

GENDER-BASED DIFFERENCES IN PERFORMING REFUSAL STRATEGIES AMONG INDONESIAN INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

In this study, 30 male and 30 female Indonesian intermediate EFL learners were investigated to find out the gender differences in performing refusal strategy and the effect of interlocutor status on refusal strategy performed by the selected participants. A qualitative approach was employed in this study by using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) with 12 scenarios. The data were analyzed into the refusal taxonomy proposed by Beebe et al. (1990). The results showed that the indirect strategy become the most frequently used strategy performed by male and female students. However, the female students have used a variety of indirect strategies slightly greater than did the male students. Moreover, the interlocutor status also affected a similar effect on the refusal strategy performed by the participants. Therefore, there is no significant difference in refusals between male and female students, and the results reveal that EFL students prefer to refuse respectfully to avoid offending others. The researchers proposed that future studies use not only DCT but also other instruments in collecting data in order to acquire complete data to explore pragmatic competency.

Keywords: *gender differences; Indonesia Intermediate EFL Learners; refusal strategy*

INTRODUCTION

The high demand for English in today's world necessitates language users to be pragmatically competent in order to adapt to a variety of contexts' requirements. Some variables, such as the target language's culture, the speech act utilized in the contact, the interlocutors' position, and gender, are considered crucial components within particular situations, Tuncer & Turhan (2019). As a result, English should be researched from more than just a language standpoint. In other words, because it is the world's lingua franca, it is not sufficient to evaluate its syntactical, morphological, as well as its phonetic features. This means looking at English from the standpoint of how it should be used in various situations that demand distinct grammatical forms or lexical elements. This is where the term "pragmatics" should be used (Hikmahwati, et al, 2021).

According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is the process through which speakers modify their language use depending on who they are speaking with, when, where, and under what circumstances. Pragmatics, according to Crystal (1997), is the study of

language that takes into account its users' choices and the impact of language usage on the participants in the communication act. When it comes to language skills, there are two basic areas to consider: Communicative Competence and Grammatical Competence.

These two skills should not be considered separate because, according to Hymes (1972), grammatical competence, as well as the capacity to use the grammatical skill in a range of communication circumstances, are included in communicative competence, highlighting the relevance of the sociolinguistic perspective. Grammatical competence includes knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and phonology, but communicative competence also includes sociolinguistics, discourse, and strategic competence. Pragmatic competence is classified under sociolinguistic competence (Niezgoda & Röver, 2001) Because pragmatic competence is described as the ability to use language successfully in relation to users and circumstances, pragmatics may be seen as a relationship between society and language, and this is something that should be linked to sociolinguistics.

This study attempts to explore pragmatic competency under this paradigm, specifically the refusal strategy of Indonesian intermediate EFL learners by looking at gender differences among these students in performing refusal acts. There have been some studies conducted on the realization of speech acts of refusals. First, Jiang (2015) The study looked at pragmatic transfer in refusal speech acts performed by Chinese high school EFL students and Americans. The findings showed that Americans preferred direct rejection techniques and good sentiments over Chinese, and pragmatics transfer was clearly shown in both groups. Both pragmatic transfer and L2 verbal ability exhibited a tendency of negative co-relationship in Chinese English learners 1 and 3, and both pragmatic transfer and L2 linguistic ability showed a tendency of negative co-relationship in the substance of rejection techniques of excuse. Second, Demirkol (2016) conducted the research on How do We Say 'No' in English? The participants in this study did not show any significant modifications in their preferences for politeness methods. Third, Seyyed Hatam and Zohre (2014) conducted a comparison study of refusal strategies of Iranian University English as a Foreign Language and Non-English Learners in Native Language. The findings showed that non-English learners used refusal strategies more frequently, whereas EFL learners used adjuncts more frequently.

A number of those researchers mentioned above only investigated speech acts of refusal dealing with age, level of education, and power differences. Nonetheless, gender as its variable has not been paid much attention. So, this current study will investigate gender and its contribution toward males and females in performing refusal.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Refusal

The negative answer to someone's invitation, recommendation, offer, or request is called refusal. Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) stated that the response to four

distinct speech actions of invitation, offer, request, and suggestion is known as a speech act of refusal. Refusal occurs when the addressee refuses to do what the speaker requests. A refusal is a speech act in which a speaker refuses to engage in an activity that the converser suggests (Cheng et al., 1995). Moreover, refusals are not always the form of rejection. According to Gass and Houck (1999), when deciding not to accept an initiated act, one can normally choose one of three refusal strategies, rejection, delay, or an alternate proposal.

Furthermore, refusals take into account a variety of social factors such as gender, social power, and position. Refusals are essential, according to Felix-Brasdefer (2006), since they are sensitive to social characteristics including gender, age, level of education, power, and social distance. In addition, Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz believe that refusals are an especially tough task in a second language, because learners may lack relevant linguistic and pragmatic skills (1990). Because of the complexity of refusals above, second/foreign learners must use their pragmatic ability to avoid the offense by adopting strategies when conducting the refusal.

Semantic formulae (expressions that may be used to execute refusal) and adjuncts (which cannot be employed by themselves but go with refusal tactics) are the two types of refusal answers. According to Beebe et. al's (1990) taxonomy, there are two types of strategy: direct and indirect. In addition, there are four sorts of adjuncts in this categorization, however, they cannot be employed alone and must be used in conjunction with rejection tactics.

1. Direct Strategy

Direct strategy occurs when the illocutionary force is in line with the linguistic form. This strategy consisted of two classifications: (1) Performative, and (2) Nonperformative statements.

2. Indirect strategy

The indirect strategy is classified into the following classification: (1) Statement of regret, (2) Wish, (3) Excuse, reason, explanation, (4) Statement of alternative, (5) Set condition for future or past acceptance, (6) Promise of future acceptance, (7) Statement of principle, (8) Statement of philosophy, (9) Attempt to dissuade interlocutor, (10) Acceptance that functions as a refusal, and (11) Avoidance.

3. Adjunct

This strategy cannot be used to conduct a refusal on its own. They may exist before or after the semantic formulations (Felix-Brasdefer, 2004). This strategy is classified into four categories, namely: (1) Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement, (2) Statement of empathy, (3) Pause fillers, and (4) Gratitude/appreciation.

METHOD

This study was carried out in the English Education Department of one of Indonesia's public universities in Banten province. The purpose of this study was to

determine gender differences in refusal strategy execution and the influence of interlocutor status on refusal strategy execution by 60 intermediate students (30 males and 30 females). To achieve this goal, Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used because the researchers expected the participants to give their answers to the situation given. The situations for male and female groups were the same. Therefore, the most strategy which is frequently used and the relationship of the strategy used to the status of the interlocutors could be directly compared. According to Billmyer and Varghese (2000), this test requires participants to write down plausible replies depending on the circumstances provided. The data was then evaluated using three techniques described by Miles, Huberman, and Sadana (2014), namely data condensation, data presentation, and generating conclusions or verification. The refusal situation in the DCT is described below.

Table 1. The Design of Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

No.	Situation	The interlocutor's status
1.	Request	Lower
2.	Request	Equal
3.	Invitation	Lower
4.	Invitation	Higher
5.	Offer	Equal
6.	Suggestion	Higher
7.	Suggestion	Equal
8.	Suggestion	Lower
9.	Offer	Lower
10.	Invitation	Equal
11.	Offer	Higher
12.	Request	Higher

DISCUSSION

The study is aimed to analyze the types of refusal strategies that are most frequently used and the effect of interlocutor status on the strategy employed by the participants, to figure out the refusal strategies used the researchers used the refusal taxonomy which was proposed by Beebe et. al. (1990) to analyze the findings.

After conducting the study, the researchers have found 569 strategies that are used by females, and 529 strategies that are used by males. Those findings are classified into twenty-two to twenty-three strategies on refusal taxonomy. The further discussion about each strategy used is shown in table 2.

Table 2. Refusal Strategies Used by the Participants

Refusal Strategy	Female (f)	Females (%)	Male (f)	Males (%)
Direct Strategy	106	18.62	100	18.90
Indirect Strategy	385	67.66	363	68.62
Adjunct	78	13.70	66	12.47
Total Strategy	569		529	

To answer the first research question about the most frequently used strategy performed by males and females, the researchers compared the average of total direct strategy and indirect strategy. The findings showed that both groups performed indirect strategy more frequently than direct strategy. The female group performed 67.66% indirect strategy and the male group performed 68.62%. However, the female group was indicated to employ a slightly greater variety of indirect strategies than the male group. Additionally, the researchers also found that both groups performed the adjuncts. In both groups, fewer adjuncts were elicited in the refusal strategy performed by males amount 12.47% than did the female group 13.70%. These findings indicated that the strategy frequently performed by both groups is indirect strategy than direct strategy and the female group has used a variety of indirect strategies and adjuncts greater than did the male group.

The second research question is about the effect of interlocutor status on the strategy employed by the participants. In investigating the participants' refusal strategy three different interlocutor's status was determined to refuse as follows: Refusals to a lower status of the interlocutor, refusals to an equal status of the interlocutor, and refusals to a higher status of the interlocutor. Table 3 will be presented the refusal strategy performed by males and females.

Table 3. Refusal Strategy toward Interlocutor's Status

Participant	Interlocutor's Status	Refusal Strategy		
		Direct Strategy	Indirect Strategy	Adjunct
Female	Higher	14.64%	79.36%	10.05%
	Equal	18.81%	66.66%	14.51%
	Lower	23.11%	61.29%	15.59%
Male	Higher	16.27%	75%	6.97%
	Equal	17.75%	71%	11.24%
	Lower	23.36%	60.86%	15.76%

As shown in Table 3, the researchers compared the average of strategies per item performed to the different types of interlocutor status. The researchers found that the strategies performed varied among the three different types of interlocutor status. Nevertheless, there were similarities among the types of interlocutor's status toward the strategies performed by both groups. Firstly, both male and female groups elicited direct strategy greater to interlocutors with the lower status than to equal and higher status. In contrast, the indirect strategy was employed by both groups toward the interlocutor with lower status is fewer than equal and higher status. In addition, the use of adjuncts is in line with the direct strategy. Both groups performed fewer adjuncts to the interlocutor with higher status than to equal and lower. Therefore, the interlocutor's status has an effect on the refusal strategy performed by both groups. However, these findings showed many similarities than differences in the strategy performed to the types of interlocutor status by the male and female groups.

Based on the findings of the results of refusal strategy frequently used and the interlocutor's effect on the refusal strategy performed by both groups of the present study with the results obtained in previous studies presented a considerable level of consistency of refusal strategy performed by the participants. The indirect strategy is the most frequently used strategy performed by male and female groups than the direct strategy. The current result of this research supports the study conducted by Jiang (2015) who investigated pragmatic transfer in refusal speech act made by Chinese high school EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners and resulted that Chinese speakers used more indirect strategy than American English speakers. The indirect strategy of giving the reason, excuse, and explanation were among the top refusal produced in this study. Along with giving the reason, excuse, and explanation strategy, the giving regret strategy was investigated as the second most preferred strategy. These findings also run parallel to Dermikol's (2016) study found that giving reason and negotiation are the most frequently used strategy then followed by giving regret as the second most frequently used strategy by Turkey EFL learners.

The female group utilized a little higher diversity of indirect strategies than the male group in this study. Liao & Bresnahan (1996) back this up, claiming that women employed more strategies than males to decline someone of higher status. The higher indirect strategy showed that the participants tend to avoid the interlocutor's offense, especially the interlocutor with the higher status. According to Campillo, Jorda, et al. (2009), indirect realizations are used to soften the bad impacts of face-threatening conduct, and they are performed via the use of excuses, explanations, alternatives, and so on. Furthermore, the majority of the participants in this study used adjuncts to express a favorable opinion, empathy, pause filler, and thankfulness. This result is similar to the study conducted by According to Seyyed Hatam and Zohre (2014), the participants utilized favorable ideas, sentiments, or agreement, as well as expressions of thanks and appreciation, the most frequently. One might presume that the employment of adjuncts was designed to fulfill the aims of politeness, Morkus (2009).

CONCLUSION

The results of this study proved that there are more parallels than differences in the rejection strategies used by both groups. To decline the interlocutor's request, offer, invitation, or suggestion, both female and male groups regularly adopted the indirect method. Female participants, on the other hand, used a wider range of indirect strategies than male ones. The gender of the interlocutor had a comparable influence on the rejection approach used by male and female groups. Refusals to the higher-status interlocutor evoked less direct strategies than refusals to the equal and lower-status interlocutor.

In contrast to the indirect method used by participants with higher level interlocutors than equal and lower status interlocutors, fewer adjuncts were elicited in refusals to higher status interlocutors than lower and higher status interlocutors. Thus,

there are no significant variations in the refusal approach regarding the interlocutor's position across male and female groups, and the results demonstrate that EFL learners prefer to respectfully decline to avoid offending anybody.

In this section, the researchers would like to make some recommendations for further study on speech acts, particularly rejection. It is critical to acquire data, not only solicited data but also natural conversation data, in order to develop a full result concerning pragmatic competency. As a result, the researchers must not only utilize DCT to obtain elicited data, but also additional instruments such as role-play to capture natural discourse data. In order to conduct a more interesting study, the researchers suggested taking into account additional refusal factors such as the influence of age on refusals in the EFL environment, variations in the degree of education on refusal strategy in the EFL context, and so on. Moreover, to improve students' pragmatic competence, teachers should construct tasks that expose students to a variety of pragmatic situations, allowing them to perform acceptable speech acts in a given context to persons of various social statuses and social distances in order to prevent pragmatic failure.

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