



Refusal Strategies Used by EFL Learners of English Study Program in Riau, Indonesia

Ranisha Pristania Rusdi¹⁾, Indah Tri Purwanti²⁾, Dahnilsyah³⁾

ranisharusdi@gmail.com

¹⁾Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia

²⁾Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia

³⁾Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia

Received: 2022-03-015 Accepted: 2022-06-05

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v10i1.2581

Abstract

This research shed light on the types of refusal strategies employed by the EFL learners of the English Study Program of Universitas Riau. This is using a descriptive qualitative study. The participants of this research involved 35 EFL students of the English Study Program selected by using the cluster random sampling method. The data was acquired using a DCT (Discourse Completion Task) as the instrument that contains some situations in which students were supposed to expressing their refusal. The result showed that the students used three kinds of strategies in giving refusals. Indirect refusal is the most strategy used by the students to interact in their daily life. One strategy which is not used by the students is direct refusal by using a performative statement.

Keywords: refusal strategies direct refusal, indirect refusal, adjunct to refusal, speech acts

Introduction

A language is a form of communication that allows people to interact with each other in their daily lives. People generally talk and use language to communicate their thoughts, ideas, and facts, as well as to comprehend the emotion and meaning behind it. Complaints, apologies, requests, and refusals are examples of politeness in different languages (Okla, 2018). People not only offer and get good responses while conversing, but they also receive negative responses. This is in line with (Khalil, 2014) who claims that misunderstanding occurs not just as a consequence of language issues or pragmatic error, but also as consequences of the target culture's deficient application of social norms and values or sociopragmatic failure. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), refusing to do something is a Face

Threatening Act (FTA) because it threatens some features of the interlocutor's positive face, and it falls into the category of commissives because it determines to commit the refuser not to do something (Searle, 1977 in Sattar et al.'s, 2012). Refusals are essential in daily conversations due to their communicative importance (Khalil, 2014). Even if a person has a lot of vocabulary and a great command of grammar, misconceptions might arise if pragmatic knowledge is not used effectively (Sattar et al. 's, 2012).

According to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987, as cited in Fukada & Asato, 2002) everyone in society has a facial expression, which is described as one's public self-image, and when a speaker does anything that would make them feel guilty, the speaker will tend to employ a politeness technique to avoid losing face. Faces are divided into two categories. The negative face is concerned with one's claim to one's territory, personal preserves, and non-distracting rights like freedom of action and freedom from imposition. The positive face is related to the desire to be liked or approved by others in society. It will also need people to recognize your good attitude, something they may be hesitant to do. A positive face emphasizes unity while also considering status; a negative face also considers status by respecting the other's right to be left alone to do as they choose. Furthermore, the speaker assesses the seriousness of a Face Threatening Acts depending on the following three factors: the speaker's social distance (S) from the hearer's (H), a measure of the hearer's power over the speaker, and the ranking of impositions in the culture or society.

Speech acts are actions performed during the speaking process. The speech acts hypothesis is concerned with what individuals are doing when they use language. It was developed from the mainstream theory of speech acts (Austin, 1962 & Searle, 1969) as referenced in (Jung et al.'s, 2008). Speech acts, according to Austin (1962), are actions performed during the delivery of an utterance, such as issuing commands or making promises. Speech actions, according to Searle (1969), are the fundamental group of linguistic communication. Speech actions can be performed in writing as well as in person. For example, a greeting could be expressed on a card or spoken (Griffiths, 2006).

The English Study Program students produce refusals in their frequent communication as EFL students. Refusal may be one of the most critical abilities for college students to improve. Students may be required to refuse someone appropriate manners, including with lecturers, seniors, and friends, whereas people create refusal strategies in daily communication to avoid being impolite. If the refusals are misrepresented by students, they will lose their face. English may become the second or the third language that they learn. As a foreign language learner, students of The English Study Program use refusals to show their pragmatic competence. When students refuse an invitation or suggestion, they generally show their displeasure using phrases like "*Sorry, I can't go with you*", "*Oh, I can't. Maybe next time*". In such a situation, it's safe to assume that not everything we say will be well received. People don't always agree with us or reject our ideas.

This is referred to as refusal.

Method

This study involved 35 students of sixth-semester students of the English Study Program of Universitas Riau, who were chosen by using cluster random sampling. The participants were required to type their responses to find out their refusal strategies. The refusal strategies were collected by using DCT (Discourse Completion Task). Parvaresh and Tavakoli (2009, in Yuda et al. 's, 2018) Discourse Completion Task is a data collection instrument that is explicitly designed to elicit answers to complex, situationally challenges. In this research, the Discourse Completion Task was adopted from Wardani (2019). The DCT for this research consists of 8 situations. This research only focused on analyzing the students strategies in refusing requests and suggestions. The DCT was distributed online to the students by using Google-Form. The data of refusals would be categorized into categories and subcategories based on the refusal taxonomy proposed by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990). Direct refusal, indirect refusal, and adjunct to refusal are the three basic kinds of refusal.

Results

A. The strategies produced by the students

The following are three refusal strategies that were discovered: direct refusal, indirect refusal, and adjunct to refusal. With 173 occurrences or 63% of 275 responses, indirect refusal appears to be the most common strategy.

1.1 Direct Refusal

Direct refusals occur when speakers communicate their unwillingness to concur by utilizing negative propositions. Students used direct refusal strategies:

1.1.1 Non-performative statement

a. Non-performative by using "No"

This strategy can be expressed as follows:

(1) S6: "No, this is little more. Thanks anyway"

(2) S29: "No, I think I still have to continue to work"

(3) S32: "No, I can break from my job. Because I still need money"

The underlined word indicates the respondents' reluctance or unwillingness to accomplish what the requester needs.

b. Non-performative by using "Willingness / ability"

This strategy can be expressed as follows:

(4) S1: "I'm sorry, I can't fill out your questionnaire"

(5) S10: *"I'm sorry mom, I can't pick you at the airport, because I have a course at the time"*

(6) S16: *"Sorry mom, I can't pick you up, I have something urgent to do"*

The respondent used a non-performative statement because they were going into something urgent and could leave the interlocutor without feeling guilty.

The frequency and percentage of direct refusal are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Direct Refusals

No	Refusal strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1.	"Willingness or Ability"	65	23,64%
2.	"No"	3	1,09%
TOTAL		68	100%

Based on table 1, it can be inferred that respondents prefer to use Non-performative by using "Willingness/ability" with hugely different percentages.

1.2 Indirect Refusals

When a speaker intentionally avoids giving refusal responses because the expressions may upset the interlocutor, the speaker uses indirect refusal. The students employ a variety of indirect refusal strategies:

1.2.1 Statement of Regret

Statements of regret are the first most common indirect refusal strategy. When refusing requests, people use these expressions to express regret and lighten their language. This strategy's application can be expressed as follows:

(7) S7: *"I'm sorry that I can't pick you up because I have a class right now"*

(8) S25: *"I'm sorry my friend. But I can't join because I still have many job to do and it must finish today"*

(9) S30: *"I'm sorry, maybe later"*

When the respondents are in a condition that they can't handle and have important things to do, they utter an expression of regrets.

1.2.2 Wish

The expression "wish" is a way for something desired to

happen. This strategy can be expressed as follows:

(10) S5: *"I'm sorry. I wish I could, but I can't leave my responsibility"*

The respondent is inferring to the interlocutor that he/she has more important duties and must prioritize their duties first.

1.2.3 Excuse, reason, explanation

The second mostly used in indirect refusal is excuse, reason, and explanation strategy. This strategy can be expressed as follows:

(11) S5: *"I'm sorry, I can't. I have a class in 5 minutes again"*

(12) S18: *"Sorry sister. I have another assignment to do right now. But, if I have break time, I will help you"*

(13) S25: *"I'm sorry my friend. But I can't join because I still have many job to do and it must finish today"*

The respondents are unable to say "no" directly because they do not want to offend the feelings of the interlocutor and give an indirect reason or explanation, so that the interlocutor understood why they refused their requests.

1.2.4 Statement of Alternative

This strategy is employed when the addressee, in shifting attention away from the request, recommends an alternative. The speaker recommends another option in a statement of alternative, which includes the change of option. This strategy can be expressed as follows:

(14) S12: *"I'm kind of tired right now. How about I get you a gojek?"*

(15) S18: *"Sorry, mom. I have to do something. I can't help you. But, I will order go car to pick you up at the airport"*

(16) S20: *"I'm sorry, but I can't help you right now. Maybe you can ask to others"*

A statement of alternatives is commonly used to gather information and reach an agreement. The respondents will no longer feel bad for not being insufficient to complete the interlocutor needs after getting the agreement.

1.2.5 Set conditions for future or past acceptance

The expression of set conditions for future or past acceptance can be expressed as follows:

(17) S18: *"Sorry, sister. I have another assignment to do right now. but, if I have break time. I will help you"*

(18) S3: *"Sorry mom, I can't pick you up, I still in my class, let me know if you need my help to call brother again"*

The respondents hide their guilty reason using "if" as the

conditional phrase. Setting conditions in the future can help the respondents to achieve their life goals, however, in the past, there was only hope because time has passed and can't go back in time.

1.2.6 Promise

Promise means to inform someone that you will absolutely do or not do something, or that something will surely happen, according to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary. This strategy can be expressed as follow:

(19) S20: *"I'm sorry mom, I can't pick you up. I promise I will do it next time"*

(20) S27: *"I'm sorry I have another plan, maybe I will join you next time"*

The respondents are unable to execute the interlocutor's request or suggestion, so they promise the interlocutor that they will do so later.

1.2.7 Threat or statement of negative consequences

This strategy can be expressed as follows:

(21) S1: *"I'm sorry. I'm playing basketball just for a hobby. And I don't even think to make it my job"*

(22) S3: *"I think it's not the right option for my career, I want to be a content writer"*

(23) S26: *"I'm sorry, in my opinion I am not suitable to be a basketball player"*

The respondents give a negative statement in order to refuse the interlocutor's request and explain why they did not agree with the interlocutor's request.

1.2.8 Guilt Trip

Guilt trip is a refusal strategy that the speaker uses by showing guilt. This strategy's application can be expressed as follows:

(24) S30: *"I'm sorry mom, I confused how to picking you up because I can't drive"*

It demonstrated that the respondent feels remorseful for failing to fulfill the interlocutor's request by saying *"I confused how to picking you up"*.

1.2.9 Let the interlocutor off the hook

Another strategy to make refusals was to let the interlocutor off the hook, which can be expressed as follows:

(25) S9: *"You don't have to pick me up. Because I ordered a taxi online, mom"*

(26) S28: *"It's okay, you don't need to worry about that"*

(27) S28: *"Don't worry, I'll get it myself"*

Because they believe it is acceptable, the respondents let the interlocutor off the hook.

1.2.10 Self - defense

Self-defense is a refusal strategy where a speaker refuses by claiming that she or he can do it alone, that can be expressed as follows:

(28) S2: *"No problem dude, I can do this all day"*

(29) S26: *"It's okay if I'm still strong for work"*

(30) S28: *"Don't worry, I'll get it myself"*

The respondents use self-defense as a kind of refusal by convincing the interlocutor that they can handle it on their own.

1.2.11 Lack of enthusiasm

When respondents are encouraged to refuse something, they often answer with a particular or definitive response, that can be expressed as follows:

(31) S14: *"It's okay I think I'm still working on this. Thankyou for caring"*

(32) S26: *"It's okay if I'm still strong for work"*

(33) S28: *"It's okay, you don't need to worry about that"*

The respondents who are using the acceptance function of refusal to respond to the interlocutor are in a bit of a rush to do anything so they don't have to interact with anyone else, then said without enthusiasm that they were not interested in a given topic or anything.

1.2.12 Postponement

Postponement is an indirect strategy where the speaker informs the speaker that a request or suggestion will be fulfilled at a later time or that the answer will be delayed, that can be expressed as follows:

(34) S19: *"I'll try other way"*

(35) S29: *"I'll think about it again later"*

This suggests the respondent will think about what the interlocutor requires later.

1.2.13 Hedging

When a speaker avoids or ignores the interlocutor, hedging is also one of the refusal strategies used. Hedging can be expressed as follows:

(36) S30: *"I'm sorry because I don't know how to fill it"*

(37) S35: *"Sorry, sir. I'm not sure I can have basketball as my career. That's why I have determined the career I want to live"*

However, before refusing the interlocutor, the respondents must consider the repercussions. After hedging, the respondent

explains why they refuse the interlocutor's request and has no idea how to fill it out.

The frequency and percentage of indirect refusal are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Indirect Refusals

No	Refusal Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Statement of regret	86	31,27%
2.	Excuse, reason, explanation	44	16%
3.	Statement of alternative	15	5,45%
4.	Self - defense	6	2,18%
5.	Threat of negative consequences	4	1,45%
6.	Hedging	4	1,45%
7.	Let the interlocutor off the hook	3	1,09%
8.	Lack of enthusiasm	3	1,09%
9.	Set conditions for future/past acceptance	2	0,73%
10.	Promise	2	0,73%
11.	Postponement	2	0,73%
12.	Wish	1	0,36%
13.	Guilt trip	1	0,36%
TOTAL		173	100%

Based on table 2, it can be inferred that the most used strategy by the students in giving refusal is indirect refusal by using a statement of regret with 31,27%. The second most frequent strategy is excuse,reason,explanation with 16%, and the third is statement of alternatives with 5,45%.

1.3 Adjunct to Refusals

Adjunct to refusals remarks that would not express refusals on their own but are used in conjunction with a semantic formula to give the supplied

refusals a specific impact. Students employ three types of adjuncts to refusals:

1.3.1 Statement of positive opinion, feeling or agreement

This strategy can be expressed as follows:

(38) S12: "I would like to. But, my friends just call me now to discuss something. I'm sorry. How about you ask other class? Or I can suggest it to you if you want to."

The respondent states a positive opinion to offend the conversation away from the interlocutor's suggestion.

1.3.2 Pause fillers

A pause filler is a useless word for a pause or delay in conversation. This strategy can be expressed as follows:

(39) S2: "Well I guess I had to refuse it ma'am, I only play a basketball for a hobby"

(40) S23: "Oh yea, thank you, but I have to finish this work, I will rest later"

The respondents employ pause fillers to contemplate and pause for a short period of time. They employ pause fillers to construct an explanation or reason before refusing interlocutor suggestions.

1.3.3 Gratitude/appreciation

The speaker expresses gratitude/appreciation by thanking/rewarding the interlocutor that can be expressed as follows:

(41) S8: "Thank you for your advice, sir. For now, I think basketball is my hobby. But I haven't through about making basketball for my career"

(42) S21: "Sorry, I am trying to focus on finishing off my duty. Thank you for your attention"

Gratitude/appreciation is the most delicate manner of refusing so that the interlocutor is not offended.

The frequency and percentage of adjunct to refusal are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Adjunct to Refusal

No	Refusal strategies	Frequenc y	Percentag e
1.	Gratitude/Appreciation	17	6,18%
2.	Statement of positive feeling/agreement	15	5,45%
3.	Pause fillers	2	0,73%
TOTAL		34	100%

Based on table 3, it can be inferred that most of the students used adjunct to refusal by using gratitude/appreciation with 6,18%.

Discussion

Indirect refusal is the most frequent strategy and has the highest percentages, especially for indirect refusal by using a statement of regret. The results of this research's refusal strategies appear to be similar to those of earlier refusal research: Sattar et al. 's (2011) research findings showed that indirect refusals is the common strategy that is used by Malay university students. Sattar et al. 's claim that when participants encounter refusals, they should respectfully apologize or express regret as an indirect refusal to lessen the rejection in the following request Similarly, Yuda et al. 's (2018) research findings showed that indirect refusals is the most commonly used by Sundanese students rather than direct strategy. Ciftci & Satic (2018) research findings can be concluded that Turkish learners prefer to use indirect refusals. The findings of this research are also in line with Qadi (2021) that in case of refusal, indirect refusals is the most employed strategy by the Saudi EFL students. Ashraf & Ali (2021) research findings inferred that Pakistani EFL learners employ indirect refusals for the sake of saving their face. This means that this study reinforced the previous studies of Sattar et al. 's (2011), Yuda et al. 's (2018), Ciftci & Satic (2018), Qadi (2021), and Ashraf & Ali (2021) that EFL learners prefer using indirect strategies in refusal.

Different cultures have different ways of refusing something. Based on the researcher's analysis of the data, EFL learners in Indonesia frequently use indirect refusals instead of direct refusals because of their characteristics and their culture. The use of indirect refusal is to avoid threatening others' faces and arousing people's feelings of discomfort in another meeting. There were 2 politeness strategies related to Indonesian culture used by the students. EFL learners are more likely to refuse something by using "I'm sorry/sorry" or "Thank you". In Indonesian culture, it is common to find that the word "sorry" is used before expressing what they want to convey in any case, including in giving a refusal. This is because expressing the word "sorry" will save the other person's face and make the refusal sound less harsh. In this study, the researcher found that they expressed "Sorry" not only to someone with a higher status of occupation, but also to all levels.

In addition to using the expression "sorry," it was found that some of the respondents used "thank you" in refusing something. The expression "thank you" as a form of response when getting a compliment or an appreciation, can also be used as the politeness strategy in refusing since the function is almost the same as the expression "sorry". The use of "thank you" is to respect the others' feelings so that they do not feel offended since their suggestion or opinion got refused. For example: *"No, I can't but thanks for asking", "Thank you for your suggestion, my friend. But I'm sorry, I can't do it" and "Thank you so much. But I don't want to take a break"*. The expression of "Thankyou" is one of adjunct to refusals strategies by using

gratitude/appreciation and considered as a delicate way of expressing refusal. Conversely, this does not happen in foreign cultures such as Malaysia, Turkey, Saudi, and Pakistan. When they refuse something, they tend to use indirect refusal without saying “Sorry” and “Thank you” in their utterances.

Conclusions

According to the findings, respondents employ three kinds of refusal strategies: direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjunct to refusals. Beebe, Takashi, and Uliss-Weltz propose refusal methods (1990). This category of refusal strategies is intended to demonstrate how responders refuse requests and recommendations from the interlocutor. Indirect refusal is the most common strategy employed by respondents. The researcher can deduce from the data that the participants in this study are pragmatically capable because they apply indirect refusal to refuse someone, specifically someone who has a higher level status. The speaker needs to refuse important for the speaker to refuse appropriately and acceptably manner so that the communication is not offended as a result of the refusal. We may also deduce from the results that the participants in this study are aware of the possibility for refusal to be perceived as a face-threatening act. That is why they chose to refuse politely.

References

- Al Okla, N. (2018). Verbal and Non-verbal refusal strategies in English: Refusing promotions. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)* Volume, 9.
- Ashraf, M., & Ali, S. (2021). Pragmatic Competence: Difficulties faced by Pakistani EFL Learners. *sjesr*, 4(2), 444-451.
- ÇİFTÇİ, H., & SATIC, C. Ö. (2018). Refusal strategies and perceptions of social factors for refusing: empirical insights from Turkish learners of English. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 14(1), 11-27.
- Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research Design : Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Third edition). New Delhi : SAGE Publication, Inc.
- Fukada, A., & Asato, N. (2004). Universal politeness theory: Application to the Use of Japanese honorifics. *Journal of pragmatics*, 36(11), 1991-2002
- Griffiths. P. (2006). *An Introduction to English Semantics and Pragmatics*. Edinburgh University Press Ltd., Publication.
- Jung, E. H. S., & Kim, Y. J. (2008). Refusal semantic formulas used by foreign language learners. *English Teaching (영어교육)*, 63(4), 115-139.
- Khalil, M. A. R. (2014). A study of Refusal Strategies in Kurdish language. *Journal of Kirkuk University Humanity Studies*, 9(2).
- Masruddin, M. (2018). Lessons in Old Man and The Sea. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 1(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v1i1.126>.
- Qadi, A. H. (2021). Use of Refusal Strategies among Saudi EFL Students: An Investigative Study. *English Language Teaching*, 14(7), 27-43.

- Sattar, H. Q. A., Lah, S. C., & Suleiman, R. R. R. (2012). Refusal Strategies in English by Malay University Students. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, 11(3).
- Wardani, F. D. (2019). *Refusal strategies used by 5th semester students of English Department in State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya* (Doctoral dissertation, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya).
- Yuda, Y. E., Solihat, D., & Rahmatunisa, W. (2018, October). English Refusal Strategies of Sundanese Students at Kuningan University. In *The 1st International Conference on ELT (CONELT)* (Vol. 1, No. 1)