

POLITENESS STRATEGIES OF REFUSALS TO HIGHER STATUS INTERLOCUTORS BY ENGLISH AND INDONESIAN SPEAKERS

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Abstract: Cross-cultural refusal studies focus on how two different cultures perform refusal differently. This study sets out to investigate the speech acts of refusal performed by English and Indonesian speakers. In particular, it attempts to identify and classify the politeness strategies used to express refusals. The data used in this research were utterances containing refusals defined by the politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The data were gathered using the discourse completion task, which consists of two situations (+P -D and +P +D) completed by 30 English speaking students and 30 Indonesian speaking students. The collected data include 120 refusal utterances comprising: 60 utterances in English and 60 utterances in Indonesian. Out of the 60 English refusals, 26 (43.3%) refusals were expressed using positive politeness strategy, and 1 (1.6%) were expressed using off-record strategy, the least used politeness strategy. Negative politeness strategy is the most used strategy in Indonesian with 33 (55%) tokens, meanwhile bald on record is the least used strategy in giving refusal in Indonesian with 0 (0%) tokens.

Keywords: *Speech Act, Refusal, Politeness Strategies, Intercultural*

INTRODUCTION

Refusal as a speech act has always been a challenge to speakers, and its form has been acknowledged as one of the most complicated speech acts. Along with its complicated forms, refusal is also associated with discrepancy. This discrepancy appears in the communication between the speaker and the interlocutor/hearer because of refusal's complicated forms. As refusal is a negative reply to another speech act, such as an invitation, request, or suggestion, it is understandable to perform complicated forms to avoid offending one's hearer.

Brown and Levinson (1987) wrote one of the most used references in the academic world of politeness strategy. They proposed the concept of "face" which divides into two types. The first one is a negative face, which is a face of someone whose desire is not to be stopped by others. When someone's freedom of action is suppressed, his/her negative face is threatened. The second one, which is a positive face, is when someone's desire is to be accepted or acknowledged by others. It is threatened when someone's want was not understood or approved by others. Johnson et al (2004) argue that refusal is a threat to both positive and negative face. It threatens the positive face of the hearer and both the positive and negative face of the speaker.

The expression of refusal is affected by various factors. Brown and Levinson (1987) refer to more or less distance and authority between the speaker and the hearer as two of them. Nonetheless, relative power and social distance are not the only factors that affect refusal utterances. Many contextual factors also affect the choice of strategies by the speakers. Eslami (2010) indicated that the divergence between refusal strategies is also due to cultural differences. She also mentioned cultural view as an indicator of whether a specific refusal utterance is appropriate or not in a particular culture.

Research on refusal discusses its relation to broad intercultural study. Much research attempts to investigate the politeness strategy of refusals in different cultural situations including refusals in Persian and English as a foreign language/EFL (Izadi and Zilae, 2014; Shishavan and Sharifian, 2013), refusal in Iraqi and English (EFL) (Alzebaree and Yavuz, 2018), and refusal in Arabic and American English (Morkus, 2014). Studies that discuss refusal in the first language and second language have the objective to measure the ability of the students to perform their foreign language communication capacity. Meanwhile, the objective of this research is to compare two languages used by the speakers of the language.

Previous studies that are in line with this research and compare two different languages involved English and Russian (Iliadi and Larina, 2017), Spanish and German

(Siebold and Busch, 2015), and English and Indonesian (Nadar, 2005). The previous studies and this study assume that research comparing cultural language differences will develop knowledge in communicative differences and help to achieve successful intercultural communication.

In the case of intercultural pragmatics, the pair of English and Indonesian has not received much attention compared to other language pairs. This research tried to compare and contrast the politeness strategy used by the speakers of those two different language users.

Comparison of English and Indonesian on the topic of refusal strategy has already been conducted before. This research seeks to specifically compare politeness strategies of refusal from English and Indonesian speakers to higher status interlocutors.

METHOD

In this section, there will be an explanation about how the data were collected and how they were analysed. In the data source section, there will be explanations about participants, instruments, and questionnaire distributions. Meanwhile, in the data analysis section, there is an explanation of the classifications.

Method of Data Collection

The English-speaking participants in this research consist of undergraduate students from the United States, Great Britain, and Australia. Meanwhile, the Indonesian speaking participants are undergraduate students of Universitas Gadjah Mada, Universitas Islam Indonesia, and Universitas Indonesia. The respondents are limited to students with an age range of 18-26 years old.

Using students as respondents has been done by many researchers previously; Johnson et al (2004), Chojimah (2015), and Rahbar et al (2015). The number of participants varied. Johnson et al collected data from 133 undergraduate students (60 males, 73 females). Their research focused on the relation between face threat and refusals to request. Meanwhile, Chojimah collected data from 161 Indonesia university students and her research tried to find the relation between social status and the politeness strategy of refusal. In the Ghargani et al. research, they collected data from 46 participants, which consisted of 30 (15 female and 15 male) students of undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who completed a questionnaire in Persian and English. Meanwhile, the other 16 participants consisted of 8 Persian advanced EFL learners and 8 native speaking American English students. Following the previous study, this current research collected data from 30 English speaking students and 30 Indonesian speaking students because of time limitations in conducting this research.

The data in the current research were collected through an instrument called the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The DCT is a written questionnaire which contains a short description of a certain situation of a speech act that is being studied (Kasper, 2008). The short description in the DCT also contains context and open dialogue. According to Kasper, besides providing a situational description, DCT also provides an open dialogue. In this present research, the DCT consists of two situational contexts; +P+D and +P-D.

The DCT was shared through social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and twitter. The DCT is in the form of google document link that accommodates the questionnaire. It was reshared by friends from Facebook, WhatsApp, and twitter to their other friends. For the English form, in addition to being shared through social media platforms, the form was also directly given to the native English speakers in Indonesian Language and Culture Learning Service (INCULS) Faculty of Cultural Sciences Universitas Gadjah Mada.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected are 120 utterances. They made up of 60 English utterances and 60 Indonesian utterances. All the 120 utterances are valid utterances since previously the total 214 collected utterances were sorted out if they do not meet the classification. The 120 utterances are included in the data when they meet the classification of refusal. Chang (2008) argues that refusal is an action of speech that rejects another individual's initiation in a social interaction. Meanwhile Felix-Brasdefer (2008, p.3) says that "refusal is the second pair part of conversation which belongs to the speech act of dissent which represents one type of assertive act or negative expression". According to him it is broken down into direct and indirect refusal. Since refusals is an act that threaten individual's positive and negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987), the data then classified based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory.

Theory of politeness by Brown and Levinson consists of four strategies; bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. The bald on record include direct refusal, sarcasm, and so on. Positive politeness strategy includes three sub strategies and fifteen output strategies such as exaggerate, offer, promise, and give reason. Meanwhile negative politeness comprises five sub strategies with ten output strategies, for instance apologise, questions, and be pessimistic. Lastly, off record strategy which consists of two sub strategy and fifteen output strategy, for example give hints, be vague, or be ambiguous. The detailed explanation of politeness strategy can be seen in the second chapter of the theoretical framework.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 120 utterances are collected in this research. The found utterances are classified into four strategies. They are bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. The table 1 below shows the frequency of politeness strategies produced by English and Indonesian speakers. The table shows that the most used politeness strategy in English is positive politeness. Meanwhile the least used strategy is off record. There are 26 findings (43.3%) of positive politeness in this research. There are 21 (35%) findings of negative politeness found. Meanwhile bald on record and off record findings are 12 (20%) and 1 (1.6%) respectively.

Table 1. Frequency and Distribution of Politeness Strategies

Politeness Strategies	English	Percentage	Indonesia	Percentage
Bald on Record	12	20	7	11.6
Positive Politeness	26	43.3	20	33.3
Negative Politeness	21	35	33	55
Off Record	1	1.6	0	0
TOTAL	60	100	60	100

From the 60 Indonesian data points, negative politeness is the most used politeness strategy. Fifty five percent (33 findings) are negative politeness. There are 20 (33.3%) positive politeness occurrences found, 7 (11.6%) bald on record found, and off record were not found in the Indonesian data findings.

Bald on Record

Brown and Levinson (1978) mentioned that bald on record strategy is a direct, clear, and unambiguous way of saying something. This strategy is the most direct. This strategy does not try to save the hearer's face. There is a strong possibility that the speaker will make the hearer feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. That is why this strategy is commonly used for people who have a close relationship, such as friends or family.

Presented below is one example that illustrates the use of bald on record strategy. This example is taken from situation 1. Situation 1 described a circumstance in which the speaker refuses an interlocutor who is his boss. His boss offered him the chance to be a ghost-writer for someone. Even though the boss has higher status than the speaker, the boss and the speaker have a close relationship since they have known each other since they were still students.

(Situation 1: The speaker refuses an offer to be his boss's assistant ghost-writer. They both are in a close relationship. +P, -D)

(1) "No sorry, I'm not comfortable writing his thesis. I would be happy to help him out a bit and maybe proofread it."

(2) "Tidak lah bos jadwalku padat kalau aku nulis nya nanti pekerjaanku kacau dan berimbas pada perusahaan bos hehe"

A prior study of Indonesian politeness strategy of refusal by Chojimah (2015) mentioned that a higher or lower status of power affects the choice of refusal strategies. Even though someone who has a lower status directly refuses someone with "No", they will usually follow it with other types of strategies; such as apologising just like example (1) above. The example of the Indonesian finding above (2) also strengthens Chojimah's argument. Even though the interlocutor has a higher degree of power, there are some examples of bald on record strategy with additional strategy following the head strategy which is directly saying "no" or "tidak" in Indonesian. While the example of English is followed by apologising, giving reasons, and an offer. In the Indonesian data findings, the direct no was followed by giving reasons.

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is a strategy that tries to minimise face threat of the hearer's positive face. In a refusal, both positive and negative face of the speaker are threatened and it also threatens the positive face of the hearer (Johnson et al., 2004). A positive face in a refusal threatens when someone's cannot or does not want to do what the hearer's want. Brown and Levinson (1987) divided positive politeness includes three broad mechanisms. The first one is when speaker claim common ground with hearer. The second one is when the speaker convey that speaker and hearer are co-operators. The third one is when speaker fulfil hearer's want with some condition. Below are presented one example each in English and Indonesian of politeness strategy data findings.

Situation 2: You rejected a business expansion offer. (=P, -D)

(3) "Thank you for your interest, that means a lot to me, but unfortunately, it's not for sale at the moment". (English)

(4) “Tawaran tersebut menarik namun saya tidak berniat untuk menjual paten itu. Maaf sebelumnya”. (Indonesian)

The two examples above are from situation 2, in which someone follows his mother to the supermarket and meets his mother’s friend who is a successful businessman. The businessman knows from his mother that he has a quite successful online store product. The businessman gets interested and offer to buy the online store, but the online store owner refuses the offer. Brown and Levinson (1987) mentioned that positive politeness strategies are usually used in the relationship between speaker and interlocutor who has close relationship. Meanwhile situation 2 speaker and interlocutor are in a distant relationship.

Negative Politeness

Refusal is a speech act that is a threat to negative face and gives imposition to others. So, negative politeness is used to save the negative face from the threat (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) mentioned that negative politeness is uttered when the speaker is talking to a superior, or when the speaker and hearer are equal in power, or they have a distant relationship. Johnson et al. (2004), argued that in addition to refusal being a threat to both the positive face of the hearer and speaker, it is also a threat to the negative face of the speaker. It is so because refusal limits the autonomy of the speaker. Example data findings are presented below.

(5) “I am really sorry but this goes against my principles, I don’t think I would be suitable as a ghost writer and my conscience wouldn’t allow me to do so, I think it would be best if you find someone else” (English, situation 1)

(6) “Sorry, but I don’t want to sell any of my copyrights right now.” (English, situation 2)

(7) “Maaf, saya tidak bisa membantunya” (Indonesian, situation 2)

(8) “Mohon maaf Pak/Bu, untuk saat ini saya masih ingin mengelola usaha ini secara mandiri supaya terus belajar dan menambah pengalaman dalam bidang bisnis online”. (Indonesian, situation 2)

Brown and Levinson (1987) mentioned that negative politeness is the preferred form of politeness in the western world. According to them, negative politeness is the most elaborate and conventional strategy to redress FTA. Western culture encourages this strategy which can be seen through the data collected in this present research. However, it is not the only reason negative politeness is used. Negative politeness is considered to be useful for social distancing, which is the opposite of positive politeness that tries to minimise social distance. Therefore, this strategy is used when the speaker wants to put a social brake on his interaction with the hearer.

In the current research, all the negative politeness strategies found use apologising output strategy. Apologising is part of the sub strategy called “communicate speaker’s want to not impinge hearer”. This sub strategy tries to partially satisfy the hearer’s negative face demands. It shows the speaker’s awareness and consideration towards the hearer’s demands. It is also a way to communicate that the speaker does not take what the hearer requests lightly.

Off Record

The off-record strategy is used when the speaker wants to do an FTA but wants to avoid the responsibility of doing it (Brown and Levinson, 1987). A communication becomes off record when it is not clear what the intention of the act is. So, the actor of this strategy avoids committing himself to one interpretation. The act can be interpreted in many ways by the hearer. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), off record is usually found when the hearer has higher power (+P) than the speaker and the relationship between them is a close relationship (-D). Here is the only finding demonstrating this strategy.

(9) “Maybe another time”. (Situation 2, English)

Although two people who have higher power and a close relationship are expected to express themselves using off record strategy, this research discovered only one finding of off record strategy.

Significance

According to the chi-square data table that was made using Microsoft excel, the comparison between English and Indonesian data findings in this research is not significant. With significance level 95%, critical point 0,05, and chi-square table 7,81473, the chi square of the data finding is 5,7650648. As the number of chi-square data findings is less than the chi square table, H0 was not rejected (Siegel and Castellan, 1988).

H0: There is no difference between English and Indonesian speakers’ politeness strategies.

H1: There is a difference between English and Indonesian speakers’ politeness strategies.

As the H0 was not rejected, it means the differences between English and Indonesian in terms of choice of politeness strategies are not significantly different and this may be due to the small number sample size.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This current research compared English and Indonesian speakers in using politeness strategy, specifically in the speech act of refusal to higher status interlocutors. It was shown from the table findings that the most used strategy in Indonesian is negative politeness with 33 findings out of 60. Negative politeness was used commonly when the speaker has a distant relationship with the interlocutors (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Meanwhile, from the English findings, positive politeness was the most commonly used to higher interlocutors with 26 out of 60 findings. This is quite different from the theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). They argued that negative politeness is the most commonly used politeness in western culture. Then, we may conclude, through this research, in refusing higher interlocutors English speakers prefer to use positive politeness. Meanwhile, Indonesians prefer to use negative politeness. Besides the interlocutors, there might be other factors to explain this situation. The result may be affected by the contextual situation and the culture of Indonesian speakers or English speakers. It may also relate to the background context of the speaker and hearer. To explain these results, further research is needed.

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