

REFUSAL STRATEGIES REALIZED BY PROFICIENT EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This research was aimed at describing the strategies of proficient EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' refusal realization in English. This research employed Qualitative research method. The subjects were 18 EFL students of English Study Program Sriwijaya University whose TOEFL prediction scores were 450 above. DCT was used as the instrument of collecting data. Data were analyzed based on combined refusal classification by Wannarath (2008) and Campillo (2009). The results of this research show that proficient EFL students mostly used the indirect strategies in their refusal realization in English. There were 318 (84%) of the 494 semantic units in proficient EFL English refusal that were categorized into indirect strategy. There were 42 (9%) of the 494 semantic units in proficient EFL students' English refusal that were categorized into direct strategy. There were 185 (23%) semantic formula of the 494 semantic formula of the 494 semantic formula in proficient EFL students' English refusal that were categorized into adjacent-to-refusals.

Keywords: Refusal, proficient EFL students, semantic formula

INTRODUCTION

Research in interlanguage pragmatics has shown that ESL learners' performance of speech acts is often different from that of native speakers because of "lack of knowledge in the target language sociocultural rules" (Kwon, 2003:18).

One speech act in which communication breakdowns can possibly occur is the speech of refusal. Refusal is an effort on the part of speakers to deny to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor. It is not an act initiated by the speaker but a response to a speaker's act such as an invitation, a suggestion, an offer or a request. Refusals are also recognized as "face-threatening acts" (Dorbej and Takahashi, 1990). Refusals occur in all languages. However, not all languages/cultures express refusals in the same way nor do their users feel comfortable refusing invitation, suggestion, offer and request.

Differences in the realization of refusals exist between native and non-native speakers regardless of the language issue. In her study on speech act sets of refusal and complaint: a comparison of native and non-native English speakers' production, Taneh (2002) found that refusals in English produced by Japanese and Chinese speakers have been found to be sometimes vague and indirect, or lacking the requisite excuse as prescribed by American culture.

Based on the ideas that ESL learners' performance of speech acts is often different from that of native speakers because of "lack of knowledge in the target language sociocultural rules that cause pragmatic failures. One speech act in which communication breakdowns can possibly occur is the speech of refusal. The results of preliminary study done in one-on-one interview type on three language lecturers of English Education Study Program Sriwijaya University show L1 influence on EFL learners. The researchers felt interested in exploring refusal strategies of proficient EFL students' refusals. The problems of the study are formulated in the following questions. "What strategies do proficient EFL students apply in their expressing refusals?" In line with the research problems, the objectives of this study are to provide pragmatic data proficient EFL students' refusals realization. To be specific, the objective is to identify the strategies proficient EFL students apply in their refusal realization. This study will provide information about proficient EFL students' refusal realization. The results of the study can be useful in enriching insights for lecturers, EFL learners, and those who are interested in pragmatics about

whether or not language proficiency influences EFL learners' performance in making refusals. The results can also give some indirect contribution to the teaching of sociolinguistics.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This part discusses some literature and previous study results related to the topic in order to give sufficient theoretical foundation for this study. They are categorized into five sub-topics: (1) communicative competence, (2) speech act, (3) speech act of refusals, (4) power and solidarity in style of speech.

Communicative Competence

When learning a new language, learners do not forget their native norms completely. Although they are successful in learning a foreign language, it is not easy for learners to adopt the culture of the new language. The combination of the lack of grammatical competence and that of sociolinguistic confusion, can make learners appear incompetent. Misunderstandings or offense can also emerge when speakers can only understand the literal meanings of words. These can cause pragmatic failure and various communicative problems on the part of the learners (Yu, 2004).

Speech Acts

What we accomplish through physical acts such as cooking, eating, bicycling, gardening, or getting on a bus, we accomplish a great deal each day by verbal acts. In face-to-face conversation, telephone calls, job application letters, notes scribbled to a roommate, and a multitude of other speech events, we perform verbal actions of different types. In fact, language is the principal means we have to greet, compliment, and insult one another, to plead or flatter, to seek and supply information, and to accomplish hundreds of other tasks in a typical day. Actions that are carried out through language are called speech acts (Franklin et al, 2007).

Every speech act has several principal components -the utterance itself and the intention of the speaker in making it. First, every utterance is represented by a sentence with a grammatical structure and a linguistic meaning; this is called the locution. Second, speakers have some intention in making an utterance and what they intend to accomplish is called an illocution.

Speech Act of Refusals

Refusal is an effort on the part of speaker to deny to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor. It occurs when a speaker directly or indirectly says "no" to request, invitation, offer and suggestion. It is not an action initiated by the speaker but a response to a speaker's act such as an invitation, a suggestion, an offer or a request. Tanck (2002) states refusal is a face-threatening act to the listener/ requestor/ invitee, because it contradicts his or her expectations, and it often realized through indirect strategies. Refusals may also be understood

In order to analyze strategies of speech acts including refusals, a tool has been provided a tool has been provided by Blum-Kulka, et al (1989). The Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) found by Blum-Kulka et al (1989) classifies speech act strategies into three categories: (1) Direct strategies, (2) Conventionally indirect strategies, and (3) Non-conventionally indirect strategies. Mawardi, Campillo (2009) provided Refusal taxonomy which was partially based on the work of Beebe, L.M., T. Takahashi, and R. Uliss-Walter taxonomy.

Power and Solidarity in Style of Speech

Both of power and solidarity are matters of degree. They work together to produce various combinations of distance and intimacy. According to Chaika (2008) a person in power may exert to use some markers of solidarity with her or his employees to maintain friendly relation.

Furthermore, she says that forms which indicate power establish who has authority and how much authority.

The status or power dimension also accounts for a variety of linguistic differences in the way people speak. According to Holmsten (1999) speakers speak in a way which signals their social status in a community.

METHODOLOGY

The present study applied qualitative method. It is concerned with in-depth analysis of request strategies and modifications performed by the subjects in accordance with the combination of Wannaruk (2005) and Campillo (2009) refusal categories. The in-depth analysis were done to have the explanatory adequacy about refusal strategies made by EFL students with TOEFL prediction score of 450 and above. The qualitative findings will be used to answer question 1 and 2 of the research problem.

Operational Definitions

In order to avoid misunderstanding, important terms in the study need to be defined operationally. Terms, such as refusal acts, refusal realization, strategy, and proficient EFL students are defined specifically in the context of the present study. In this study, *Refusing acts* refer to speech acts in which the speakers say 'no' directly or indirectly to the hearers' request, invitation, offers and suggestion. *Refusal realization* refers to the utterances that reflect the refusers' choice of refusal strategies. For the sake of the investigation, refusal realization will be analyzed by using refusals taxonomy combined from refusal categories made by Wannaruk (2005) and Campillo (2009). The term *strategy* refers to the choice of the level of directness or indirectness by which the refusal is realized. *Proficient EFL students* refers to the students of English as a Foreign Language, in this case are students of English Training and Education Study Program of Seiwijaya University Indonesia.

Subjects of the Study

In determining the total number of the subjects of this research, a purposive sampling technique will be used. The total subjects of this research are 18 students of English Education Study Program of Seiwijaya University in Indralaya Campus who got 450 and above in TOEFL prediction Test conducted by Seiwijaya University Language Institute on 3 April 2010.

Techniques for Collecting Data

There was only one type of instrument used that is DCT. DCT was originally developed for comparing the speech act realization of native and nonnative speakers of Hebrews. The DCT in English version used in this research was modified one. It had been used in a research on refusals by Wannaruk (2005) on the samples. The subject was elicited to give response to the task written in the text by writing their acts of refusing in the blank spaces provided.

The 12 DCT situations are divided into four types : three requests, three invitations, three offers, and three suggestions. Each situation can only be answered by a refusal, in each type of eliciting act of refusal was required to the interlocutor of high, equal or lower status.

Trustworthiness

In this research, inter-rater data classification were conducted. Inter-rater data classification was used to ensure the reliability of the result of data classification. The raters for classifying subjects' English refusal realization were Drs. Zainal A. Nasing, M.A., an English lecturer of English Education Study Program Seiwijaya University and the researchers. An inter-rater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was performed to determine consistency between raters. Viera

and Garrett (2003) stated that Kappa statistic give us a numerical rating of the degree to which the agreement of two raters' rating occurs. The interrater reliability for the English refusal raters was found to be Kappa = 0.695 ($p < 0.0001$), 95% CI (0.504, 0.848). This measure was statistically significant and marginally moderate. As the rule of thumb values of Kappa from 0.41 to 0.60 is considered moderate, 0.61 to 0.80 substantial, and 0.81-0.99 almost perfect (Viera and Garrett, 2002).

Techniques for Analyzing Data

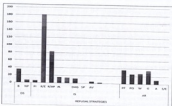
The data collected from DCT in Indonesian were classified into refusal classification in accordance with the refusal categories which the researchers combined from refusal categories proposed by Wawancara (2005) and Campillo (2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were 318 (64%) of the 494 semantic units in proficient EFL students' refusal were categorized into indirect strategy. There were 42 (9%) of the 494 semantic unit in proficient EFL students' English refusal that were categorized into direct strategy. There were 102 (22%) semantic formula of the 494 semantic formula in proficient EFL students' English refusal categorized into adjunct to refusal.

The refusal strategies in refusals in English realized by the Indonesian EFL students are described in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The Total Semantic Formula and Adjuncts in Proficient EFL students' Refusal Realization in English



Proficient EFL students mostly used the indirect strategies in their refusal realization. Nevertheless, the use of direct strategies are found especially when they realized their refusal for refusing suggestion of a familiar person of equal and lower status, and also when they refusing offer from an unfamiliar person of lower status. Proficient EFL students preferred to use bluntness to negation of proposition in realizing the direct strategy in their English refusal. Though bluntness shared quite small percentage of the total semantic formula of refusals realized by them. Bluntness was used especially when refusing suggestion from a familiar person of equal status and lower and also when they refusing offer from an unfamiliar person of lower status. The negation of proposition hardly found among 12 twelve situations in DCT. Commonly, they express bluntness as the first semantic unit of their refusal realization, for example, "No, I want to make it simple."

R/E (reason or explanation) were 181 of the total 494 refusal semantic unit, and commonly realized as the second semantic unit. Mostly it realized as the highest percentage of the second semantic formula in their refusal realization. For example, "Actually, I really want to, but I can't. I have to take care of my younger sister at home, sir. I'm sorry for that.", "Oh, sorry! I have many assignments to do tonight." Different from reason/explanation R/Ap (request or apology), one of the indirect semantic formula, 81 of the total 494 refusal semantic unit, commonly realized as the first and the second semantic formula of proficient EFL learners' refusal realization but less common in the third semantic formula. For example, "I really apologize, I have booked a flight already for that day.", "I'd like to take it, but I'm afraid I can't because I have another class to manage. "It is really exciting to share my experience, but I have an important competition this Thursday, I'm sorry I can't." The alternatives, 15 CO (Change option) and 14 CT (change time), were seldom found in the realization of proficient EFL refusal realization. They were commonly realized as the third semantic formula of proficient EFL refusal realization. For example, "I have something to do tonight, sorry. May be you can tell me the summary of the film.", DaGdC (disagreement/disillusion/ criticism), P/Plain indirect, H (Hedging), CTp (Change Topic), were also found in the proficient EFL learners refusal realization but only in a very small number. They are commonly found in the first or second semantic formula of Proficient EFL learners' refusal realization.

Adjuncts to refusal, part of the act of refusing but do not constitute a refusal by themselves, were quite significant in number. Among adjunct commonly used by the proficient EFL learners' refusal realization were 36 PF (pious filler) of the total 494 semantic unit, 33 G (Gratitude) of the total 494 semantic unit, 27 W (willingness) of the total 494 semantic unit, 26 PO (positive opinion) and 10 A (agreement). They mostly used in the first semantic formula of proficient EFL learners' refusal realization. The examples are as follows:

- I'd love to be there but my mother is going to have surgery operation.
- Thank you, sir. But I already have 24 credits for next semester so I cannot add.
- Yeah, I thought so. But I have asked my advisor about it. He said it's OK.
- Oh, thanks. I'm trying to do work out. I guess it might be good for my health.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Proficient EFL students English mostly used the indirect strategies in their refusal realization. Nevertheless, the use of direct strategies are found especially when they realized their refusal for refusing a familiar person of equal status and lower, and also when they refuse offer from an unfamiliar person of lower status. They preferred to use bluntness to negation of proposition in realizing the direct strategy in their English refusal. Though bluntness share quite small percentage of the total semantic formula of refusals realized by proficient EFL learners, bluntness was used especially when refusing suggestion. The negation of proposition hardly found across all 12 twelve situations in DCT. Commonly, they express bluntness as the first semantic unit of their refusal realization.

Due to the limitation of this study, future researchers may address to deal with three issues: difference between EFL students' refusal realization in their native language and Indonesian, idiosyncrasies which occur in the proficient EFL students' refusal realization, and communication strategies used by EFL students in realizing their refusals.

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