

REFUSAL STRATEGIES USED BY MALAY ESL STUDENTS AND ENGLISH NATIVE SPEAKERS TO REFUSE A REQUEST

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ABSTRACT: The present study investigates similarities and differences of a speech act of refusal in English as realized by Malay Speakers of English (MSE) and Native Speakers of English (NSE). The study examined the types and also the contents of the strategies used by the two groups when refusing a request made by a higher status interlocutor. An *Enhanced Open Role-play* was utilized to obtain data on the types and content of refusal strategies. Participants of the study comprised 12 MSE undergraduate students from a local university and 12 NSE who were IGSCE and Diploma Baccalaureate students from an international school who had refused to the higher status interlocutor's request. Qualitative data analytic methods were used to analyse the data which were classified into semantic refusal strategies and politeness strategies. Brown's and Levinson's politeness theory, Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's high- and low-context cultures were used to guide the study. The findings revealed that the two groups shared many similarities in terms of types and contents of the strategies when refusing to the higher status interlocutor's requests. Nevertheless, the NSE demonstrated a higher use of direct strategies and the content of their indirect strategies and adjuncts to refusal strategies reflect the western individualistic values. The MSEs, on the other hand exhibited the eastern values which prioritize group's importance. These findings provide further insights on the complexities of refusal interaction and the patterns could be used by English language teachers as pragmatic input to develop English as a Second Language students' ability to use socially appropriate language for the situation they encounter.

KEYWORDS: Refusal strategies, Politeness strategies, Speech act, Enhanced open role-play, English as a Second Language

INTRODUCTION

Since communication is culturally relative, when individuals of diverse background interact, they may fail to understand each other's intention. People from different cultures have different rules of speaking as a result of different frames of reference. Communication may falter due to ignorance, the influence of factors such as when to talk, what to say, pacing and pausing, listenership, intonation, familiarity, indirectness, cohesion and coherence (Tannen, 1984). This misunderstanding may contribute to cultural stereotyping and to the perception of nonnative speakers as being arrogant or ill-mannered by native speakers (Olshtain, 1983; Wolfson, 1989).

Malaysia, with its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society, is a country where intercultural contacts are rapidly increasing. Furthermore, with 2150 foreign company subsidiaries and 14 million tourists

visiting Malaysia from January to August 2007, which is an increase of 22% from 11.5 million in 2006, the possibility of interactions between Malaysians and foreigners using English as the lingua franca is high (Immigration Department of Malaysia, 2007). In addition, the number of foreign students in Malaysia has also increased. For instance, more than 66,000 foreign students from over 100 countries are currently pursuing their pre- tertiary and tertiary studies at various educational institutions in Malaysia (NST, 21 October 2007). The implication clearly points to the need for more scientific studies of cross cultural communication which has become central to the field of applied linguistics not only for the purpose of language learning and teaching but also for enhancing cross cultural understanding.

There are numerous studies on interlanguage/cross-cultural pragmatics within the framework of speech acts. They have examined among other issues, the production, perception, and pragmatic development of L2 learners during the realisation of various speech acts. Among these studies are compliments (e.g. Wieland, 1995), complaints (e.g. Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993), apologies (e.g. Intachchakra, 2004), requests (Kasanga, 2006; Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasake & Ogino, 1986), requests and apologies (Achiba, 2003; Marquez-Reiter, 2000; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986), and refusals (Nikmehr & Jaherdi, 2014; Sattar & Farnia, 2014; Abarghoui, 2012, Al-Shboul, Marlyna Maros & Mohamad Subakir, 2012; Sattar, Salasiah Che Lah & Raja Rozina, 2011; Kahtani, 2008; Al Eryani, 2007; Nguyen, 2006; Al Khatib, 2006; Felix-Brasdefer, 2004a & 2004b; Lauper, 1997; Chen, 1996; Ramos, 1991). Among the aspects focused in these studies are linguistics manifestations and underlying politeness strategies of learners, patterns of speech acts produced the learners, pragmatics transfer i.e. how the speakers' patterns of speech acts reflect their sociopragmatic competence of English; how the speakers' and hearers' beliefs built on relevant social and cultural values influence students' realisation of the speech act.

In Malaysia, several studies have been carried out focusing on similar areas. Among the local studies focusing on politeness strategies and/or specific speech acts are studies done by Marlyna Maros (2006) – complaint strategies in Malay middle class, Norashikin Ghazali (2006) – negative politeness in conversations among Malays of Northern and Central Peninsular, Noor Azian Abdul Aziz (2005) – linguistic politeness, Hishamudin Isam (2003) – politeness as reflected in Malay proverbs, Mohammad Idris (2000) – politeness in conversations among Malay family members, Mohammad Fadzeli Jaafar (1997) – politeness through the use of refine language, Teo Kok Seong (1996) – Malay pronouns and its relation to politeness, and Khadijah Ibrahim (1993) – politeness in Malay directives. Subjects of the studies were native speakers of Malay and the speech acts and politeness strategies studied concentrate on their use of the first language i.e. Bahasa Melayu. Yusniza, Faizah and Nasariah (2011). Kuang (2009) also conducted studies on speech acts and politeness strategies in Bahasa Melayu as realized by Malay university students but they compared the data to the data of other ethnicities, Chinese and Indian. However, similar studies conducted on the use of ESL/EFL are not many.

Among the studies on speech acts realised by Malay speakers in English are studies carried out by Marlyna Maros (2006) who discussed the relationships of language and culture manifested through the production of the speech act of apologies, Norzainiyah Norita Mukhtar (2003) who examined request strategies of students from two different programmes and how they negotiate the strategies between two social factors, power and social distance, and Abdul Aziz Idris (1991) who investigated aspects of politeness strategies in English and Malay focusing on the speech acts of greetings and leave-takings. There is also a study by Lim (2000) who examined the transfer of Malay politeness strategies into Singapore English. His subjects were Malay undergraduates of the National University of Singapore.

More recent studies on the Malays' realization of refusal speech act in English are comparative in nature i.e. compared to other non-native speakers of English. Sattar and Farnia (2014) compared Malay data to Iraqis data while Al-Shboul et al. (2012) compared Malays' refusal strategies to Jordanian EFL learners' refusal strategies.

As can be seen, studies on speech acts and politeness as realised by Malay speakers in their L2 are only a handful. Thus, the present study focusses on politeness strategies of Malay speakers in English which are compared to politeness strategies of the native speakers of English. Specifically, the study examines the similarities and differences of the speech act of refusals in English between Native speaker of English(NSE)

and Malay speakers of English (MSE) in Malaysia from intercultural perspective based on Brown & Levinson (1987) politeness theory and Beebe et al.(1990) semantic refusal formula. Another theory that lends support to this study is Geert Hofstede's (1991) four cultural dimensions: power-distance, collectivist-individualistic, feminine-masculine, and uncertainty avoidance. In addition, reference is made to Edward T. Hall's (1976) high-low context cultures, and monochromatic and polychromatic cultures. It is hoped this endeavor has provided important useful insights on politeness strategies of both native and non-native speakers of English parties which could lead to better comprehension, fewer misunderstandings and mutual respect. Furthermore, the researcher hopes to fill in the gap in study of refusal and politeness strategies of the Malay society as realised in English and as realized by the Native speakers of English who reside in Malaysia.

In the study, aspect of politeness is examined in the context of the speech act of refusal. This particular speech act has been chosen as the focus of the study, apart from politeness, due to the fact that only a few studies have been conducted on the Malays refusing in English despite the many studies carried out overseas. In addition, refusing is one of the central issues of intercultural communication. The act of refusing itself is risky and potentially a source of tension in intercultural interactions. Refusals function as a response to an initiating act and constitute a major cross-cultural challenge for nonnative speakers (NNSs) because they require a high level of pragmatic competence. Refusals are complex speech acts that require language sequences of negotiation and cooperative achievements. From a sociolinguistic view, refusals are important because they are sensitive to social variables. They may vary according to gender, level of education, and the social status of the speaker (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; Beebe et al., 1990). From a pedagogical point of view, refusals are worth investigating because not only do L2 learners need to recognize the linguistic forms necessary to produce the speech act, but they must also be aware of sociocultural values that characterise the target speech community; that is, learners must be sensitive to the culture of the target language in order to communicate appropriately in any given situation (Cohen, 1996; Kasper & Rose, 2002).

Review of the literature has also shown that most of the studies which compare realization of speech acts of participants from different cultural background employed Discourse Completion Test (DCT) (Nikmehr & Jaherdi, 2014; Mohammad & Hatam, 2014; Abarghoui, 2012; Al-Kahtani, 2008; Al Eryani, 2007; Nguyen, 2006; Al Khatib, 2006; Hill, 1997; Lauper, 1997; Chen, 1996; Trosborg 1995; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986) to elicit data. Many of the local studies also employed DCT to elicit responses (Farahnaz & Asma, 2014; Sattar & Farnia, 2014; Al-Shboul et al., 2012; Youssef, 2012; Sattar et al., 2011; Farnia, Buchheit & Shahida, 2010; Maros, 2006). Kasper (2000, p.329) states that DCT is an effective data collection instrument when the objective of the investigation is "to inform the speakers' pragmalinguistic knowledge of the strategic and linguistic by which communicative acts can be implemented, and about their sociopragmatic knowledge under which particular strategies and linguistic choice forms are appropriate". Nelson, Carson, Al Batal, and El Bakary (2002) also support the use of DCT when they point out that DCT can be applied directly to participants from various background since it allows control over participants' variables such as status and ethnic background.

The present study, however, employs open role-play as the instrument to elicit responses from participants since the aim of the study focuses on conversational interaction and sequencing of communication. In contrast to DCT which is limited in authenticity, open role-play generates data which resemble real-life data and thus, produces more accurate pragmatic data than DCT (Tran, 2003). Kasper & Dahl (1991) and Felix-Brasdefer (2010 as cited in Martinez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2011) state that this data collection technique allows researchers to examine a particular act behaviour in its full discourse context in order to observe how speech act performance is structured in sequence and how specific strategic choices affect interlocutor responses. This technique also allows the researcher to analyse the data on refusal interactions at the discourse level. Hence, the use of role-play and the discourse level analysis generate richer refusal negotiations, and produce clearer refusal patterns, contents and strategies.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The present study aims to find answer to the following research question:

How do the Malay Speakers of English (MSE) and the Native Speakers of English (NSE) differ in the types and contents of refusal strategies when refusing the higher status interlocutor's request?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is beneficial as it has added to the present studies done on speech acts and pragmatics by providing pertinent information on refusal patterns of Malay speakers of English and native speakers of English. It has also contributed to insights on the values or belief which underlie their speech behaviors. Hence, the findings of the study have further contributed to the current understanding and knowledge of the native speakers' and non-native speakers' refusal and politeness strategies. Secondly, the findings are useful for pedagogical purposes. Teachers can highlight the salient features of refusal patterns and politeness strategies of the two groups to students. Discussions on the differences in speech behaviours and factors which influence them can also be conducted. Thus, the findings can be used to raise learners' pragmatics awareness of how people of different cultures behave and speak and help them to become familiar with a range of devices and practices in the target language.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research design. Its data were derived from open role plays enacted by the Malaysian speaker of English (MSE) and the Native Speakers of English (NSE) from a situation requiring them to refuse the higher status interlocutor's request to work extra-hour. The refusal interactions were transcribed, coded and analysed. The analysis was aimed at determining similarities and differences in the refusal strategies of the two groups employed to refuse their higher status interlocutor's request to work extra-hour.

THE INSTRUMENT

The study employed open role-play to collect data. Open role-play is a role-play in which the actors' roles are specified but the course and the outcome of the conversation are not predetermined i.e. a subject is given a situation in which the status of both the subject and his/her interlocutor are given specific roles. What to say in the role-play and how to resolve the dilemma he/she is in is entirely up to the subject. In this study, the situation given is the respondents were part time workers at a bookstore and their boss requested them to work extra hours (see Appendix 1 for full description of the situation). They were to decline their boss's request. The situation for the role-play was adapted and modeled based on previous studies (Von Canon, 2006; Felix-Brasdefer, 2004; Margalef-Boada, 1993; and Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990). The situations provide specific information in order to provide respondents with adequate contextualized background information such as social distance, power status, characteristics of the social setting and age. The provision of sociocultural information is based on the suggestion made by Billmyer and Varghese (2000) that content-enriched DCT (Discourse Completion Test) prompts elicit more elaborated and natural-like data. Thus, to ensure the validity of the role-play data, the open-ended role-plays used in the present study include sociocultural information. Felix-Brasdefer (2004) and Von Canon (2006) consider this kind of role-play as 'enhanced' open-role plays and they employed them in their study of refusals.

A pilot study was conducted in which five respondents from each of the groups role-played the situation. The interactions were transcribed and then, their refusal strategies were categorized by the researcher according to classification of refusal semantic formula (Beebe, et al., 1990) and were reviewed by two native speakers of English who were teachers at an international school. Results of the categorization were compared. The semantic formula were then adapted accordingly. Subsequently the actual data were collected from the 12 respondents from each of the groups. The researcher's analysis and categorizations of the actual data were given to two lecturers from Applied Linguistics Department to review. Discussions among the three were conducted and based on the consensus reached; the researcher revised her categorization accordingly. Table 1 presents the classification of semantic formulas of refusal employed by the study. The classification system includes three components: directness, indirectness, and adjuncts to refusals.

Table 1
Classification of Refusal Semantic Formulas

I Direct Refusal

Performative (e.g., "I refuse")

Non performative statement

1. "No"
2. Negation of Proposition or Negative willingness/ability
3. Mitigated Refusal

Indirect Refusals

- A. Statement of regret/ apology
(e.g., "I'm sorry...", "Excuse me")
- B. Excuse, reason, explanation, justification
- C. Statement of alternatives
 1. I can't do X instead of Y (e.g., "I'd rather...", "I'd prefer...")

Why don't you do X instead of (e.g., Why don't you ask someone else?)

Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., "If you had asked me earlier, I would have...")

Promise of future acceptance (e.g., "I'll give you a pay raise as soon as I can")

Statement of principle (e.g., "I never do business in restaurant")

Statement of philosophy (e.g., "Such things can happen to anyone")

Attempt to dissuade interlocutor

1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (e.g., "You won't be able to understand my handwriting" for refusing to lend class notes)
2. Statement of negative feeling:
Criticism of the request/requester, guilt trip (e.g., "You are lazy")

Criticized the request/requester / negative feeling

Opinion/insult/attack (e.g., "Who do you think you are?", "That's terrible idea!")

Request for help, empathy, and assistance (e.g., "I hope you can understand my situation")

Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g., "Don't Worry about it", "that's is okay", "you don't have to")

Self defense (e.g., "I'm just following the course program", "I'm doing my best", "I'm doing all I can do")

Statement of assurance (e.g., "I like it the way it is")

I Avoidance

1. Verbal
 - a. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., "Did you say Monday?")
 - b. Request for information
 - c. Postponement (e.g., "I'll think about it")
 - d. Wish
- e. Hedging (e.g., "I'll don't know", "I'm not sure")

f. Compromise

Adjuncts to Refusals (preliminary remarks that cannot stand alone to function as refusals/disagreement.)

1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement
(e.g., “good idea”, “I’d love to...”), compliment (e.g., “The cake was very good”).
2. Statement of empathy (e.g., “I realize you’re very good in a difficult situation”)
3. Support
4. Gratitude/Appreciation (e.g., “Thank you very much”)
5. “Exclamation of disappointment, surprise (e.g., “What a pity!”, “What a coincidence!”)
6. Preparator
7. Disclaimer

(Source: Al Issa, 1998 and Felix-Brasdefer, 2004b)

The Participants

The participants of the study consisted of two groups; MSE and NSE. Twelve MSE participants were selected among students from a law programme of a local university and 12 NSE participants were selected from GCSE and Diploma Baccalaureate programmes of an international school in Penang. Table 2 shows details of the participants.

Table 2
Participants of the Actual Study

Participants	Age	Gender	School/University	Total
MSE	19 - 21 years old	6 males & 6 females	Undergraduates of a local university	12
NSE	15- 18 years old	6 males & 6 females	Students of an international school	12

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for the study. The method is commonly used in speech act studies (Al Kahtani, 2008; Al Khatib, 2006; Nguyen, 2006; Felix-Brasdefer, 2004; Reiter, 2000; Lim, 2000; Al Issa, 1998; Khadijah, 1993; Chen, 1996; Nor Hashimah, 1994; Margalef-Boada, 1993; Ramos, 1991) mainly due to the fact that such studies require participants who can provide “the desired information, either because they are the ones who have it, or conform to some criteria set by the researcher” (Sekaran, 2003, p.277). Dornyei (2007) suggests the employment of three interrelated sampling strategies; homogeneous sampling, typical sampling and criterion sampling which all aim at selecting participants who are similar in some aspects. Hence, the present study utilizes the methods suggested by selecting participants who conform to the specified criteria.

MSE participants were selected from Malay undergraduate students who obtained MUET (Malaysian University Entrance Test) Band 4 or Band 5 at entry point. The reason for selecting students with MUET Band 4 (Competent User) and Band 5 (Good User) was to ensure that the respondents are able to carry out conversation for the role play without too much difficulty as the focus of the study too was not on students’ ability to express themselves but rather on refusal patterns, and politeness strategies. The MSE participants ranged from 19-22 years old. These groups of participants were selected from first year students to enable the researcher to get participants within the age specified so that their age difference was not too far different from their NSE counterparts. In addition these participants were also selected since their parents are native speakers of Malay and they speak Malay at home.

NSE participants consisted of students from an international school in Penang. Since they were school students, these participants were slightly younger than the MSE group, that is, between 15 (GCSE students) to 18 years old (Diploma Baccalaureate students). These participants were British nationalities and their

parents were native speakers of English. Similar to the other two groups, the reason for setting these conditions was to ensure homogeneity in the group of native speakers of English.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of data for the study involves the following stages:

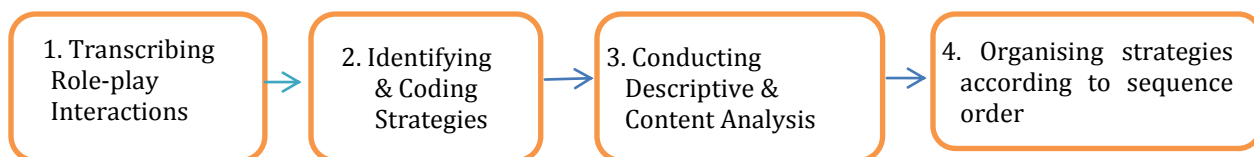


Figure 1 Stages in Data Analysis

As shown in Figure 1, the data analysis began with transcription of refusal interactions from the role-play. Based on the transcription, refusal strategies were identified and coded according to the revised Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990) classification of semantic formula and were analysed across full interaction. The strategies identified and obtained were analysed using descriptive analytical procedure to obtain the overall distribution of the strategies and to ascertain similarities and differences in the MSE and the NSE speech patterns. Content of the strategies were also identified. Finally, the speech act of refusals realized by the participants' role-play were analysed as a series of strategies that comprised of three sequences as suggested by Blum, House, and Kasper (1989) to determine the strategies distributional order. The sequences are as follows:

1. Pre-refusal strategies which prepare the addressee for an upcoming refusal;
2. Head-act or main refusal which expresses the main refusal;
3. Post-refusal strategies which follow the head act and tend to emphasize, mitigate, or conclude the refusal response.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings for the types and the contents of refusal strategies for the two groups are presented according to three categories: direct, indirect and adjunct to refusal strategies.

In terms of types of refusal strategies, the MSE and the NSE employed four direct strategies: *negation of proposition*, *mitigated refusal*, *flat no* and *performative*. As indicated in Figure 2 participants from both groups employed almost similar approach to refuse their superior's request to work extra-hour. Both groups employed two lesser degree of directness. The first, *negotiation of proposition* was employed substantially by the MSE (25.4%) and considerably by the NSE (18.6%) while the second strategy *mitigated refusal* was used considerably by the MSE (10.4%) and substantially by the NSE (20.9%). The two groups also employed a high degree of directness; *flat no* minimally. However, comparatively the NSE participants used slightly more direct strategies (42.2%) compared to the MSE participants (36%).

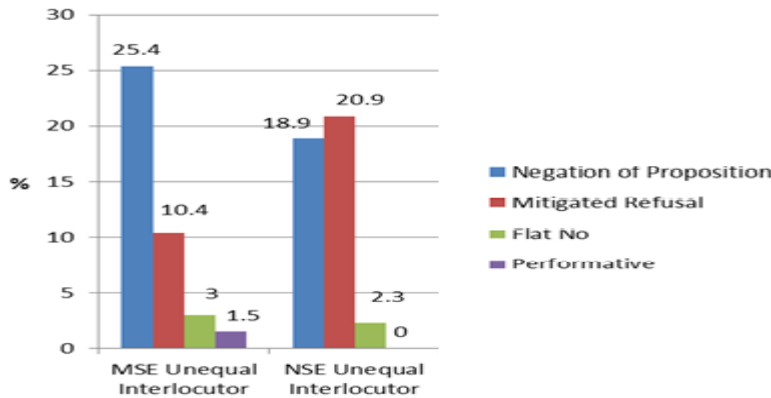


Figure 2 MSE vs NSE direct strategies when refusing high status interlocutor

The MSEs' and NSE employment of the direct strategies corresponds to Brown and Levinson's on record strategy (1987, pp. 68-69) with respect to precision and clarity of communicative intention and Grice's maxim of manner (1975, pp.45-46) in which message should be conveyed without obscurity and also maxim of quality i.e. do not say what you believe to be false. By being direct the participants can avoid misunderstanding or being seen as a manipulator and their refusal message is clearly conveyed. The variation in the use of direct strategies reflects that they adapted the strategies according to situations, closeness/distance authority and the imposition involved. In other words, the participants assess, the perceived social distance between the hearer and the speaker, the perceived power difference between them and the cultural ranking of the speech (Vilkki, 2006). The power variable has led the participants from both groups to reduce the degree of directness via substantial use of the lesser (*negation of proposition*) and the least degree of directness (*mitigated refusal*). Felix-Brasdefer (2002) who had the same finding, attributes the low use of the highest direct of directness (*flat no*) to refuse the higher status interlocutor to the fact that it poses greater threat to the hearer's positive face.

The approach adopted by the MSE and the NSE in their direct strategies was extended to the MSE and the NSE indirect strategies. Both groups utilized similar indirect strategies to decline their employer's request to work overtime. The MSE used 10 indirect strategies: *reason, apology, alternative, request for empathy, repetition, principle, hedging, request for information, set condition for future acceptance and compromise* while the NSE utilized one extra strategy (i.e. *wish*) apart from the 10 strategies as employed by the MSE. Figure 3 and Figure 4 show clearly that both the MSE and the NSE employed *reason, apology* and *alternatives* as their major strategies.

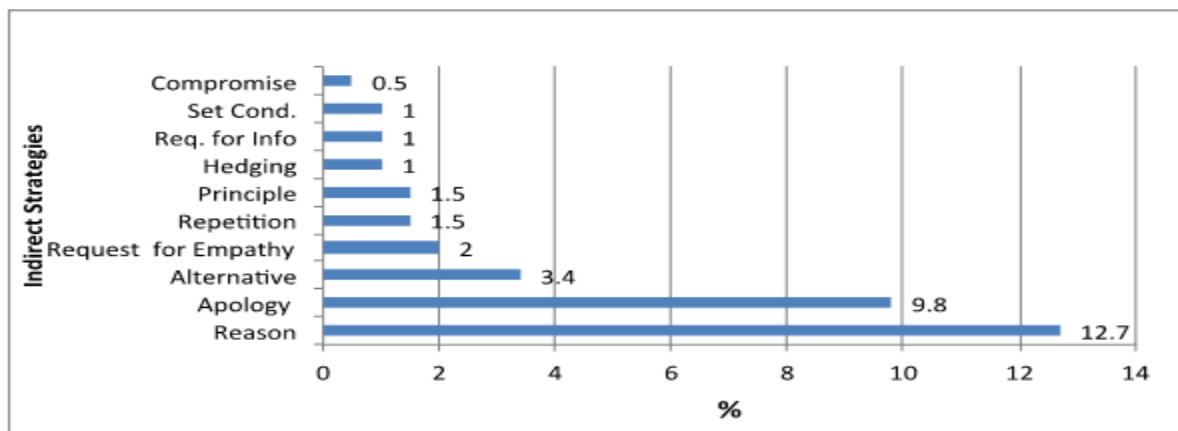


Figure 3 Indirect strategies employed by the MSE in Refusing the Request to Work Extra-Hour

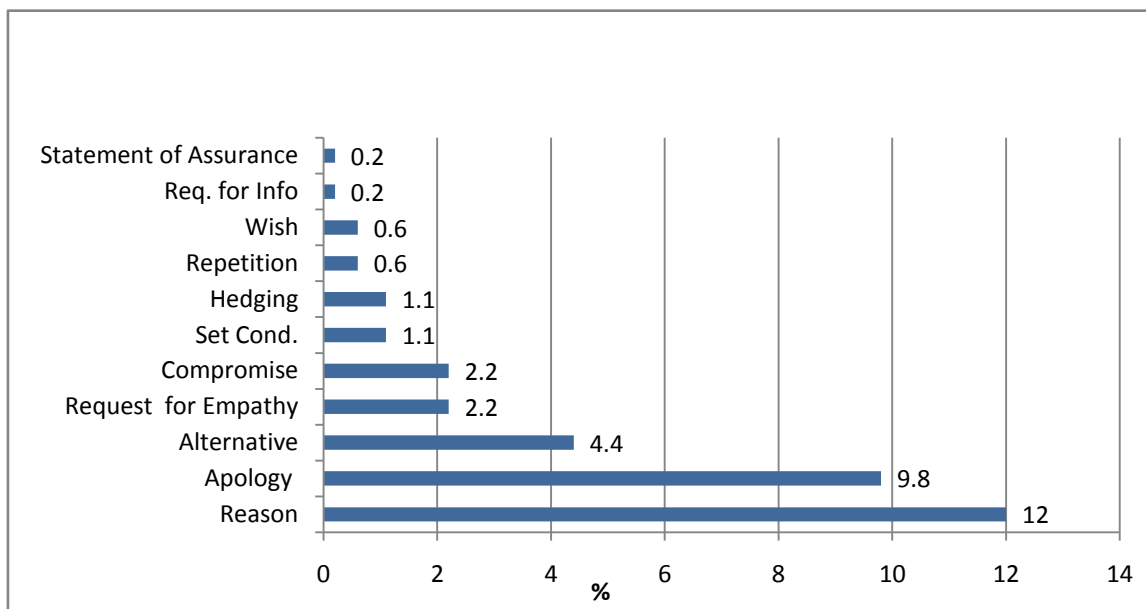


Figure 4 Indirect strategies used by NSE in Refusing the Request to Work Extra-Hour

As stressed by Beebe et.al (1990) refusals are sensitive to sociolinguistic variable such as power variable and the strategies employed by the MSE and the NSE indicate this clearly. In the request to work extra-hour, the interlocutor was their supervisor; hence the MSE and the NSE used reason and apology substantially in their effort to save their hearer’s face as the switched from the direct strategies which are face-threatening to the self-effacing indirect strategies. After expressing their refusal, their provided ample reasons and followed by apologies and attached intensifier such as “really,” “so” and “very” which preceded the word “sorry” to heighten its effect. In addition some also requested the supervisor’s understanding (*request for empathy*) and showed her that they care by giving her *alternative* but at the same time used direct strategies to indicate their stand clearly. The employment of reasons, apologies and alternatives as the three salient strategies used by the MSE and the NSE were in line with findings of studies by Beebe et.al. (1990), Farnia and Wu (2012), and Sattar and Farnia (2014).

In terms of content, as can be seen in Table 3, participants of both groups gave specific reasons. Majority of the participants cited having other jobs and as such would be too tired due to lack of sleep and would not be able to concentrate on their jobs. Apart from job related reasons, few of the MSE and the NSE participants also cited meetings/appointments with friends. The MSE also cited matters pertaining to family; had to fetch his wife from work, worried about his sick wife at home, had her kid waiting at home and wanted to keep her promise that she would go home right after work. The NSE, however, did not give any family related reasons.

Table 3
Reasons for declining request to work extra-hour

Reasons	MSE	NSE
Matters pertaining to jobs	18	19
Had meetings / appointments with friends	4	3
Matters pertaining to family	4	-

The findings which reveal that non-native speakers i.e. the MSE gave specific reasons contradicted Beebe et.al,(1990) which indicated that the native speakers of English gave specific reasons whereas the non-native speakers provided vague reasons. The contradiction i.e. the non-native speakers of English (the MSE) giving

mostly specific reasons may be due to the fact that the MSE participants were quite fluent in English as they were chosen from students with MUET Bands 4 and 5. Hence, they were able to express themselves without much difficulty. The MSE citing family related reasons also reflects the eastern values which give important to family as stated by Asmah (2002). Asmah also reiterates that Malay culture prioritizes group rather than individual and that a person should take care of extended family before self. Hofstede (1994) categories society with this value under 'collective culture' and one's allegiance to group is more important. The absence of family related reasons given by the NSE participants may be due to the manifestation of the western values which emphasize 'individualistic culture' as highlighted by Brown and Levinson (1987). Likewise, Hofstede (1994) in his 'individualism' versus 'collectivism' dimension suggests that people from this 'individualistic culture' prefer to act as individuals rather than members of a group. As such, individual's needs, values, and goals are given more priorities over in groups' needs, values and goals (Triandis, 1995)

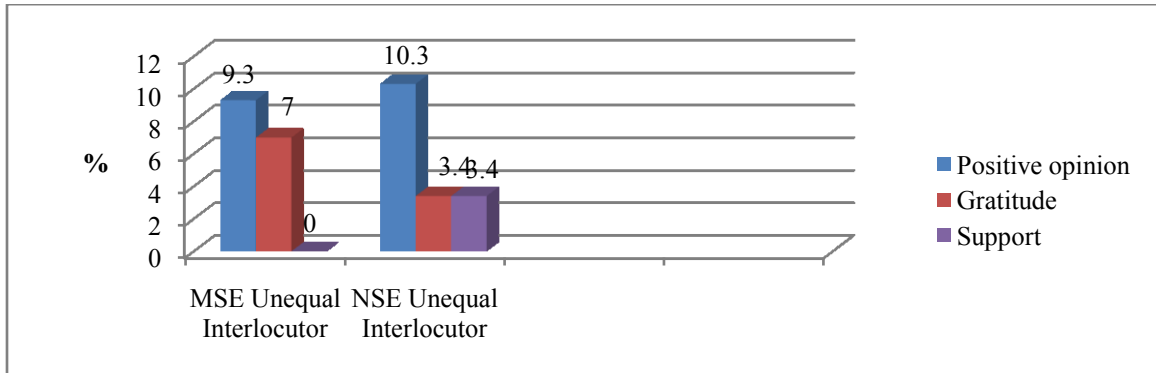


Figure 5 MSE VS NSE Adjuncts to Refusals

The MSE and the NSE participants' employment of adjunct to refusal strategies also indicated their effort to mitigate the effect of their refusal. There were three strategies employed under this category: *positive opinion*, *gratitude and appreciation*, and *support*. As shown in Figure 5, they employed almost the same number of the strategies i.e. 16% for the MSE and 17% for the NSE when refusing their superior's request to display books outside their working hours. Both used *positive opinion* dominantly to express their willingness by agreeing with employer's request but this was followed by rejection of the request. However the MSE also employed gratitude considerably. Conversely, the NSE used *gratitude* and one more strategy i.e. *support* minimally.

CONCLUSION

The MSE and the NSE shared many similarities in terms of their refusal strategies employed to refuse their employer's request to work extra-hour. With regard to their direct strategies, both groups preferred the lesser degree of directness: *negation of proposition* and *mitigated refusal* while for the indirect strategies both employed *reason*, *apology* and *alternative* as their salient. Both also tended to agree with their employer's request by using the *positive opinion* strategy before indicating their inability to fulfil her request. Their strategies throughout the refusal interaction illustrate the characterization of refusals which is rather complex. It involves multiple speech acts and strategies, refusal, request, apology, suggestion, promise and so forth. This suggests that the participants from both groups are aware of their status and tried as much as possible to save the face of their interlocutor but at same time maintain their stance. The findings also reveal several differences between the groups. The NSE tends to be more direct compared to the MSE as indicated by slightly higher use of the direct strategies. Both groups exhibit different values as reflected by the content of the reasons to refuse the request. The NSE participants display western individualistic values while the MSE participants exhibit eastern group oriented values.

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Appendix: Situation for Open Role-Play

Request: Bookstore

Apart from your regular job, you also work part-time at an established bookstore. The bookstore is open Sunday until Thursday from 9.00 in the morning to 9.30 in the evening. You work from 7.30 in the evening to 9.30 in the evening from Sunday to Thursday. You get along fine with your boss, but you don't socialize together outside work. It is Thursday evening at 9.15pm and your boss has just received a delivery books that had been lost in the mail for three weeks and which need to be on display by Sunday morning. You are finishing an inventory when the boss approaches you and asks you to work extra hours (until 11.30pm) to get the display ready , but you can't stay back to do the job.