A COMPARISON BETWEEN REFUSAL STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH MADE BY INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS AND THAILAND EFL STUDENTS: AN INTERLANGUAGE STUDY

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Abstrak


Kata kunci: pragmatik antar bahasa, strategi penolakan, strategi kesantunan

Abstract

This study deals with refusal strategies in English made by Indonesian EFL students (ILE) and Thailand EFL students (TLE). The aims of this study are (1) to analyze the differences and the similarities between refusal strategies made by both groups, (2) to analyze whether the two groups used similar or difference refusal strategies in social level, (3) and to analyze whether the two groups of speaker use the same or different politeness strategies in their refusals. The subjects of the research are 15 Indonesian EFL students and 15 Thailand EFL students who study at UMS. Refusal strategies to request and suggestion made by the two of groups became the object of this research. The type of this research is descriptive qualitative research. The data for this study is elicited from the respondents through the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) which consisted of six situations with different level status. The data were analyzed by Beebe et al refusal strategy and Brown and Levinson’s politeness strategy. The finding of the study showed that ILE tended to be direct in declining a request and suggestion for examples, inability, unwillingness and direct ‘no’. While TLE tended to
employ ‘excuse’ almost in all DCT scenarios. It is also found that most of group
participants used combination strategies of politeness in their groups.

Key words: interlanguage pragmatic, refusal strategies, politeness strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

A linguistic interaction is necessarily a social interaction. In order to
make sense of what is said in an interaction, between the speaker and the
hearer should be aware of social distance and closeness factors (Yule: 1996).
Social distance tied to such things as age and power, closeness factors involve
the relative status of the participant. Brown and Levinson (1996) explain that
power usually tied up with age and job can influence the way speaker’s say.
Furthermore, language learners interacting with speakers of a target language
have to be pragmatically appropriate, otherwise they run the risk of appearing
uncooperative at the least, or more seriously, rude or insulting (BardoviHarliget al., 1991:4).

Interlanguage pragmatic is defined as “the systematic knowledge of the
language being learned (L2) which is independent of both this learners’
native language (L1) and the target language” (Ellis 1994:698). The fact that
“only interlanguage study of grammar system is not enough and problems
involving context cannot be solved” (Huang 2010: 682), created the need to
focus on the pragmatic comprehension and production of second/foreign
language learners”, which is called as interlanguage pragmatics.

Jacob (1999) explained word that do thing in the world called speech
act. The speech act defines as the basic units of linguistic communication
(Austin:1962, Searle:1979). Austin produces a typology of condition which
performatives must meet if they are to succeed or be ‘happy’ (Austin in
Levinson 1987: 229) and the factor which are necessary to make them so are
known as felicity condition (Chapman: 2000).

The speech act of refusal belongs to the category of ‘commissives’ in
Searle’s classification of illocutionary acts (1976). “Commissives are those
kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to some future
action. They express what the speaker intends” (Yule 1996: 54). Searle
differentiates between a direct and indirect speech acts depending on the recognition of the intended illocutionary effect of an utterance in a certain case. A direct speech act is performed directly with the illocutionary force of an utterance built on the structure of the sentence (Levinson 1983). Indirect speech acts are defined as “cases in which illocutionary act is performed indirectly by performing another” (Searle 1975:60).

Beebe et al. (1990) classifies refusal strategies regarding the degree of directness. The strategies include two board main classifications namely direct and indirect refusals. Direct refusal strategy consists of a performative refusal (e.g. I refuse) and a non-performative statement expressing inability, unwillingness and ‘no’. There are indirect refusals propose by Beebe et al namely: 1) apology/ regret, 2) wish, 3) excuse, 4) statement of an alternative, 5) set condition for future acceptance, 6) promise for future acceptance, 7) statement of principle, 8) statement of philosophy, 9) dissuasion, 10) acceptance that function as a refusal, 11) avoidance. Beebe et al (1990) identify four adjuncts that might be added in direct or indirect strategies: 1) positive opinion, 2) empathy, 3) fillers, 4) gratitude.

Politeness, in an interaction can be defined as the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face (Yule: 1996). Face means the public self image of person. Brown and Levinson (1987) divide face into two categories namely negative face (freedom of action and freedom from imposition) and positive face (self-image be appreciated and approved of). Some speech acts intrinsically threaten positive and negative face of speaker and hearer of face threatening act (FTA) (Brown and Levinson: 1987). There are three aspects that can be used to calibrate the strength of face threatening act (FTA) namely; power (P), social distance (D) and degree of imposition (R).

Brown and Levinson (1987) give four strategies for doing politeness. Those are: 1) bald on record, 2) positive politeness, 3) negative politeness, 4) off record. Bald on record means that speaker intends to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than he/ she wants to satisfy hearer’s face. Positive
politeness is directed to redress the addressee’s positive face (Brown and Levinson: 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) give the strategy for doing positive politeness. Positive politeness consist of 1) notice, 2) exaggerate, 3) intensity interest, 4) group identity marker, 5) seek agreement, 6) avoid disagreement, 7) presuppose, 8) joke, 9) assert knowledge of hearer’s wants, 10) promise, 11) be optimistic, 12) include speaker and hearer in the activity, 13) give reason, 14) assume or assert reciprocity, 15) gift.

Brown and Levinson (1987) also give the strategy for doing on record with redressive action negative politeness. There are ten strategies namely: 1) be conventionally indirect, 2) question/ hedge, 3) be pessimistic, 4) minimize imposition, 5) give deference, 6) apologize, 7) impersonalize, 8) state the imposition as a general rule, 9) nominalize, 10) go on record as incurring a debt.

Off record politeness means the speaker not directly addressed to the hearer/ addressee (Yule:1996). Off record may or may not succeed because the hearer not always able to understands what the speaker’s intentions. There are fifteen strategies to produce off-record politeness in Brown and Levinson theory (1992); 1) give hints, 2) give association clues, 3) presuppose, 4) Understate, 5) overstate, 6) use tautologies, 7) use contradiction, 8) be ironic, 9) use metaphor, 10) use rhetorical questions, 11) be ambiguous, 12) be vague, 13) over generalize, 14) displace hearer, 15) be incomplete.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This is a qualitative research involving descriptive comparative design which analyses two kinds of written data of refusal strategies provided by the two of groups. The subjects of the research are 15 Indonesian EFL students and 15 Thailand EFL students who study at UMS. The subject of the research were qualified and ranged in age from twenty to twenty-two. All respondent are female with intermediate English level, and one year minimum living in Indonesia for Thailand EFL students.

The data of the research are refusal expressions to request and suggestion produced by Indonesian EFL students and Thailand EFL students.
The data source of the study is the answers to DCT scenarios. The scenarios of DCT consist of the situations and different social levels. The select refusal was classified into two categories there are refusal to request and refusal to suggestion. The DCT consists of three social statuses. Those are higher, equal, and lower. The researcher used six steps to analyze the data; classifying the data, describing the data, analyzing the data based on refusal strategies, analyzing refusal strategies based on differences in social levels, comparing politeness strategy in their refusals, and the last is taking conclusion.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The data were analyzed using refusal strategy by Beebe et al (1990) and Brown and Levinson’s (1987) based on six DCT scenarios.

3.1 Refusal Strategy in Declining Request and Suggestion to Interlocutor of Equal Status

In declining a request to equal status (DCT1), TLE tended to be direct (80%) while ILE tended to be indirect (68%). The researcher found that TLE inability was the highest frequencies of all strategies (60%). By contrast, ILE inability only got 20%. However, ILE in excuse strategy was more dominant than TLE (47%). No one of ILE used direct ‘no’ while TLE achieved 13%. In unwillingness both groups got similar frequency (7%), and in other strategies ILE dominated with low frequency.

In declining suggestion (DCT4), the data showed that TLE excuse strategy was higher than ILE (40%). In dissuasion strategy, TLE became more dominant than ILE which achieved only 13% while TLE got 40%. However, direct strategies such as unwillingness (33%) and direct no (13%) of ILE was too higher than TLE did. In acceptance as refusal, both of groups obtained similar frequency (7%). Furthermore, alternative was dominated by ILE with low frequency (7%) and the researcher found no respondent of TLE used alternative.

3.2 Refusal Strategy in Declining Request and Suggestion to Interlocutor of Higher Status
In declining request to higher status (DCT 3), ILE tended to be direct than TLE. ILE used excuse, acceptance as refusal and inability to decline a request in higher status while TLE only used excuse and inability. The researcher found no one of TLE respondent used acceptance as refusal while ILE got 27%.

In declining suggestion (DCT5), the data exhibited TLE in excuse strategy was too higher than ILE (67%). By contrast, ILE unwillingness was more frequent than TLE (53%). In direct ‘no’, both of groups used this strategy in low frequency where ILE achieved 7% and TLE got 13%. TLE also used dissuasion in declining suggestion with low frequency (7%). Furthermore, no respondent of ILE used dissuasion. The researcher found no respondent of TLE used avoidance, alternative and acceptance as refusal.

### 3.3 Refusal Strategy in Declining Request and Suggestion to Interlocutor of Lower Status

In declining a request to lower status (DCT2), ‘excuses’ were the highest strategies in TLE (60%). By contrast, excuse occurred in low frequency in ILE (13%). However, alternative and inability in ILE were more dominant than TLE. In other strategies such as acceptance and direct no, ILE became dominant. Although ILE became frequent in acceptance and direct no, the percentage of unwillingness was less than TLE.

In declining a suggestion to lower status (DCT 6), both of groups used excuse as their refusal strategy to decline a suggestion in lower status, but the exertion of excuse in TLE was higher than ILE (53%). Both of groups also used direct ‘no’ in declining a suggestion, the data showed ILE and TLE have the same percentage (33%). Since no respondent of TLE used inability and acceptance as refusal, automatically ILE became dominant in those strategies (20% and 7%). The last strategy used by both groups is unwillingness, this strategy used by ILE and TLE in low frequency.

### 3.4 Politeness Strategies in Declining Request and Suggestion to Interlocutor of Equal Status
In DCT 1 (refusal to request), the data showed combination strategy got highest percentage in both groups. However, TLE combination was higher than ILE. For example:

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Sorry my friend, I need my notes to study first. You must ask somebody else
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(TLE/01/1)

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Sorry, tomorrow I have an exam also
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(ILE/15/1)

The occurrence of positive politeness was less, ILE achieved 13% while TLE 7%. The data showed ILE and TLE used similar strategy to decline a request in equal status level even though in some parts the percentage of frequency was different. NP6 (apology) became the highest strategy in both of groups, the percentage was equal only 1% deference. In giving reason (PP13), the frequency of TLE was more dominant than ILE. TLE achieved 31% while ILE got 16%. However, ILE became higher in OFF1 which achieved 29% while TLE only got 13%. In other strategies such as PP5, PP4, PP1 occurred in very low frequencies, of these both speaker used different frequencies.

In DCT 4, combination politeness strategy became the highest frequency in both groups. In positive politeness, both groups got the same percentage (13%), only 7% of ILE respondent used bald on record (BOR). The data showed that OFF1 TLE was the highest percentage of all. It achieved 54% while ILE only got half of it (25%). In giving gift (PP15) the percentage of TLE was higher than ILE (33%). However, in giving reason the percentage of ILE was more dominant than TLE (21%). PP6 and NP6 frequencies showed that TLE was higher than ILE. Furthermore, in other strategies such as BOR, PP4, PP5, PP10 ILE generally was higher than TLE.

3.5 Politeness Strategies in Declining Request and Suggestion to Interlocutor of Higher Status

In DCT 3, combination strategy became very dominant in both groups. It means that the respondent mostly did not use single strategy/
independent strategy to decline a request. The data presented that both of groups used similar politeness strategy, even though in avoid disagreement no one of TLE respondent used that strategy while ILE applied it (10%). The percentage of NP6 in TLE was higher than ILE. The appearance of deference (NP5) in ILE was more significant than TLE, but in OFF1 the percentage of TLE was too higher than ILE which only got 8%. In using apology (PP13), ILE and TLE used it almost in the same frequency, where TLE more dominant than ILE, deference 4%.

In DCT 5, the data showed that TLE OFF1 was the most dominant in DCT 5. This is too high if compared with ILE which only got 11%. In PP13, the frequency of TLE was higher than ILE (29%). ILE was dominant in NP5 which achieved 29% while TLE only got poor percentage (5%). Although, TLE got many respondents who used NP6, but the percentage of NP6 ILE was higher than TLE (26%). In general, both groups used no more than 5% in other strategies such as PP1, PP5 and PP15.

3.6 Politeness Strategies in Declining Request and Suggestion to Interlocutor of Lower Status

In DCT 2, the data depicted both groups commonly used combination strategy to decline a request in lower status. The data showed the two of groups used similar strategies to decline a request in lower status. NP6 (apology) became the dominant of the strategies used by both groups. However, NP6 TLE was higher than NP6 ILE which achieved 45%. In using hint (OFF1) the percentage of TLE was higher than ILE, ILE got 23% while TLE got 35%. Both of groups also used reason (PP13) in declining request. The percentage of both was almost balance, only 6% difference. ILE got 19% while TLE got 13%. In other strategies such as seek agreement (PP5), avoid disagreement (PP6), using group identity marker (PP4) and giving noticed to the hearer (PP1), ILE was higher than TLE even though it was in low frequencies.
In DCT 6, the data presented OFF1 in TLE was the highest percentage of politeness strategy in DCT 6 (50%). It was higher than ILE which achieved 29%. The deference percentage between ILE and TLE in PP13 was 0.2%, which TLE more dominant than ILE (44%). In other strategies with percentage no more than 10% such as NP6, PP15, PP4 and PP1, ILE was higher than TLE.

Refusal to request and suggestion

The present study found that TLE tended to be direct than ILE in declining request to equal status. Although, they tended to be direct in declining friends’ request but in fact they avoided “no” and tended to use ‘inability’. Inability were chosen because the respondent of TLE did not want to be direct, but they also hope that the interlocutor can catch their refusal clearly. Surprisingly, to decline a suggestion TLE tended to be indirect. TLE tended to hide their disagreements with silence and produced indirect strategies. They carefully kept interlocutors feeling and avoid clash, so even though they disagree they hardly used direct ‘no’. This founding is in line with Leech’s (1997) about Tact maxim, ‘Minimize cost to the speaker and maximize benefit to the hearer’.

In declining a request ILE was more indirect than TLE. The percentage of direct strategy in declining request to equal status of ILE decreased if compared with other scenarios. It was quite different with previous studies in which ILE tended to be direct when they refused a request to equal status (Amarien: 2008). Hence, the respondent of ILE tended to be more indirect in declining a request because they are afraid to get bad stereotype.

In declining a suggestion ILE was more direct than TLE. ILE tended to use unwillingness and direct no while TLE tended to use excuse. ILE tended to use direct strategy because they did not have any responsibility or obligation to their friends so the speaker becoming free and independence. Then, they felt secured and do whatever they wanted to and they even wanted to use their right to say ‘no’. On the other hand, TLE tended to be indirect by
using excuse or dissuasion to decline a suggestion. TLE tended to be indirect because they believed when someone gives a suggestion especially come from their friends it is for their own goodness. TLE gave more specific information such as give the date and how the importance their assignment (DCT 4) such as because my project deadline is tomorrow, I must finish my project to day (TLE/02/4). In some data, TLE produced gratitude to the interlocutor for example, Thank you I’m not tired I’m fine (TLE/04/4).

In declining request and suggestion to lower status, ILE tended to be direct while TLE tended to be indirect. The researcher found ILE tended to use ‘inability’ instead of ‘no’ in declining request. The reasons why they employed ‘inability’ were because they do not want to be direct, but on the other side they want their refusal can be seen by interlocutor. By using ‘inability’ their intention to reject interlocutor wants is clearly understood.

In declining suggestion, ILE tended to use direct ‘no’. The researcher realized mostly the respondent of ILE are Javanese. Correlated with Javanese social hierarchy, older people are most assertive and direct employed language to younger people. People who have higher status level will fell their authority were threatened when the lower status gives suggestion to them. So that is why, they tended to use ‘no’ rather than other strategies.

Interestingly, excuse made by TLE became shorter and unspecific in declining request to lower status. In declining suggestion to the lower status, TLE tended to give specific excuses. Surprisingly, the respondents of TLE mostly did not employ gratitude such as when declining suggestions to equal status or apology when declining suggestion to higher status. They used excuses without adding ‘gratitude’ or ‘apology’ that could be that they needed a sense of direct in their excuses even though their strategy was indirect. This may be the reason that they did not use gratitude, for example, because if I do, my supervisor will think that I am careless or being disrespect to him, so I prefer to wait him (TLE/03/6).

In declining request and suggestion to higher status ILE tended to be direct while TLE tended to be indirect. ILE tended to use inability when
declining a request and tended to use unwillingness when declining a suggestion. On the other hand, TLE tended to be indirect by employing ‘excuse’.

**Politeness Strategy**

The researcher found six strategies of positive politeness commonly used by ILE, including notice, group identity marker, seek agreement, avoid disagreement, reason and giving gift while TLE dominantly tended to use reasons and giving gift. In negative politeness strategies, both groups tended to use deference and apology. The researcher also found fifteen from off record strategy only one strategy commonly used by both of group, hint. Surprisingly, bald on record almost did not exist in all DCT scenarios. Based on follow up interview, both of groups were aware to another person’s face need. They avoided using bald on record because they knew that bald on record may threat interlocutor face and being impolite.

All in all the data showed that, ILE were more polite than TLE. Most of ILE tended to be polite to the interlocutor as the higher, equal, even to the lower status. It occurred because of ILE respondent mostly are Javanese. In Javanese culture they have a speaking role named ‘Sopan Santun’. Since interpersonal communication was regulated based on sociopolitical and economic power, it brings different speaking role in each status. This role trained them to speak properly and politely based on the social power.

TLE produced politeness strategy less than ILE did. This might be that TLE tended to use indirect refusal to the interlocutor as the higher, equal, lower status. In their perception, indirect refusal represented politeness strategy. So the respondent of TLE tended to give direct explanation without tied apology, for example because I am afraid it will lost (TLE/05/6) while ILE tended to say I’m sorry I can’t put this research paper on his desk because it is very important, I worry I will lost it (ILE/06/6). Even though in declining a request to lower status TLE added apology, the degree of
politeness still less than ILE, for example *Sorry, I have deleted* (TLE/05/2) while ILE tended to say *I’m sorry, I can’t give you because my laptop have broken and my entire files has lost* (ILE/04/2)

Meanwhile, based on 180 refusal utterances made by ILE and TLE, the researcher found 69% used politeness strategies in combination. Combination strategy means the respondents used more than one strategy in their utterances. In declining request and suggestion to their lecturer (DCT 3,5), 90% of ILE participant used combination strategy for example, ILE produced negative politeness, ‘apology’ and ‘give deference’ in the beginning their utterances. Then, after produced refusal, ILE used positive politeness ‘reason’. They used combination strategy to give honor and to compensate their refusal. They tended to add ‘reason’ after direct refusal because they do not want the interlocutor misunderstanding with their refusal.

In declining request to lower status (DCT 2), 60% the respondent of ILE used combination strategy. Commonly, they combined negative politeness and off record strategy. By contrast, only 26% used combination in declining suggestion to lower status (DCT6). They used positive politeness and off record strategy.

The use of combination in equal status by ILE in declining request (DCT 1) got 86%, while 66% in declining a suggestion (DCT4). In refusal to request, they commonly used negative politeness and off record. On the other hand, in declining suggestion they tended to use ‘giving gift’ and ‘reason’. This result had similarity, in declining request to their lecturer (DCT 3) 100% or all of TLE used combination politeness strategy. However, their combinations are simpler than ILE. TLE commonly combined ‘apology’ and ‘hint’. By contrast, in declining suggestion to their lecturer (DCT 5), 77% used non-combination strategy. They only used off record strategy or one positive politeness.
In DCT 1 (refusal to request in equal status), the respondent of TLE 93% used combination strategy, while 66% used combination politeness strategy in declining to suggestion in equal status (DCT 4). In equal status, commonly they combine negative politeness and positive politeness. In DCT 2 (refusal to request in lower status), 93% TLE used combination politeness strategy. They commonly combined ‘apology’ and ‘hint’. By contrast, only 26% of TLE used combination strategy in DCT 6 (refusal to suggestion in lower status). Mostly, TLE used independent off record. The fact that the respondent of both groups combine politeness strategies, explicitly can be said that politeness strategy cannot be separated with other politeness strategies. This result is quite different with Brown and Levinson theory (1987) that politeness strategies stand independently.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research finding, the researcher concluded that TLE tended to be direct than ILE in declining request to equal status. TLE tended to use ‘inability’ while ILE tended to use ‘excuse’. All in all the data showed that ILE tended to be more direct in declining suggestion.

The researcher also found that ILE was more polite than TLE. Most of ILE tended to be polite to the interlocutor as the higher, equal, even to the lower status. Moreover, more than a half of data from ILE and TLE used combination strategies. Combination strategy means the respondents used more than one strategy in their utterances.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated special to her parents, her husband, family, friends and lecturers. The writer greatly expects that this research will be useful to give positive contributions for academic studies and for everyone.

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