



**Research article**

# Interlanguage refusals and the initiating acts

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## Abstract

In order to find out the complexity of refusals, we investigated cross-cultural similarities and differences of refusal performance by 40 EFL learners and 40 native speakers of American English with the variation of the initiating acts. The two groups of participants were asked to react by writing in the format of discourse completion task (DCT), which consisted of 12 scripted dialogues with the manipulation of the initiating acts. The results were coded based on the taxonomy developed by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990), and were analyzed in terms of the means on direct, indirect and adjunct main categories. Both groups preferred to use indirect refusals, and the type of initiating acts had significant differences on groups in indirect refusals and adjuncts. Among the three initiating acts, requests elicited the highest mean of indirect refusals, followed by refusals to invitations, and refusals to suggestions. In direct refusals, a higher mean was observed in refusals to invitations than the rest of the two initiating acts. The results showed some cross-cultural similarities and differences in refusals for groups, and the type of initiating acts affected refusal strategy selection to a certain extent. The results were discussed from the perspectives of politeness and face.

## Keywords

refusal speech acts; initiating acts in refusal; cross-cultural differences

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the focus of language learning and teaching shifted from grammatical competence to communicative competence (Hymes 1972), we have found that a growing number of cross-cultural and interlanguage studies on speech act performance by native and nonnative speakers have recently emerged (Beebe and Cummings 1985; Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz 1990; Boxer 1989; Eisenstein and Bodman 1993; Piotrowska 1987). The speech acts being investigated included the expressions of gratitude (Eisenstein and Bodman 1993), greetings (Omar 1992), apologies and requests (Blum-Kulka 1982), suggestions (Koike 1996), complaints (Boxer 1989; Piotrowska, 1987), and refusals (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1990; 1991; Beebe and Cummings 1985; Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz 1990; Felix-Brasdefer 2003; Robinson 1992; Rubin 1983).

Usually the issues addressed in these cross-cultural or interlanguage speech act studies followed two traditions (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989). In terms of interlanguage pragmatics, topics such as the ways nonnative speakers selected and realized different speech acts, and the ways how sociopragmatic factors (e.g. age, sex, relative status of the interlocutors, and other situational constraints) governed speech act performance (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989, 7-11) have attracted great attention. In terms of contrastive pragmatics, the issues which have been widely investigated included the value and function of politeness in speech act realization, and the universality of politeness phenomena across languages and cultures. Overall, the theoretical framework of these studies was based on various models of pragmatics (e.g., Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1987). Among them, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model is the most enticing.

Central to Brown and Levinson's politeness model were two kinds of avoidance-based negative politeness and solidarity-based positive politeness (1987, 101-29). Negative politeness strategy referred to some kind of attempt to establish solidarity with the addressee by emphasizing commonality while positive politeness strategy referred to some ways to perform the act by showing deference to the hearer. In other words, negative strategies were used to express restraint, formality, and distancing, whereas positive strategies were used to show solidarity, intimacy, informality, and familiarity (1987, 101-29).

In order to understand how politeness was realized across culture, there have been many studies conducted to investigate the ways nonnative speakers realized refusals (Chen, Ye and Zhang 1995; Lauper 1997; Liao and Bresnahan 1996; Lyuh 1992). For instance, Lauper (1997) did a study using Discourse completion task (DCT) with focus on similarities and differences between Spanish and English refusals. Their findings indicated that two groups used different refusal strategies for moral, educational, social, financial and physical reasons.

A study on refusal done by Lyuh (1992) investigated refusals in English and Korean. By using Discourse completion task (DCT), the results showed that Koreans and Americans differed in the use of refusal strategies and in the content of their refusals. Unlike Americans whose refusals reflected the features of individualistic society, Korean's refusal semantic formulas showed the characteristic of a collectivistic culture.

A large-scale study on Mandarin Chinese refusal in Taiwan and American English refusals was conducted by Liao and Bresnahan (1996). Based on 24 strategies of refusals identified, their



findings showed that both Taiwanese and Americans used one of the refusal strategy - apology (e.g. *I am sorry*) - similarly in terms of frequency distribution. However, Americans were less likely to refuse a friend, while Chinese hesitated to refuse a family member. Americans and Chinese used different formulaic expressions in refusals. Chinese were using fewer strategies at making excuses. In refusing the requests made by the person with higher status, one common refusal pattern in Chinese was using address term, apologies, and reasons (Liao and Bresnahan 1996). On the other hand, Americans tended to use the formula "*I would like to,*" reasons and apology as a mode of polite refusal (Liao and Bresnahan 1996). According to Liao and Bresnahan, Chinese may avoid using formula like "*I would like to*" because they were afraid that if they expressed positive opinions, they will be forced to comply with the request. Liao and Bresnahan (1996) proposed a politeness hypothesis of *dian-dao-wei-zhi* literally meaning 'marginally touching the point.' This "economy of strategy use" (724) in the oriental countries may be due to their concern to end an awkward refusal situation as soon as possible. In their conclusions, they suggested that both cultures were concerned about politeness; however the ways in which politeness was realized reflected the differences between western and oriental countries.

Furthermore, Felix-Brasdefer (2005) investigated the refusal speech act of native speakers of Mexican Spanish and American English, and advanced American learners of Spanish. She found that the type of initiating acts affected the use of strategies and length of responses used to elicit a refusal (i.e., invitations, requests, offers, and suggestions). Learners tended to use more strategies in refusing to requests and invitations, and less strategies in refusing to suggestions and offers.

By reviewing some of the related refusal studies, we found that other social factors and the type of initiating acts (i.e. whether it is a refusal to a request, or a refusal to an invitation or an offer) affected refusal strategy use was mostly done across western speech communities. The issue was not adequately explored in non-western societies. In addition, while refusals can be regarded as pragmatic universal, refusal performance varied with cultures and was constrained by factors like initiating acts. Under the influence of initiating acts, the relative weight placed on each type of refusal strategy varied from culture to culture, or even within the same speech community due to intra-lingual variations (Blum-Kulka 1987).

In order to find out the complexity of refusals and cross-cultural differences in realization of this face-threatening act, we focused on refusal performed by EFL learners and native speakers of American English, and the effect of the type of initiating acts on refusal choice within group and across groups. The findings from the study could help contribute to a better understanding of how refusals was performed by linguistically and culturally diverse speakers. In addition, the complexity and the uniqueness of refusal speech act realization would be better understood. The findings of the study could serve as pedagogical references in language teaching & learning as well.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this study was described as follows, including research questions, subject, procedures, instrument, data coding and analysis.



## *2.1 Research questions*

The major research questions addressed in this study are:

1. How does the type of initiating acts affect refusal performance in three main categories of refusal strategies for American English speakers and EFL learners in Taiwan respectively?
2. What are the top five choices of refusal strategies for groups with the variation of initiating acts?

## *2.2 Subject*

In the study, data on refusals were collected from 40 Taiwanese EFL learners and 40 American English speakers. Equal number of male and female students was chosen in order to counterbalance gender effect.

## *2.3 Procedures and instrument*

The study was carried out through the use of a discourse-completion task (DCT), which consisted of scripted dialogues that represented socially differentiated situations. The situations presented in the DCT required subjects to refuse 4 request, 4 suggestion and 4 invitation situations. In each situation, each dialogue was preceded by a short description of situation, specification of the setting, and was followed by an incomplete dialogue. Respondents were asked to complete the dialogue by providing the responses regarded as socially appropriate.

The questionnaire contained 12 situations, which were related to every day occurrences of the type expected to be familiar to the student population. The degree to which a refusal was regarded as socially appropriate in a given culture lied in several factors which usually led to variations in groups' refusal performance. Thus some of social variables like social status and familiarity were controlled in order to avoid their potential confounding effect on learners' refusal performance, and the factor of the type of initiating act could be more rigorously examined and better understood accordingly.

## *2.4 Coding and data analysis*

Descriptive quantitative analyses were conducted to examine written refusals for EFL learners and Americans. Data were coded according to the taxonomy developed by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990) in terms of frequency of refusal strategies in different situations. The refusal strategies were classified into two major categories: direct refusal category and indirect refusal category. Examples and their substrategies were listed below (See Appendix). Chi-square tests were conducted to examine differences in terms of mean distribution with probabilities up to 0.05 were considered as significant.

In addition, in order to find out the effect of initiating acts within each group and between group respectively, the procedure for analysis was as follows. For refusal responses in direct refusals, indirect refusals, and refusal adjuncts respectively, we used a mean table and descriptive statistics to examine the distribution of refusals produced in request situations (i.e. S2, S3, S4, S9),



suggestion situations (S1, S5, S10, S11) and invitation situations (i.e. S6, S7, S8, S12) by each group (Table 4.9). The within subject factor was initiating acts. Then Chi-square analyses including means and P value will be conducted to see the effect of initiating acts within each subject group.

Furthermore, the results of the between subject effects (i.e. American English and EFL learners) were first checked to find out whether there was significant group difference found in the three main refusal categories.

**Table 1.** Initiating Act Variables in Situations

Type of initiating acts	Situations
Request	S.2, S.9, S.3, S.4
Suggestion	S.1, S.10, S.5, S.11
Invitation	S.6, S.12, S.7, S.8

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The Initiating acts and direct refusals

As shown in Table 2, result of Chi-square indicated that at an alpha level of 0.05, there was significant within group difference for the effect of initiating acts for the Americans ( $p < 0.05$ ), but not for EFL learners ( $p = 0.05$ ).

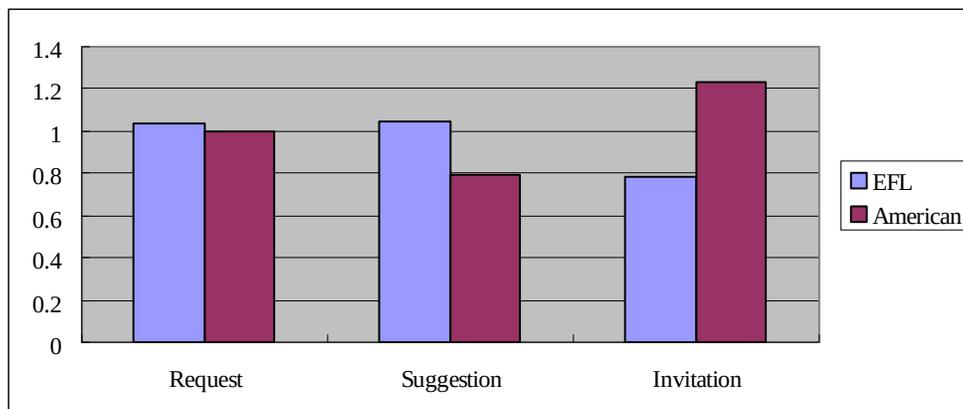
Though no significant difference was observed for EFL learners, we have found suggestions produced the highest mean in direct refusals (mean=1.05), requests ranked 2nd(mean=1.04), and invitations (mean=0.78) had the lowest mean. However, for Americans, invitations elicited the highest mean (mean=1.23), followed by requests (mean=1) and suggestions (mean=0.79).

In terms of the between group differences on each initiating act, the two groups varied greatly ( $p < 0.001$ ) in that EFL learners were more direct in refusing one's suggestions (mean=1.05) than the Americans (mean=0.79). On the other hand, though no significant differences were displayed in either request or suggestion, we found that EFL learners tended to have a slightly higher direct refusal to ones' requests or suggestions. Figure 1 gives a visual illustration.

**Table 2.** Initiating Acts on the Group Choice in Direct Refusals

Direct	EFL	American	P value
Request	1.04	1.00	0.96
Suggestion	1.05	0.79	0.13
Invitation	0.78	1.23	0.00***
P value	0.05	0.01*	

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$



**Figure 1.** Initiating Act on Two Groups' Direct Refusals

### 3.2 The initiating acts on indirect refusals

When we compared the mean occurrences of the two main refusal categories, direct refusals and indirect refusals, the latter was found to be a significantly preferred choice for both groups. The motivation for using indirect refusals instead of direct refusals can be explained from the motivation of face concern.

Because refusals were face threatening, the speaker was faced with the tension when performing refusal. Although the speaker wanted to refuse directly, h/she may have the risk of hurting the hearer's face by refusing directly. So, in order to save the hearer's face and the desire to give the hearer a way out, the speaker used conventional indirectness. By doing so, the speaker expressed his/her intention indirectly. This seemed to partly support the claim that the form of conventional indirectness was universal, as claimed by Brown and Levinson (1987, 132).

With regards to the means in the indirect refusal category (Table 3), result showed that at an alpha level of 0.05, initiating act had significant within group effect on EFL learners ( $p < 0.05$ ) and Americans ( $p < 0.05$ ). For EFL learners, requests elicited the greatest means (mean=3.93), invitations ranked 2nd (mean=3), and suggestions ranked 3rd (mean=1.85). However, with regard to Americans, invitations produced the highest means (mean=3.53), followed by requests (mean=2.88) and suggestions (mean=2.48).

Both groups had the highest means in refusals to requests, whereas the lowest one was in refusing ones' suggestions. This result seemed to in agreement with the findings as reported in Felix-Brasdefer (2005) in that invitations elicited higher indirectness than suggestions.

Concerning cross-cultural differences in each initiating acts, at an alpha level of 0.05, we have found significant between-group differences in requests ( $p < 0.05$ ), suggestions ( $p < 0.05$ ) and invitations ( $p < 0.05$ ). These results revealed that EFL learners, unlike native speakers, either underused indirect refusals (e.g. suggestion and invitation) or overuse indirect refusals (e.g. requests), which might cause cross-cultural miscommunication.

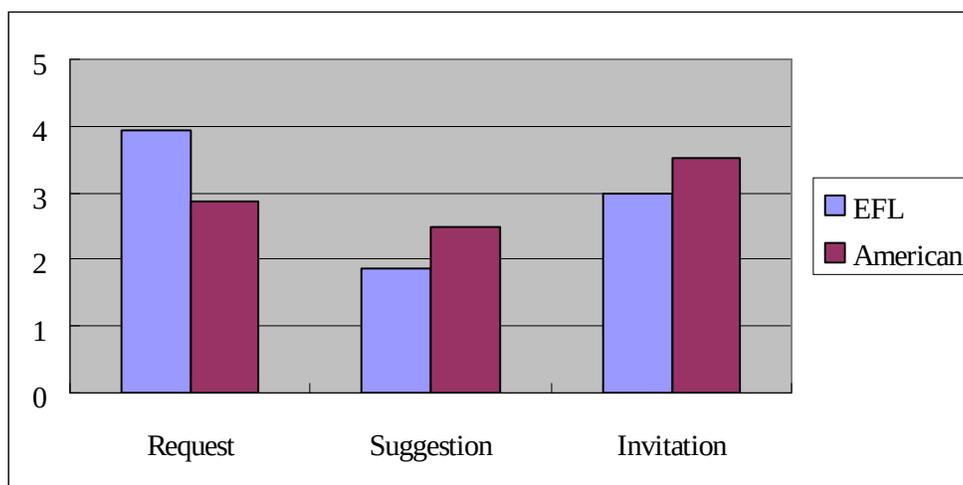
In addition, part of the finding was in line with Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990), which found that turning down a suggestion may be costly to the hearer's face, and native speakers were

able to reject an advisor’s suggestions and maintained the status balance whereas EFL learners seemed to have difficulty keeping the balance required in a conversation. When EFL learners failed to produce pragmatically appropriate utterance by using appropriate forms to maintain their roles in conversation, they may be viewed as non-consistent with the status of the speaker or even labeled as rude.

**Table 3.** Initiating Acts on the Group Choice in Indirect Refusals

Indirect	EFL	American	P value
Request	3.93	2.88	0.00***
Suggestion	1.85	2.48	0.00***
Invitation	3.00	3.53	0.04*
P value	0.00***	0.00***	

Note: \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001



**Figure 2.** Initiating Acts on the Group Choice in Indirect Refusals

### 3.3 The initiating acts on refusal adjuncts

Table 4 showed the effect of initiating acts on adjunct within and between groups. In terms of within group difference for the influence of initiating acts, at an alpha level of 0.05, significant differences were found: EFL learners ( $p < 0.05$ ), Americans ( $p < 0.05$ ).

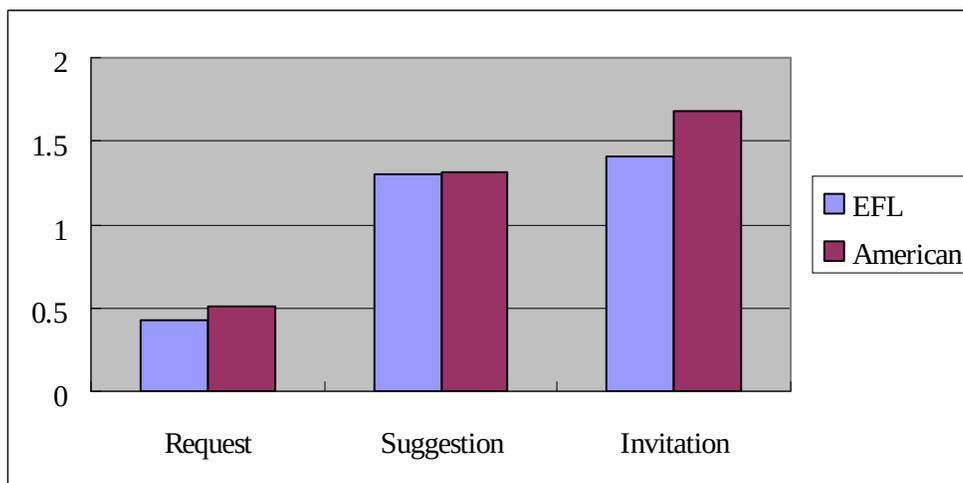
Regarding EFL learners, invitations elicited the greatest adjuncts (mean=1.41), suggestions ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> (mean=1.30), and requests ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> (mean=0.43). With regard to Americans, they were like EFL learners in that invitations produced the highest means (mean=1.68), followed by requests (mean=1.31) and suggestions (mean=0.53). In general, requests seemed to elicit the lowest means of using adjuncts. No significant between group

difference was found for the effect of each type of initiating act. Figure 3 provides a visual illustration.

**Table 4.** Initiating Acts on the Group Choice in Adjuncts

Adjunct	EFL	American	P
Request	0.43	0.51	0.82
Suggestion	1.30	1.31	1.00
Invitation	1.41	1.68	0.50
P	0.00***	0.00***	

Note: \* p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001



**Figure 3.** Initiating Acts on the Group Choice in Adjuncts

To sum up, the results of the descriptive analysis as indicated in the tables above served therefore to answer the research question “How does the type of initiating acts affect three main refusal categories of EFL learners and native speakers of American English?”

Based on the results, it revealed that though EFL learners did not show sensitivity to initiating acts in direct refusals, we have found that initiating acts had significant influence for native speakers of American English and EFL learners in indirect refusals and refusal adjuncts.

Also, in terms of group differences, we have found two groups had significant differences for using indirect refusals in either request, invitation or suggestion situations (Table 3) whereas no great differences were observed in adjuncts (Table 4). With respect of direct refusals, significant across group variations were found in refusals to suggestions and invitations.

### 3.4 The top five preferred strategies

The initiating acts not only had an impact on refusal performance in three main categories of refusal strategies, but also constrained their preference on the top five preferred refusal substrategies as shown in Table 4 and Table 5.

Firstly, both groups used certain substrategies with the variation of the initiating acts based on the top five list. EFL learners used avoidance exclusively in refusing requests; dissuading interlocutors in suggestions; positive opinions in invitations. Based on the data of Americans, gratitude was not preferred in refusing requests, and neither apologies nor reasons were found in refusing suggestions; positive opinions were not observed in invitation situations.

Secondly, some cross-cultural differences were observed based on the top five list. As an example, EFL learners used avoidance exclusively in refusing requests; dissuading interlocutors in suggestions; positive opinions in invitations. For Americans, avoidances were only found in refusing suggestions; dissuading interlocutors was not on their top five list; positive opinions were not observed in invitations.

In addition, even certain strategies were chosen as the top 1 choice for two initiating acts in a certain group, the specific means in the choice was different. As an illustration, apologies were the first choice for Americans, but their means differed in that higher means were in refusing one's requests (mean=1.38) than invitations (mean=1.24). Similarly, for EFL learners, more reasons were found in requests (mean= 1.74) than in invitations (mean=1.66).

**Table 5.** Top Five Preferred Strategies for EFL Learners

request	mean	suggestion	mean	invitation	mean
avoidance	0.23	apology	0.31	gratitude	0.36
alternative	0.31	dissuading interlocutor	0.35	statement of positive opinion	0.51
direct refusal	1.04	alternative	0.63	direct refusal	0.78
apology	1.41	gratitude	0.89	apology	0.99
reason	1.74	direct refusal	1.05	reason	1.66

**Table 6.** Top Five Preferred Strategies for Americans

request	mean	suggestion	mean	invitation	mean
statement of positive opinion	0.25	1. pause fillers 2. statement of positive opinion	0.29	gratitude	0.59
reasons	0.96	gratitude	0.60	alternative	0.86
direct refusal	1	alternative	0.78	reason	1.01
alternative	1.18	direct refusal	0.79	direct refusal	1.23
apology	1.39	avoidance	1.04	apology	1.24



The findings seemed to support that the type of initiating acts has been found to affect two groups' refusal performance, and it was in agreement with the findings of Beebe et al. (1990) that the form refusals can vary with according to the eliciting speech act.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the effect of the initiating acts in refusals by American English speakers and EFL learners in Taiwan in 12 situations. The result of this study showed that the type of initiating acts affected refusal strategy use in three main categories and constrained the top five preferred refusal substrategies as well. The findings were in agreement with other studies like Felix-Brasdefer (2003) and Chen, Zhang, Ye (1995).

Both groups preferred to use indirect refusals, and the type of initiating acts had significant differences on groups in indirect refusals and adjuncts. Among the three initiating acts, requests elicited the highest mean of indirect refusals, followed by refusals to invitations, and refusals to suggestions. In direct refusals, a higher mean was observed in refusals to invitations than the rest of the two initiating acts. The results showed some cross-cultural similarities and differences in refusals for groups, and the type of initiating acts affected refusal strategy selection to a certain extent.

In addition to the factor of initiating acts, culture factor played a role as well. Cultural similarities and differences were displayed. In terms of similarities, both groups tended to use indirect refusals in performing refusals, which was in agreement with Brown and Levinson's (1987) universality claim that the conventionally indirect strategies are universally valid.

However, cultural variation can be observed in that EFL learners were more direct in refusing one's suggestions (mean=1.05) than the Americans (mean=0.79), and they had slightly higher direct refusals to ones' requests or suggestions. In addition, unlike the native speakers of American English, EFL learners, either underused indirect refusals (e.g. suggestion and invitation) or overuse indirect refusals (e.g. requests). Their differences in refusal performance seemed to contribute cross-cultural variations.

In terms of the issue of universality and language specificity issue, we have found a very broad agreement with the universality claims for the existence of indirect categories. However the present study was in support of Wierzbicka's claim that speech acts and other verbal behavior can't be truly understood without reference to cultural values and attitudes (1985). For instance, though there were general categories of refusal strategies shared between native speakers of Chinese and American English, the different choice for certain strategies showed that different cultures have their own ways of "...performance, the differences having to do with a culture's ethos" (Yu 2003, 1704). We have found differences in the mean distributions of conventional indirectness used as well as in the preference for specific substrategies. Such differences reflect culturally special "way of speaking" (Hymes 1974; Yu 2003).

Thus similar to the findings in other studies (Matsumoto 1988; Gu 1990; Mao 1994), the application of Brown and Levinson's framework has faced many problems, and has its inadequacies to account for some speech act phenomenon. Typical views against Brown and Levinson are from Matsumoto (1988), Gu (1990) and Mao (1994). From their studies of Japanese and Chinese culture respectively, they argue that the concepts of negative face, freedom to act,

and negative politeness, avoidance of imposition on the freedom to act, are derived from Western's individualism. They could not apply to non-western societies. As Matsumoto (1988, 409) points out, what is important for Japanese people is not their rights to act freely, but their positions in a group in relationship to others, and their acceptance by others. There are differences between an egocentric individualistic western society and a sociocentric interpersonal non-western one. The differences in the view of face and the concept of personhood are reflected in the language use in western and non-western society. For instance, in western society, English speakers tend to use negative politeness strategy to avoid or down-play an imposition, while in non-western society, Japanese speakers are inclined to use positive politeness strategy to reflect a positive relationship between the interlocutor (Matsumoto 1988, 409).

Similarly, Gu (1990) argues that Brown and Levinson's universal model of politeness could not account for the politeness behavior present in Chinese culture. Politeness concept for Chinese "is a phenomenon belonging to the level of society, which endorses its normative constraints on each individual" (242). Under this view, and contrary to Brown and Levinson's theory, the act of declining an invitation in Chinese is not considered as 'threatening the hearer's negative face,' but rather as a polite act (Gu 1990). Instead, not performing refusal to someone's invitation will appear greedy and might be considered rude in Chinese society (Mao 1994; Chen, Ye and Zhang 1995). In other words, Chinese politeness put more emphasis on human relations and formality, while Americans put a high value on intimacy and equality instead (Mao 1994; Chen, Ye and Zhang 1995). Just as Wierzbicka (1985, 145) argues, linguistic differences are due to "aspects of culture much deeper than mere norms of politeness", and these differences are associated with cultural differences such as "spontaneity, directness, intimacy and affection [in Slavic and Mediterranean cultures] vs. indirectness, distance, tolerance, and anti-dogmatism in Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition."

In a similar vein, Blum-Kulka (1987) also pointed out that the variations of speech acts are attributed to differences in social-cultural factors in terms of face and politeness, which lead to variations in the actualizations of the speech acts. Different cultures have different ways in expressing politeness in refusals. According to Searle (1969), politeness is one important factor, among others, that motivates indirectness (Searle 1969), depending on the definition of politeness in different cultures (Yule 1996). Differences in the concept of politeness and the notion of face have been attested from some of the previous studies on refusals (Felix-Brasdefer 2003; Robinson 1992; Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz 1990).

In terms of the issue of universality versus language specificity, and the concept of politeness and face, we have examined the concept of politeness and the notion of face in both American and Chinese data and found that these refusal studies and the present study seem to work against Brown and Levinson's issue on universality. Instead, they support Wierzbicka's claim (1985) that speech acts and other verbal behavior can't be truly understood without reference to cultural values and attitudes that underlie the concept of politeness (1985). In addition, in terms of face, individual face applied to the American culture, which was strongly related to Brown and Levinson's theory. While group face and solidarity seemed to better describe the Chinese culture and was better accounted for by Fraser's social norm view (1990). This view of politeness assumed that each society had a particular set of social norms including

rules that prescribed a way of thinking in a context. One will try to behave in congruence with the norms and to achieve social expectations. Thus positive evaluation and politeness will occur.

Based on the findings in the present study, some pedagogical implications can be drawn. First of all, from interlanguage perspectives, EFL learners' deviation of the target language norm could be explained from their lacking input and limited linguistic proficiency (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 1996). The major sources of their input are from teacher-student talk, which was an example of an unequal status encounter and can't serve as a good model for EFL learners (2001, 25). The other major source of input was from textbooks, which usually failed to yield realistic input to learners as stated by Bardovi-Harlig (2001).

Furthermore, learners' limited linguistic competence could constrain learners not performing native like and were reported in other studies as well. Lower proficiency learners invariably relied on imperatives, whereas higher level of learners showed sensitivity to status (Scarcella 1979). Also, the lower proficiency learners were more direct in their refusals than higher-level ESL learners (Takahashi and Beebe 1987).

Additionally, types of initiating acts have been found as sources of cross-cultural variation. Thus in EFL teaching, instructors need to help students cultivate sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge in language class to encourage learners to identify the strategies commonly used by speakers in the target language, and the factors like initiating acts that may affect strategy use in the target community. In other words, EFL learners have to adjust themselves to the new linguistic system (Weizman and Blum-Kulka 1987). Without appropriate adaptation, it might result in pragmatic failure and caused serious miscommunications in native-nonnative interactions (Blum-Kulka 1989, 65).

Furthermore, some published textbooks used in teaching English are still based on traditional approaches to syntax and teaching of the grammaticality of a sentence. They usually were short of providing language learners with minimal linguistic information or strategies for the teaching of speech acts (e.g. Carrell 1982; Rose and Kasper 2001). In response to the need for more effective language instruction, the need to teach students to use the target language appropriately in a specific social-cultural context must be taken as one of the central foci in the design of language teaching materials. It is strongly recommended that the pragmalinguistic and sociocultural aspect of the target culture should be considered in the curriculum and pedagogical intervention on teaching speech act across cultures.

Some suggestions were provided for the directions of future studies. First of all, the number of participants, and situations need to be increased. Second, in terms of methodological suggestions, use of other methods of data collection like natural observation in natural setting, role-plays, etc. are suggested (Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig 1992 Wolfson 1989). In addition, in view of other potential influential social variables [e.g. familiarity, and status], future studies can be conducted to address the effect of these variables on refusals, and to offer further insight into the complex business of refusing in different languages.

## Appendix

### Classification of Refusal Strategies (Beebe et al. 1990)

- I. DIRECT REFUSALS
  - A. Performative (e.g. *I refuse*)
  - B. Negative willingness/ability (*I can't; I won't; I don't think so*)
- II. INDIRECT
  - A. Statement of regret; apology; disappointment (e.g. *I'm sorry.*)
  - B. Wish (e.g. *I wish I could help you; I wish I could stay to work*)
  - C. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g. *I already have a family gathering that day; My parents are celebrating their birthday*)
  - D. 1. Statement of alternative (e.g. *I'd rather; I'd prefer*); 2. Why don't you do X instead of Y (e.g. *Why don't you ask someone else?*)
  - E. Set condition for future for future or Past acceptance (e.g. *If you had asked me earlier, I would have...*)
  - F. Promise of future acceptance (e.g. *I promise I'll...; Next time I'll...; Using "will" of promise or "promise"*)
  - G. Statement of principle (e.g. *I never do business with friends*)
  - H. Statement of philosophy (e.g. *One can't be too careful*)
  - I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor
    - 1. Threat statement of negative consequences to the requester (*If you complain to him, he will fail you; I won't be fun tonight*)
    - 2. Guilt trip (e.g. waitress to costumers who want to sit a while (*I can't make a living off people who just order coffee*))
    - 3. Criticism of the requester (*You are lazy*)
    - 4. Request for help or empathy and assistance by dropping or holding the request (e.g. *I hope you can understand my situation*)
    - 5. Let interlocutor off the hook (*Don't worry about it; that's ok*)
    - 6. Self defense (e.g., *I am trying my best; I do nothing wrong*)
  - J. Acceptance that function as a refusal: unspecific or indefinite reply lack of enthusiasm
  - K. Avoidance
    - 1. Nonverbal: including silence; hesitation; do nothing; physical departure
    - 2. Verbal
      - a. Topic switch
      - b. Joke
      - c. Repetition of part of request (e.g., *Did you say Monday?*)
      - d. Postponement (*I'll think about it*)
      - e. Hedging (*Gee, I don't know; I'm not sure*)
- III. ADJUNCTS
  - 1. statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement(e.g. *I'd love to; that's a good idea*)
  - 2. statement of empathy(e.g. *I realize you are in a difficult situation*)
  - 3. pause filler(e.g. *uhh; well; oh*)
  - 4. gratitude/appreciation



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