

A pragmatic Study of Indirect Refusal Strategies in Me Before You Movie

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ABSTRACT

The speech act of refusal occurs in all languages and is mostly used by speakers in different ways. So many researchers have been interested in studying refusals.

The research falls into four sections; the first section is an introductory remarks about refusal , section two is the literature review which illustrates the definition of refusal , refusal classifications and sequences. Data analysis is tackled in section three. Section four ends with conclusion of the final outcomes.

The current study aims at investigating the indirect refusal strategies that are employed in Me Before You movie .To fulfill the aim Beebe's et al (1990) taxonomy of refusal strategies is adopted. The findings reveal that the characters differ in the way they use refusal strategies and ' giving reason and explanation ' formula is the most frequently used by the characters .

Key words : pragmatics, refusals , indirect strategies.

أنا قبلك دراسة تداولية لاستراتيجيات الرفض غير المباشرة في فيلم

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الملخص

ان الرفض الكلامي يحدث في جميع اللغات ويستخدمه المتحدثون في الغالب بطرق مختلفة

ولذلك فقد اهتم الكثير من الباحثين بدراسة حالات الرفض .
يشتمل البحث على أربعة أقسام؛ القسم الأول عبارة عن ملاحظات تمهيدية حول الرفض،
أما القسم الثاني فهو مراجعة الأدبيات التي توضح تعريف الرفض وتصنيفات الرفض وتسلسله
بينما يتم تناول تحليل البيانات في القسم الثالث وينتهي القسم الرابع باختتام النتائج النهائية
للبحث .

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى دراسة استراتيجيات الرفض غير المباشرة المستخدمة في فيلم أنا قبلك
ولتحقيق الهدف من البحث تم اعتماد تصنيف ببلي واخرون لسنة (١٩٩٠) لاستراتيجيات
الرفض. وتوصلت النتائج الى ان الشخصيات تختلف في طريقة استخدام استراتيجيات الرفض
وأن صيغة "إعطاء السبب والتفسير" هي الأكثر استخدامًا من قبل الشخصيات.
الكلمات المفتاحية: التداولية، الرفض، استراتيجيات الرفض غير المباشرة

1. Introduction

The skill of using language among the interlocutors is the cornerstone of communication. So to achieve a successful communication , a wide set of speech acts used by speakers as stated by Searle (1969) such as : **(declaration, commissives, expressive, representative, and directives)** in addition to acts of apologizing, complaining, requesting, and refusing. (Kasper and Rose , 2001).

A refusal is defined as responding negatively to someone's invitation, offer, or suggestion. It is considered as an important act because of its usage within daily communication . In order to reject appropriately it involves linguistics and pragmatics knowledge (Abdul-Sattar et al, 2011:70).

What's more , to refuse or reject something , one should have repertoire of vocabularies, grammar , and word sounds to practice pragmatic in a better way .

Another key to remember that various cultures differ in the acts of communication. Each culture has its own rejection methods among the members of society and for these reasons misunderstanding may arise by other cultures and may lead to confusion in the social communicational process .

Referring to the views of Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985), humans' communication can be better understood through investigating ,empirically, their linguistic behaviors including speech acts . Such investigation highlights similarity and difference in modes of interaction among individuals of various cultural communities. As a matter of fact, social factors , cultural standards, and individuals' beliefs all contribute to the realization of a speech act (Schmidt , 1983).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pragmatic

Every utterance has a meaning and can be interpreted in a particular way, but how can these utterances be interpreted? The answer might be easy and straightforward, which is by looking at the meaning of each word in the utterance. However, there is so much beyond what is literally uttered. What deals with what is beyond the literal meaning is the domain of pragmatics. The field of pragmatics is initiated in the 1930s by Morris, Carnap, and Peirce. Morris (1938, p.30) defines pragmatics as "the relation of signs to their interpreters." However, in modern linguistics, pragmatics is broadly defined as the study of language use in context. Leech (1983, p.1) proposes a broad definition to pragmatic stating that it is the study of how language is actually used in communication.

2.2 Speech acts and Refusal

Speech acts can be understood as utterances that have communicative functions such as requesting, refusing, greeting, thanking, apologizing, inviting, and giving orders. Kempson (1977) states, that in uttering a sentence, a speaker is involved in three different speech acts, where the speaker utters sentences with a particular meaning (locutionary act), and with a particular force (illocutionary act), in order to achieve a particular effect on the hearer (perlocutionary act).

Refusal is an important speech act in our daily life, and it requires a high

level of pragmatic competence. Sadler and Eroz (2001) define the speech act of refusal to reject the speech acts of requests, invitations, suggestions, and offers. A refusal can be identified as unpreferable reply which contradicts the interlocutors' expectations ; subsequently the competence required to perform it in appropriate manner (Kreishan, 2018 : 69) .

Refusal act is found almost in all languages. Searle and Vandervken (1985:195) view that refusal is the counterpart of acceptance and that individuals can equally accept or refuse an application, an invitation , and an offer in light of the relevant linguistic rules common in their cultural communities. Thus, in various languages uttering the word **"NO"** is very important than the answer itself. So, in order to transmit and receive a message of **"NO"** this requires a special skill to interact by depending on the most important things namely : ethnicity and cultural linguistic values (Abdul-Sattar et al 2011:70–71. Moreover, the speaker should realize the appropriate form and its function in order to be used successfully. To refuse someone's request , invitation or suggestion without hurting her/his feelings is extremely significant since the [inability to utter the word ' *no* ' made many non-native speakers to insult the other participants] (Ramos, 1991) . Concerning the close relationship between culture and refusal strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1978) demonstrate that the refusal strategies can be considered a gate that illuminates data about cultural and social values of the of a language and their social norms.

2.1.1 Refusal classifications

Beebe et al (1990) elicit four types of refusal as follows:

1.Refusals of Request

An act of requesting can be divided into the act of asking for:

- a. Favour (to borrow something, or ask for help)
- b. Agreement, acceptance.(e.g. Job application)

- c. Permission e.g (information about a product)
- d. Request to take an action (e.g.payment)

2. Refusals of Invitation

An invitation act is classified into two kinds :

- a. (**Ritual Invitation**) usually takes place at the end of human interaction. It plays a (*leave- taking act*) role among the participants . By using unspecified expressions of invitation , the inviter illustrates his desire to maintain the future relevance with the hearer.

E.g. **[come to have dinner with us]**.

- b. ("**Real Invitation**") this type shows the sincerity of speakers' intention to the listener about the invitation as for example **[Would you like to go to the movie with us?]**.

3. Refusals of Offer

An offer means that the speaker initiates some act willingly and it involves offering:

- a gift
- a favour
- food or drink
- an opportunity e.g. (**promotion, job**)

4. Refusals of Suggestion

A suggestion act can be clarified as an idea brought up for consideration. Suggestion falls into types as it can be :

1. (**Solicited act of suggestion** : when the interlocutors ask for advice).
2. (**Unsolicited act of suggestion** : when the interlocutors give advice voluntarily).

- a. [Personal suggestion] this suggestion is uttered by the speaker to the listener in order to maintain the relationship through:.

* Showing concern

e.g. **[– It is getting hot. you'd better wear something light.]**.

* Developing a conversation:

e.g. [**Its getting dark. Move inside as soon as you can.**].

* Showing or establishing membership :

e.g. [**I do concern about you, I suggest that you work harder**].

b. [Commercial suggestion] this type of suggestion is uttered to guide the participants' or customers' commercial manners and thoughts to purchase in response to salesmen's advertisements which calls agents to try their productions.

2.2.2 Refusal Sequences

Beebe et al (1990) proclaim that refusals can be viewed as series of the following :

A. [Pre-Refused Strategies]: these strategies prepare the hearer for an imminent refusal .

B. [Main Refusal Strategies]: these strategies discern the main strategy.

C. [Post- Refusal Strategies]: these strategies are used for concluding or justifying the refusal response followed the main act of refusing or the so called ' head act'

e.g. Boss : { "I was wondering if you might be able to stay a bit late this evening, say, until about 9.00 p.m. or sor" }.

Employee: { "Uh, I'd ready like to, but I cannot stay. I'm sorry . I have plans . I really cannot stay" }.

The previous example shows refusal sequences through the conversation between the boss' request for the employee to stay overtime at work .

Table No . (2) Refusal Sequences

Refusal Sequences	Response
<i>"Pre-refusal"</i>	<i>"Uh, I 'd really like you</i>
<i>"Head act(main act)"</i>	<i>"But I cannot"</i>
<i>"Post-refusal"</i>	<i>"I' m sorry"</i>

<i>"Post-refusal"</i>	<i>"I have plans"</i>
<i>"Post-refusal"</i>	<i>""I really cannot stay"</i>

2.3 Refusals and politeness

Politeness is one of the important factors that may influence refusals. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that the essential concept of politeness theory is "face" which means "the public self- image". They proposed that individuals whether speakers or hearers like to save each other's faces when facing threatening acts by using politeness strategies.

Scollon et al (2012) divided politeness systems into three types, deference, solidarity and hierarchical. Two factors help in the distinction of these systems. They are power

Relationships and social distance. The first politeness system is deference. The participants of communication see themselves according to this system as being equals or near equals with a distant relationship. They employ independence strategies in interaction This type of politeness system can be seen when two professionals who have the same status but a distant relationship address each other with deferential terms such as "Ms. Or Mr. and surname.

The second politeness system is solidarity. In this system, the participants of communication see themselves as being equals with a close relationship. They use politeness strategies of involvement that save each other's face, e.g. colleagues.

The third type is hierarchical. In this system, the participants of communication see themselves as being different in social status. They use different strategies to talk to each other. The higher status individuals use involvement strategies whereas the lower status individuals use independence strategies, e.g. a professor with a student. In general, both of the two types of deference and solidarity are symmetrical, which means using the same types of politeness strategies

mutually by the two parties in a conversation. The third system “hierarchical” is asymmetrical which means one party is in a superior position and the other is in a subordinate position.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 The Model of Analysis

Beebe et al's (1990) taxonomy of refusal strategies is adopted for the analysis of the selected data movie. The taxonomy consists of three types of strategies which are direct, indirect and adjuncts to refusals. This research will tackle only the indirect strategies as follow:

1. [Stating Regret]

e.g. { I feel terrible, I am sorry }

2. [Expressing a wish]

e.g. { I wish to be there }

3. [Giving an Excuse , reason , or explanation] , these acts are achieved through giving excuses , reasons , or explanation in this way one can decline an offer of invitation.

E.g. { "I have got an important work tomorrow." }

{ " I want to leave now.)

4. [Stating an Alternative]

It involves making a request or giving a suggestion by a person in response to the requester 's offer and affords the latter the opportunity to choose , i.e. expanding the request or the offer to someone else:

E.g. { " Please say it to Tomba." }

5. [Showing Restricted Acceptance]

In this state , the speaker accepts indirectly but he gives a condition which appears to some extent that it is declining .

E.g. { I do accept this but I've got a problem. }

6. [Promising of Acceptance]

In this condition, the speaker disapproves an offer by showing his/her it is currently rejected but acceptance can be a future action:

E.g. { I will definitely attend next time . }.

7. [Stating a Principle]

The addresser , in this strategy , illustrates his/her norm or rule towards the addressee or to the person whose is creating the suggestion; declaring to others that he/she is not that kind to agree such a suggestion or an offer.

E.g. { "I am not that type of person to ask favor to anyone."] ' }

8. [Stating a Philosophy]

e.g. { " One cannot be too careful" }

9. Dissuading the hearer by:

a. threatening or using utterance whose locution has negative impact on the requester :

e.g. { "I won't be any fun tonight ." } [refusing invitation]

b. {guilt tripping}

e.g. { "I cannot make a living off people who just order coffee ." }

["In the previous sentence , the waitress talked to customer who wants to sit a while ."]

c. {criticizing the act of request or its performer by insulting ,attacking or showing negative opinion or feeling, .

e.g. { "Who do you think you are ?" }

{ "That's a terrible idea." }

The previous sentences indicate that there are kinds of underestimation or attacks by the speaker to the recipient .

d. {requesting for empathy, help , , and assistance by holding or dropping the request}.

e. { defending one's situation }

e.g. { "I 'm trying my best ." }

{ "I'm doing all I can ." } (Ibid)

10. Refusing through acceptance

In this strategy , the speaker declines by giving inaccurate or indirect

answer.

E.g. {" I do not know when I will be able to do that ."}
 A: indefinite or unspecific reply B:{ showing less enthusiasms}

Here , the speaker does not pronounce his or her unwillingness directly so, he or she tries to play on words in order to keep his or her face (Rahaya , 2019 : 69).

E.g. {" I do not fed like doing it ."}
 11. Avoidance

(i) {Non-Verbal} : Refusals get through body gestures as nodding head , eye movements , hesitation or by keeping silence .

(ii) {Verbal}

a. (topic switch): the addressee usually avert an offer or request by changing the topic .

E.g. { "Wait , how did it go about that previous thing ?" }

b. (jock) :considered as one kind of indirect refusal strategies . This kind fulfils when the responder tells a joke while the request is made .

c. (repetition of the requested part) : This statement happens when the speaker dissimulates that not to hear . It is also viewed as a kind of irony resulting from the offer or request .

E.g. {"What did you say , do a work together , huh ?"}
 d. postponement :An offer or suggestion is rejected by means of delaying or stalling it by the speaker .

E.g. {" I will think on it .)

e. hedging : a kind of indirect refusal strategy to save face because hedge is used as a form of politeness .

e.g.{" Gee , I don't know." }

12. Adjuncts to refusals

Adjuncts cannot be performed by themselves as a refusal. Since , they may appear either before the semantic formula [pre-refusal] or after it [post refusal] as follow:

- a. (Stating positive point of view / showing favorable feeling / or agreement) e.g.
- b. (Expressing empathy)
e.g.()
- c. (Using a Pause filler)
e.g.{
- d. (appreciation /Gratitude) (Reichl , 2017:255).

3.2 Data Selection

The present study is directed to examine indirect refusal strategies in **Me Before You** movie. To carry out this study, extracts containing indirect refusals are taken from the script of this movie. Moreover, the script is retrieved from the following website, https://www.scripts.com/script/me_before_you_13548 .

3.3 Data Analysis

The current data is mainly relied on Beebe et al (1990) taxonomy of indirect refusal strategies . The final outcomes of the conducted analysis is shown in the table below:

Table (3) The Overall Numbers of Indirect Refusal strategies .

Types of Indirect Refusal Strategies	Frequency
1– <i>Expressing regret</i>	10
2– <i>Statting a wish</i>	1
3– <i>Giving an excuse ,an explanation , or a reason</i>	Excuse/ 15 Reason/ 40 Explanation/ 40
4– <i>Providing an Alternative</i>]	5
5– <i>Conditioned agreement</i>	6
6– <i>Promise to accept in future</i>	20
7– <i>Stating Principles</i>	1
8– <i>Stating a Philosophy</i>	0

<p>9- <i>Dissuading the Interlocutor by:</i></p> <p>a. threatening or using utterance whose locution has negative impact on the hearer.</p> <p>b. guilt tripping</p> <p>c. criticizing /attacking /insulting / giving opinion</p> <p>/showing feeling.</p> <p>d. requesting for empathy, help , , and assistance by holding or dropping the request</p> <p>e. defending one's situation.</p>	<p>0</p> <p>4</p> <p>Criticize /20</p> <p>0</p> <p>8</p>
<p>10 <u>Acceptance Functioning as Refusal</u></p> <p>a. unspecific or indefinite response</p> <p>b. Less enthusiasm</p>	<p>8</p>
<p>11-['Avoidance']</p> <p>1. ['Non-verbal'] : a. hesitation b. silence c. do nothing d. physical departure</p> <p>2- <u>switching the</u> topic</p> <p>b. ['joke c. repeating part of the request'] d. [Hedging / Postponing</p> <p>e. ['hedging']</p>	<p>0</p> <p>Joke/ 0</p> <p>Topic switch /5</p> <p>Repetition /2</p> <p>22</p> <p>postponement /1</p>

4. Conclusions

After analyzing the data , the research comes up with the following conclusion:

1. The investigation has approved that the indirect strategies of refusal are the extremely preferable strategies employed between the characters of the movie to minimize the threatening-face and softening the interlocutors' responses to refusals. Such preference can be due to cultural factors that affect the society to which the characters belong, the fear of employing improper ways of refusal by people in addition to

various factors that are associated with set of elements such as : power , age , social distance as well as the subject of conversation .

2. Concerning the most frequently used indirect strategy , the research finds that the characters have employed different refusals but the ' giving reason and explanation ' is the highly preferred by the characters. This means that the characters in this movie consider much about other's feelings and often try to comfort others as well as avoid hurting other's face.

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Data source

https://www.scripts.com/script/me_before_you_13548