Ways of Expressing Refusals in Speech Acts

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Abstract: The speech act of refusal has been identified as the main challenge because it can cause undue offense and communication breakdown. In most cases, people offend their interlocutors in the process of performing the act of refusal, because the extant obstacle of linguistic proficiency is compounded by the threatening nature of the speech act .A refusal is a dispreferred response that contradicts the expectations of interlocutors; hence pragmatic competence is necessary to carry it out appropriately. Most studies have indicated that speech acts can be realized either directly or indirectly, but that they are mostly performed indirectly to "soften the blow". The indirect performance of a speech act in its linguistic form does not clearly represent the speaker's intention, thus requiring the addressee to decipher the intended meaning of the utterance in a particular context. The speech act of refusal has been thoroughly studied in inter-language and multicultural pragmatic linguistics. It always takes the form of a negative response to acts such as invitations, offers, requests, and suggestions. A refusal can generally be considered a commussive speech act, although exceptions are possible in situations where the participants may not be aware of the outcome.

Keywords: refusal, speech act, pragmatic, interlanguage.

I. Introduction

Refusals, as all the other speech acts, occur in all languages. However, not all languages/ cultures refuse in the same way nor do they feel comfortable refusing the same invitation or suggestion. According to Al-Eryani (2007), the speech act of refusal occur when a speaker directly or indirectly says 'no' to request or invitation. He states that refusal is a face-threatening act to the listener/ requester/ inviter, because it contradicts his or her expectations, and is often realized through indirect strategies. Thus, it requires a high level of pragmatic competence.

II. Literature review

Chen (1996) (in Al-Eryani: 2007) used strategies to analyze speech act sets of refusal (refusing requests, invitations, offers and suggestions), and concluded that direct refusal as "NO" was not a common strategy for any of the subjects, regardless of their language background. For example, an expression of regret, common in Americans' refusals, was generally produced by the Chinese speakers, which might lead to unpleasant feelings between speakers in an American context.

There are certainly differences in the production of refusals .Refusals require a high degree of pragmatic competence because they lie between very narrow margins of appropriateness. Knowledge of interlanguage pragmatics is essential for understanding the acquisition and use of linguistic patterns. Pragmatic competence on their part is required, because a lack of knowledge about speech act strategies and patterns when people from different cultures communicate may cause intercultural and interethnic communication breakdowns (Sattar, et al.,2011).

From the perspective of pragmatics or discourse analysis, requests and refusals are automatic

sequences in the structure of the conversation which are called "adjacency pairs". "Adjacency pairs" is the term used for certain consecutive speech turns that are closely related (Thi Minh P.: 2006). They can be described as automatic sequences consisting of a first part and a second part produced by two successive speakers such that the second utterance is identified as related to the first as an expected follow-up. Having uttered the first part, the speaker immediately expects his/her conversational partner to produce a second part of the same pair.

Being inter-related with requests, refusals are speech acts aimed at escaping from performing a requested action. However, since requests are made with the expectation that the addressee will not perform otherwise, refusals to requests threaten to produce the requester's 'negative face' (Brown and Levinson: 1987 as cited by Oktoprima sakti: 2006). Therefore, in order to reduce the threat of seeing the requester's negative face, people often use appropriate semantic formulas in refusing, which vary within and across cultures.

III. Analysis

In responding to a request, excuses might be commonly given as part of refusal (Bardovi-Harlig: 1991). In a certain culture of the society, an address or might typically start with expressing a positive opinion or feeling about the request or requester (addressee), then express regret (*I'm sorry*), and finally give an excuse, especially when talking to someone of higher or lower status than her/ himself (status unequal). In addition, the addressor or refuser generally employs preserving strategies of communication while maintaining the status balance. The strategies include *linguistic strategies* (appear congruent with the interlocutor's status and the choice of semantic aspects or components of the language such as "downgraders") and *non-linguistic strategies* (the use of appropriate timing and frequency, the use of brief and appropriate content).

Conducted analysis has revealed both some similarities and differences in the way the British and Russians make a refusal. It has shown that while refusing, both Russian and English speakers may say No, give an apology, express regret and explain the reason for the refusal. Nevertheless it has revealed a lot of differences. The analyses show that when refusing Russian speakers, on the whole, are much more laconic and direct in comparison to English speakers. They can say a straight 'No' followed by gratitude or explanation and don't often mitigate their refusal as the British do. The most typical Russian refusal consists of 2—3 moves while English speakers can go through 3—4 and sometimes even 5—6 moves.

For example : Situation (refusal to the offer to carry a heavy bag):

Russian: Нет, спасибо (No, thank you).

English: Thank you, but it's ok, don't worry. I don't have far to go.

IV. Discussion

The example has shown that in both languages refusal is a complex of acts (moves) which usually involves apology, regret and explanation. It involves indirect strategies as well as mitigating devices to avoid threatening the initiator's positive face. Nevertheless, the sample reveals significant differences concerning both quantitate and qualitative characteristics. Russians tend to say a straight No followed by gratitude, apology or explanation. In all types of refusal (to offers, requests and invitations) they prefer fewer words and moves (most frequently 2 or 3 moves). In British culture an explicit 'No' is avoided, English speakers are more voluble than Russians; they use more than 3 moves rising to 5 and even 6. In their attempt to mitigate refusal they use a combination of positive and negative politeness strategies which is less typical of Russian speakers. The above differences shape features of communicative ethno-styles. Our data confirms the previous statement [Larina 2009, 2015] that Russian communicative style is more laconic and direct, less emotive and more message-oriented than form-oriented in comparison with the English one. English style is more indirect, emotive, form-oriented, person-oriented and voluble. They also confirm A. Wierzbicka's idea discussed in the paper: in Anglo culture it is not enough to say No, it is necessary to say something else. Russian culture in this

respect is closer to Hebrew though it is not so direct. These communicative differences might be explained through cultural differences and values.

In the present study, data were collected through two types of instrument: a written discourse completion test and group discussion. The instruments were used to measure the people' ability to implement refusal strategies fluently and properly in various situations : a refusal of requests, refusal of suggestions, refusal of invitations, and refusal of offers.

Coding Scheme for Refusal Strategies

Category	Strategy	Example (s)
Direct Refusal	a. Direct No	No.
	b. Negative ability	I can't make it.
Indirect Refusal	a. Reason/Explanation	I need it, too.
	b. Postponement	Is it possible I do it next time?
	c. Apology/Regret	I am sorry.
	d. Alternative	You could ask someone else.
	➢ Request for additional information ➢ Attempt to dissuade the interlocutor:	Which movie?
	✓ - Negative consequence	I thought I will ruin your plan with my presentation with little preparation.
	✓ Criticize ✓ Let interlocutor off the hook	Last time I tried to borrow your notebook, why didn't you lend it to me?
	✓ - Request for empathy	Don't worry; That's ok. I hope you can understand.
	b. Conditional acceptance c. Indefinite reply	If you really need it, I can go.
	i. Repetition of part of previous discourse	I don't know if I can come to your party.
	j. Promise	Tomorrow?
	k. Wish	I will help you if I can.
	l. Avoidance: -non-verbal	I wish I could help.
	-verbal	Silence, hesitation and departure Topic switch and postponement
Adjuncts to Refusals	a. Statement of positive opinion	That's a good idea.
	b. Willingness	I'd love to go.
	c. Agreement	Yes/Ok.
	d. Statement of empathy	I know it's quite important for you to prepare exam.
	e. Preparator	I'll be honest with you.
	f. Gratitude	Thank you for your invitation.
	g. pause fillers	Well

V. Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the refusal speech act strategies. The performance of the speech acts of refusal is similar in the distribution and strategies used. Although they differ in linguistic forms, the content of these speech acts is always influenced by the social and cultural norms of the speaker. Although there exist general concepts and universal principles governing speech acts, strategy preferences are subject to the cultural norms associated with different societies.

Regarding refusal strategies, as mentioned, the most frequently used refusal strategies involved an explanation or excuse, apology, negative ability, postponement, or adjuncts to refusals. Various studies have shown that speech acts can be perceived differently by linguistically and culturally diverse groups; therefore, considering the significance of cultural values and norms is essential for understanding refusal strategies.

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