these, there are some criteria of the strategies used by the one who refuses in a situation, which may change from a language into another or between different cultures (Rubin, 1981). Performing a successful refusal may need a higher pragmatic competence level more than the other speech acts of the target language. This is actually necessary for EFL learners with little linguistic and inadequate knowledge of TL’s sociocultural rules. When EFL learners or students depend on their “deeply held native values” (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990, p. 68), as they produce the tricky refusals, the occurrence of pragmatic transfer is highly expected.

Despite all the above mentioned investigations that are mainly related to the non-native speakers’ pragmatic competence and pragmatic transfers when they interact with the native speakers, none of them is about Kurdish EFL learners’ refusal in comparison to native-speakers of English. The present research, as the first Kurdish study, will deal with the refusal strategies used by Kurdish EFL learners and their pragmatic transfer when they interact with native-speakers of English language.

**Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study**

In the education systems, to produce a good and proficient EFL learner, those teachers who teach English to the EFL students should not only teach the grammar and other linguistic materials, but they also have to provide them with good instructions about the pragmatic competence in order to make the EFL learners to be aware and competent when he or she faces interaction in the language (Abdulrahman, 2012).
The ability to make use of language forms in appropriate situations is the pragmatic competence, which has a great impact on the connection or relationship between speakers who are involved in the social and cultural context of the situation (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Rezvani and Ozdemir (2010, as cited in Farrokhi, 2012) has argued that there might be EFL learners or students who might be very advanced in the language’s rules and vocabulary but they may still have problems with pragmatic competence. In other words, they might still not be capable of producing a suitable communication while speaking the second language. Eslami-Rasekh (2004) emphasized that development of both pragmatic and sociolinguistic rules are very necessary for the EFL students of a TL and for that reason a in any TL not only the rules and comprehending vocabularies but also they should be aware about the pragmatic competence and the culture of that language to a large extend in order to make an appropriate communication.

In the recent years, there has been a growing interest in the teaching of speech acts in both ESL and EFL. Despite these numerous researches which have been done by other foreign researchers out of Kurdistan, Kurdish EFL learners still lack the pragmatic competence. The main reasons behind this failure can be attributed to the instructors, students themselves, the curricula which has been used in Kurdistan or the rare or even non-existing researches about speech acts between Kurdish and other languages (Abdulrahman, 2012).

Abdulrahman (2012), who has conducted his research about the pragmatic competence of Kurdish EFL students’ writings, has also emphasized on the incompetence of the Kurdish EFL learners pragmatics by saying that despite that most of the Kurdish EFL students are going through eight years of studying English before joining their universities, from the 5th grade of their elementary school, they still lack the pragmatic competence since this period of time enables them to develop more in the grammatical competence rather than
the pragmatic competence, and they are still not able to express themselves through their writings sufficiently.

The current study can be measured as a very significant and important study in several aspects. The significance of the study is three-fold. First of all, the previous presented literature on pragmatic behavior of language learners have been restricted to a quite small set of speech acts such as requests, greeting, and thanking. Even though the speech act of refusal possibly will be more challenging and tricky for foreign language learners but until now it hasn’t been dealt with like other speech acts often and it is still an under-researched area (Chang, 2008). For that reason, it is essential that the researchers should carry out more research about refusals.

Secondly, as compared to the considerable body of research that are conducted to investigate the pragmatic competence of learners studying English as a second language, it can be seen that the studies carried out in EFL settings, which results in serious challenges to the teaching of pragmatics, are limited (Rose, 1994). For this reason, it is hoped that this research will add awareness to the cross-sectional ILP research by investigating the refusal strategies used by Kurdish-speaking EFL learners.

Finally, the research gives the impression to have realistic and practical significance in view of the fact that results may provide helpful insights into the field of SLA, second/foreign language education, and more specifically, into the field of English language teaching in Kurdistan since it is the first research which will be conducted about the refusal strategies used by Kurdish EFL learners and native speakers of English. Thos research has its own educational value since the teachers can benefit from it to improve their students’ pragmaticcompetences and be aware about those failures which the Kurdish EFL learners may face.

**Aim of the Study and Research Questions**
The present study aims to investigate the speech act of refusal used by Kurdish learners of EFL, native speakers of Kurdish, and native speakers of English. The focus of the study is to investigate how Kurdish EFL learners realize this speech act in English and how is their performance compared to that of native speakers of English and native speakers of Kurdish. The goal here is to find out the strategies used by both Kurdish native speakers and English native speakers. The strategies will enable the researcher to find out the differences and similarities between the refusals made by the English and Kurdish native speakers. In order to be able to investigate the pragmatic transfer from the learner’s L1 which is Kurdish, into the L2 which is English the researcher will compare the EFL learner’s refusals to the Kurdish native speakers’ refusal, which will be used as a baseline in the study. Another focus is to find out if there is a relationship between the learners’ refusal strategies and their pragmatic competence and the effect of pragmatic instruction in the classroom on the way they respond to the refusals.

The study specifically aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the strategies used by English native speakers and Kurdish native speakers to refuse a/an request, invitation, offer and suggestion?
2. How are the Kurdish native speakers and English native speakers different/similar when they make refusals?
3. Is there pragmatic transfer when Kurdish EFL learners make refusals in English?
4. Does explicit instruction on pragmatic competence affect their refusal strategies?

Hypothesis

As mentioned in the introduction part, usually non-native speakers of a language cannot perform the speech acts of refusal appropriately when they interact with native speakers of a target language. As a result pragmatic transfer will happen by using their L1 norms in L2. The possibility of pragmatic transfer, in Kurdish EFL learners’ refusals, is the
main hypothesis of the present study, due to lack of the Kurdish EFL learners’ pragmatic competence. Another hypothesis will be the way how the Kurdish native speakers make refusals to the hypothetical situations which might be different from the refusals made by the English native speakers in a way that the Kurdish speakers might use more indirect refusal strategies and they will elaborate in giving the excuses.

**Literature Review**

The literature review of the current study looks at those previous research studies which have been conducted about the realization of the refusal speech acts in some different cultural contexts, and also shows some carefully conducted studies which are associated with speech act theories and pragmatics. There are many studies that have been done on refusal, different viewpoints. Such examples include Kwon’s study (2004) which is a cross-cultural investigation among English and Korean. Nelson, Al Batal and Bakary’s study (2002) which has been conducted about the comparison between Arabic and English speakers’ strategies with reference to the speech act of refusal. There are also some other studies, that have been conducted to investigate the sociocultural and pragmatic transfer in the realizations of the speech act of refusal such as Beebe et al’s (1990) and Al Issa’s study (2003).

The most prominent research about the realization of the speech act of refusal is the one which was conducted by Beebe et al. (1990). In the Japanese English learners’ refusal, the researchers looked for the transfer of pragmatic rules. Collecting data from the participants was by using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) which composed of three hypothetical situations (requests, offers, suggestions, and invitations). In each of the hypothetical situations, the respondent had to refuse one of the situations to a different status (higher, lower, and equal). The whole data which was elicited from the DCTs had been analyzed according to the frequency and the semantic formulas. The results of the research
showed that there was pragmatic transfer from the first into the second language, regarding the semantic formulas’ order, content and frequencies.

Yamagashira (2001) has conducted his research in ILP in which he has investigated the realization of refusals made by Japanese ESL learners and American native speakers of English. He tried to investigate whether pragmatic transfer occurred or not when the Japanese ESL learners made refusals. He has examined the level of pragmatic proficiency of the learners and the amount of time that the ESL learners have spent in the USA, and also talked about the knowledge of pragmatics and its importance for the Japanese learners. His findings proved that the pragmatic transfer occurred, especially in that case when the requester in the hypothetical situation is lower than the respondent in status.

Al-Kahtani (2005) has investigated the speech act of refusals in among three different cultures, who were Americans, Arabs and Japanese speakers, in order to find out the strategies used by these three different participants’ refusals. To do this, he depended on some scopes, according to the order of semantics, their contents and also their frequencies of the refusals made by the participants. The investigation results proved that there are differences between those different participants’ refusals since they have different background cultures and languages, they also proved that some of the participants still lack the ability to make a proper communicative refusal in English. Besides those differences in both culture and language the refusals were not totally different in every situation in a way that there were some similarities between their refusals in some specific situations such as the ‘request situations’. At last the researcher has talked about the need of pragmatic competence and stated that second language teachers should help the students to be aware about their communication errors in order to be able to make appropriate interaction between themselves and the English native speakers.
Felix-Brasdefer (2006) has conducted a study on the strategies which are used by monolingual Mexican Spanish native speakers. Through studying the refusal realizations he has paid attention especially to the formality, approaches used to show politeness, and the concept of that language’s face politeness in Mexico generally as used by the native speakers. Through analyzing the data which he elicited, he concluded that, in most of the situations through several indirect efforts of renegotiating successful resolutions the Mexican native speakers would be able to achieve the negotiation of face. In another study (Nelson, Carson, Al Batal, & El Bakary, 2002), the researchers have studied the awareness of Egyptian and American speakers of Arabic. He has focused on what strategies they would use while they make the refusals and what would be the level of being direct, taking into consideration that the social differences and gender will have a great influence on the way they respond to the situations. A customized version of the DCT questionnaire was used which was previously used by Beebe et al. (1990) but the responses were recorded verbally when an interviewer was reading the conditions loudly to the participants and then the participants were required to answer verbally, in other words their speeches were audio taped, which was rather different from other conventional written methods. The findings of the study showed that those strategies which were most commonly used among the Egyptian subjects were almost similar to the strategies which were used by the Americans and the first and most frequently used strategy was the reason behind their refusals and after reason the most frequently way of refusing was using negative willingness.

Al Issa (2003) presented his research about Jordanian EFL learners and American native speakers’ strategies in refusal patterns. He investigated whether there was pragmatic transfer from the EFL learners’ native language which was Arabic, into their target language which was English and he also looked for the causes of such transfers. Using a DCT questionnaire with a short interview to follow up the research findings suggested that there
was pragmatic transfer regarding the semantic formulas which were used in the EFL learners’ refusal to the situations (Al Issa, 2003). Beside the pragmatic transfer evidences, the research has compared both refusal responses made by the Jordanian and English refusal responses made by the native speakers, he found that the American native speakers are more direct than the Jordanian participants, and also not elaborating their answers while the Jordanian refusal responses were more longer in terms of using words, they used more words to describe their refusals and also more using indirect strategies than the American English native speakers particularly when it comes to a situation where the interlocutor having a higher social rank, position or status.

There is another study (Keshavarz et al., 2006), in which Persian EFL learners’ pragmatic transfer from their native language into their target language has been studied based on the Persian EFL learners’ realization of the speech act of refusal concerning the level of their English proficiency. They found that English proficiency has a great impact on the pragmatic transfer on the Persian EFL learners. Those who were more proficient in English were making less pragmatic transfers, and because of having admission to many other linguistic resources when it came to first or their native language rules they were capable of recognizing the pragmatic equivalent of the target language. On the other hand, there were some complaints from the Persian EFL learners, particularly from those who were advanced in English, their complaint was that they were unable to say or state some special feelings and warmth while they are speaking English (p. 390). For that reason Keshavars et al. (2006) regarded that the English language is “dry” and considered the EFL learners’ language which was Persian as a more “Flowery language”.

There have not been any specific studies about Kurdish refusals and speech acts concerning Kurdish speakers living in Iraq until now, except (Abdulrahman, 2012) which investigated the pragmatic competence of EFL university students through some written
activities and classes. He has conducted a pre-test and post-tests. At the beginning, results from the pretest showed that the EFL students lacked the pragmatic instruction and he gave some lectures to the participants of his study about pragmatic competence in a specific period of time then he tested them again, he recorded a great progress of the EFL students’ pragmatic competence in their written performance. The researcher emphasized on the great necessity of pragmatic competence within the courses that are taught at universities in Kurdistan and introducing English native speaker teachers in the universities as well, which might help the EFL students to converse in the English language which will make them more knowledgeable pragmatically and culturally.

Despite the fact that refusal studies in the view of literature are rich, as stated in the literature review examples before, there are plenty investigations that have been made between English and other languages, such as Chinese, Arabic and Japanese yet there are not any studies that makes any comparison between English and Kurdish speech acts in the realization of refusals. Therefore, the current study is proposed to fill up that space in the linguistics research literature general and ILP in particular.

**Definition of Key Terms**

The researcher is going to provide the key terms’ definitions of his proposal later, as he has been permitted by his supervisor.

**Methodology**

**Design**

The current study is a qualitative study since the researcher is going to use some open-ended questionnaires, discourse completion task (DCT), in which the participants are required to answer by making refusals to some hypothetical situations, and then the researcher is going to analyze each and every response carefully according to some criteria which will be discussed in the data analysis section.
Participants

The way that the participants are arranged and written in the present study is taken from the framework of Keshavarz et al. (2006). In the current study, 45 participants will participate: 20 Kurdish native speakers (KNS) in Sulaimany, 20 Kurdish EFL learners in Sulaimany (EFL), and 15 native speakers of American English who are working in the American University, University of Sulaimany and Asia Cell Company which are all located in Sulaimany city. The reasons behind choosing most of the participants from these specific places are because of that Sulaimany University is the biggest university in the city where the research can be conducted, and a good number of native speakers of English are working in the American University and Asia Cell company in Sulaimany. Gender will not be studied but the researchers will mention the number of the males and females to make the research participants clear.

Native speakers of Kurdish group (NSK)

Twenty Kurdish native speakers from Electrical Engineering Faculty of Sulaimany University will participate in the investigation. They will all be monolingual speakers of Kurdish language. They will be 10 males and 10 females and their ages will be between 20 and 35 years. This group will provide the first control group for comparison of refusal strategies used by EFL learners.

American native speakers of English group (ANSE)

Fifteen native speakers of American English will take part in this study. Out of the 15 participants, eight of them will be from American University and the other 7 participants will be from both Asia Cell Telephone Company and Sulaimany University. Their ages will be between 25 to 45 years, including 7 females and 8 males. All of them will be monolingual speakers of English. They will have different occupations in Sulaimany.
The EFL Learners group (EFL)

All the 20 Kurdish EFL learners will be chosen from 4th year students of English Department of both University of Sulaimany and University of Human Development, which are both located in Sulaimany city. They will again be the same as Kurdish native speakers in terms of gender with 10 males and 10 females, whose ages will be between 21-35 years.

Materials

All the participants will be provided with a survey packet consisting of an informed consent, a demographic survey which is to elicit some basic information about the participants, also a short written interview to find out whether the EFL participants have received any pragmatic awareness before or not, and also a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) of a dialogue completion type, which will be composed of twelve situations. These will be taken from those which were used by Takahashi and Beebe (1987) and Beebe et al. (1990) in the refusal investigations in earlier studies.

Data Collection Procedures

The instrument which will be used in the current study will be a written discourse completion task (DCT) that is made up of scripted dialogues representing socially differentiated situations. The researcher will use a DCT since it is a controlled way of collecting or eliciting data which fulfills the cross-cultural comparability demands (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Researchers also can get a great amount of data in a short time proficiently (Beebe et al., 1990).

As stated in the previous studies which dealt with speech acts by many researchers, social position or status has been proven to have great impact on the speech act realization, and it is embedded in the situations provided to the participants (Blum-Kulka, 1989; Blum-Kulka, Hose & Kasper, 1989). The DCT scenarios are rewritten in a way that each participant will have to produce a refusal to someone who is high, equal or lower in position. The data
which will be elicited from these three groups will be compared to each other to find out to what extent the Kurdish EFL learners use their native language norms when they refuse in English. The L2 scenarios are in the form of questionnaires which represent some natural daily life situations where the participants are expected to respond making the refusals.

This kind of test was at first designed by Beebe et al. (1990) and has been frequently used since then when researchers investigate specific data on speech acts realization. The L2 hypothetical situations will be divided into four groups: (no.1, no.2, and no.12) are the requests, (no.3, 4, and 10) are the invitations, (no.5, 6, and 8) are the offers, and (no.7, 9, and 11) are the suggestions. There will be a short description before each scenario about the situations, stating the specific relations between the interlocutors such as the social position (status), the location and time, and then a gap is left for the participant to refuse or respond by using his or her own refusal strategy according to the hypothetical situation.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data that will be elicited through the DCT questionnaires, the researcher will rely on similar semantic formulas which were used previously by Beebe et al. (1990). A semantic formula is “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” (Cohen, 1996, p. 265). The total number of semantic formulas of any kind which are used for each situation or refusal will be obtained for each of the three subject groups. Thus, the researcher will count the frequency of each formula for each situation and will make lists. After that the researcher, at first, will try to look at the strategies which are used by both Kurdish and English native speakers to find out whether they are different or similar. Secondly, the researcher will look for the similarities between Kurdish native speakers (as a baseline) and Kurdish EFL students’ responses when they respond to the particular refusal situations. These comparisons will be carried out in order to investigate to what extend
transfer occurs by comparing the data from native speakers of the learners’ native language to the data which is elicited by the EFL learners (Kasper, 1992). The lack of pragmatic competence of Kurdish EFL students’ responses will also be checked through analyzing their strategies they have used and then trying to shed light on those participants who have received pragmatic instructions before to find out whether pragmatic competence instruction has any impact on their refusal realizations or not.

**Ethical Consideration**

The researcher will provide the participants about certain important ethical issues of the current study. Consent and confidentiality will be considered in the study. Important details about the study are going to be explained, such as the purpose and aim of the study. None of the participants will be obliged to participate. The researcher will inform the participants that anyone can leave the study whenever they want, including during the process of data collection. The privacy and details about the participants, such as names and personal information, are not going to be revealed. Only specific relevant information which will serve the study’s aim will be included.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The study is concerned with only one kind of the speech acts which is refusal. There are also a huge number of universities in the province in which the research can be conducted, but the EFL participants, who are the main focus of the study, will be chosen from 4th year students from the Department of English/Sulaimany University 2014-2015. The present study deals only with the written performances of all the participants through the DCT questionnaire. The oral performance will not be included in the study. Participating students from different years of English departments may provide similar/different results since their English proficiencies differ from each other. This is beyond the scope of this study and this might be a suggestion for further studies.
## Time line of the Study

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<th>Schedule of each phase</th>
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(If possible also by someone else)
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