

Speech Acts or Speech Act Sets of Refusals: Some Evidence from Thai L2 Learners

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Abstract: Apart from speaking competence and vocabulary used, refusal strategies play an important role in a communication scenario. This paper investigates how Thai students realise the speech act of refusals to the initiating acts of suggestions, offers, requests, and invitations with regard to the status of the interlocutor. To achieve this objective, 157 Thai university students were asked to respond to 12 scenarios listed in an Oral Discourse Completion Test (ODCT) eliciting refusals of three requests, three invitations, three suggestions, and three offers in lower, equal, and higher status scenarios. All responses were systematically collected, transcribed, coded, and classified based on the refusal taxonomy developed by Beebe, Takahasik, and Uliss-Weltz (1990). The results revealed some discrepancies in the frequency, shift, and content of linguistic forms used in the refusals. In particular, most Thai students reported the use of indirectness, and a combination of direct and indirect strategies was used most frequently. Particularly, excuses, reasons, and explanations were the strategies frequently used in refusals with the different interactants, suggesting that refusals should not be treated as a speech act but as speech act sets that include one or more components. The study sheds light on the importance of socio-cultural factors that affect successful communication. It contributes to the knowledge of pragmatic behaviour in the L2 or intercultural pragmatics and also provides suggestions for integrating pragmatic instruction to foster the pragmatic competence of L2 learners.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Reddetme söz eylemi, söz eylemi öbekleri, ikinci dil edilibilim, Taylandlı öğrenciler, söylem tamamlama görevleri

Söz Eylemleri ya da Reddetme Söz Eylem Öbekleri: Taylandlı İkinci Dil Öğrenenlerinden Bulgular

Özet: Konuşma yetkinliğine ve kelime kullanımına ek olarak, reddetme stratejileri iletişimde oldukça önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu çalışma, Taylandlı öğrencilerin iletişime geçtikleri kişilerin statüsüne bağlı olarak reddetme söz eylemini öneri, teklif, istek ve davet eylemlerini çerçevesinde nasıl gerçekleştirdiklerini araştırmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, 157 Taylandlı üniversite öğrencisinden, Sözlü Söylem Tamamlama Testinde (SSTT) listelenen ve düşük, eşit ve yüksek statüye sahip kişilerle iletişimde talep, davet, öneri ve teklifin reddedilmesiyle ilgili toplam 12 senaryoya cevap vermeleri istenmiştir. Katılımcılardan elde edilen yanıtlar yazıya aktarıldıktan sonra sistematik olarak kodlanmış ve Beebe, Takahasik ve Uliss-Weltz (1990) tarafından geliştirilen reddetme taksonomisine göre sınıflandırılmıştır. Sonuçlar, reddetme eyleminde kullanılan dilsel biçimlerin sıklığında, değişiminde ve içeriğinde bazı farklılıkları ortaya koymaktadır. Özellikle, katılımcıların çoğunun doğrudan ve dolaylı stratejileri sıklıkla kullandığı tespit edilmiştir. Buna ek olarak, bahanelerin, gerekçelerin ve açıklamaların, farklı etkileşimcilerle yapılan reddetmelerde sıklıkla kullanılan stratejiler olması, reddetme eylemlerinin bir söz edimi olarak değil, bir veya daha fazla bileşen içeren söz edimi kümeleri olarak ele alınması gerektiğini göstermektedir. Başarılı iletişimi etkileyen sosyo-kültürel faktörlerin önemine ışık tutmaya çalışan bu çalışmadan elde edilen bulgular ikinci dildeki ve kültürlerarası iletişimdeki edimbilimsel davranışlar hakkında bilgiler vermekte ve ikinci bir dil öğrenmekte olan öğrencilerinin edimbilimsel yeterliliğini geliştirmek için edimbilim öğretiminin dil öğretimine dahil edilmesi için öneriler sunmaktadır.

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1. Introduction

People use language as a means of communication to express their thoughts, feelings or demands. Austin (1962) discussed that when we produce an utterance, we automatically perform a communicative act with the use of lexical items in everyday life, introducing for the first time a speech act theory as a functional unit in communication. According to Kasper and Rose (2001), all linguistic communication involves the production of speech acts, such as offering apologies, asking questions, making promises and complaints, or refusing. Speech acts require consideration of the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor (Brown & Levinson, 1987), as communication is only successful when the speaker and the interlocutor are on the same page and understand the same meaning to be conveyed, thus both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge is required. Furthermore, social factors also have a certain influence on the linguistic variations of a particular speech act. Knowledge of these differences is therefore crucial. Otherwise, the lack of this knowledge can lead to misunderstandings, disagreements, dissatisfaction or even communication breakdown (Austin, 1962; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Wannaruk, 2008).

Among the various speech acts, refusals in response to another act (e.g., suggestion, offer, request, invitation) are interesting because they serve to deny engaging in an action proposed by the interlocutor (Chen & Zhang, 1995), which requires pragmatic competence (Chen, 1996). Al-Kahtani (2005) and Saud (2019) argue that refusals occur in all cultures, but not in the same way. Some may be considered appropriate for one culture but not for another. When making refusals, the degree of directness, sensitivity to social factors and content of strategies may vary across cultures (Dewi et al., 2019; Rahayu, 2018; Eslami, 2010). Many cross-cultural studies (e.g., Al-Kahtani, 2005; Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rubin, 1983) have shown that speech acts reflect cultural values that may be specific to a speech community. Meanwhile, distinctive cultures have a major influence on interaction styles, leading to preferences for speech act behaviour. Therefore, realizing the importance of speech acts and producing speech appropriately are a crucial constituent of a learner's competence and social knowledge, especially when learning a language and producing utterances appropriately in the target language (Dewi et al., 2019; Rahayu, 2018; Bella, 2011).

In the Thai context, studies on refusal strategies (e.g., Ongwuttawat, 2017a; 2017b; Sihakriangkrai, 2004; Zheng et al., 2013) have examined how Thais interact with Thai and foreign interlocutors, as social relations and cultural norms of collectivism are deeply rooted in Thai culture. These studies have consistently shown that Thai people tend to use indirect strategies because living together is important to collective society. They are usually aware of other people's feelings, which leads to diversity from society to society. They may sometimes find it difficult to give negative responses to speech acts because they are afraid that inappropriate realizations of refusals may lead to conflicts with the communicative intentions of the interlocutor. As far as pragmatic competence is concerned, these studies have suggested that the ability to produce socially and culturally appropriate language to meet social norms and language communication is central to avoiding communication breakdowns, pragmatic failure and misunderstanding of the intended meaning.

Pragmatically, socio-cultural factors such as gender, social status, power and age have been reported to influence the choice of refusal strategies (Asmali, 2013; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008; Hassami et al., 2011). The refusal strategies used by different speakers may vary with respect to these factors. According to Al-Issa (2003), Asmali (2013) and Rahayu (2018), people from

two different cultures usually reflect the norms of their own culture when they communicate with each other. Differences in people's cultural backgrounds can affect the way they interact and interpret and perceive the notion of appropriateness and politeness differently (Aksoyalp, 2009; Farnia & Wu, 2012; Wannaruk, 2008). In this regard, a particular culture may be ritually offered as a polite act to indicate the speaker's consideration for the hearer (Chen & Zhang 1995). Therefore, interlocutors should have sufficient knowledge of the other's background to select appropriate refusal patterns in order to mitigate the negative effects of direct refusals (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008, 2013).

As the Thai language is dominant in Thai society alongside other foreign languages, opportunities to use English outside the classroom are relatively limited for Thai students. It is noteworthy how Thai students express refusals when speaking English in different situations. This study aims to identify the types of refusal strategies and commonly used linguistic expressions used by these students and investigate the role of interlocutor status in communication. The findings gained from the present study can contribute to a better understanding of the speech act of refusals produced by Thai students, including the role of the different social status of speakers and interlocutors.

1.1. Refusal Strategies

Refusals are considered culture-specific because they are associated with certain speech acts depending on the context and situation (Izadi & Zilaie, 2014). Some speech acts are described in the literature as “intrinsically threatening to face and thus require softening” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 24). Refusals are also associated with the concept of “face” (Brown & Levinson, 1987), ‘politeness’ (Félix-Brasdefer, 2013; Scollon et al., 2012) and ‘pragmatic ability’ (Littlewood, 2007). Gass and Houck (1999) describe that refusals are produced in response to an initiating act (e.g., a suggestion, offer, request or invitation, and are not simply initiated by the speaker).

A number of studies on refusals (Beebe et al. 1990; Chen & Zhang, 1995; Félix-Brasdefer, 2006, 2013; Kasper, 2009) have attempted to document different types of refusals. Chen and Zhang (1995) and Kasper (2009), for example, have found that there are two types of refusals: genuine and ritual. A genuine refusal is uttered to allow the speaker to express disagreement with the proposed action in the initiating move (Kasper, 2009). In contrast, a ritual refusal is a polite act by which the speaker shows that he or she is considerate of the listener (Chen & Zhang 1995) as well as employs face-enhancing politeness strategies (Kreishan, 2018). Beebe et al. (1990), in an influential study, suggested that speakers use a wide range of direct and indirect strategies to achieve successful refusal. They developed a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and taxonomy of refusal strategies that have been widely used in subsequent research studies on refusals (e.g., Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016; Wannaruk, 2008). The classification of refusals includes direct refusals, indirect refusals and adjuncts to refusals. Two main classes of refusals are direct and indirect strategies, each of which has its own sub-strategies. On the other hand, adjuncts are an adjunct to refusals rather than a part of them. Adjuncts to refusals can be expressions of gratitude and positive opinions, and the term is usually used for the type of adverbs that can precede or follow the main acts of refusals.

Although the proposed taxonomy includes the main semantic formulas that can be used to refuse different speech acts such as requests, invitations, offers or suggestions, Beebe et al. (1990) discuss that “strategies may vary depending on the type of speech act that elicits them”

(p. 56), as well as the contextual factors that contribute to intralinguistic variation (Barron, 2005). Different strategies may manifest themselves differently depending on the individual personality of the interlocutor, the social background and the multicultural subjectivity of the learners (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). Moreover, as Válková (2012, 2013) discusses, speech acts such as apologies and compliments should be treated as speech act sets because a speech act may consist of one or more components, each of which could be a speech act in itself. This is probably why the traditional model has been extended to consider speech acts and speech act sets into account.

1.2. Pragmatic Transfer in Refusals

Pragmatic knowledge is an important component of communicative competence and could potentially help expand the scope of research on interlanguage transfer at the pragmatic level (e.g., Beebe et al. 1990; Kasper, 2009; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Wolfson, 1989). Pragmatic transfer, as defined by Wolfson (1989), involves a set of strategies used to speak from one's native speech community when interacting with a community member, or when speaking or writing in a second language. This occurs when speakers apply strategies from their first language (L1) to their second language (L2). Beebe et al. (1990) pointed out that pragmatic transfer for communicative purposes is a competence of communication of a society and culture that native speakers transfer to non-native speakers. Due to the role of culture, the pragmatic transfer may not conform to the communicative purposes of native speakers, resulting in pragmatic failure or misunderstanding of the intended overall meaning (Morkus, 2018). Therefore, Kasper (1992) suggested that the distinction between a positive and negative pragmatic transfer has implications for learners' use of the L2. Positive pragmatic transfer refers to language acquisition in which "language-specific conventions of usage and use are demonstrably non-universal, yet shared between L1 and L2" (Kasper, 1992, p. 212). In contrast, the negative pragmatic transfer can often lead to miscommunication when L1-based pragmatic conventions are "projected into L2 contexts and differing from the pragmatic perceptions and behaviours of the target community" (Kasper, 1992, p. 213).

Numerous studies have addressed the question of how the pragmatic knowledge of L2 learners from different languages and cultures is transferred to the L1 (e.g., Abed (2011) in Iraqi EFL learners, Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019) in Yemeni EFL learners; Al-Shboul and Huwari, (2016); Huwari and Al-Shboul (2015) in Jordanian learners; Hashemian, (2012) in Persian learners; Krulatz and Dixon (2020) in Korean and Norwegian learners; and Wannaruk (2008) in Thai EFL learners). These interlanguage pragmatic studies show that pragmatic knowledge and speech acts apply not only to the L1 but also to the L2, which means that knowledge is not limited to linguistic components such as grammar, phonology and lexicon. Therefore, these studies focused on comparing learners' refusals with those of native speakers and also looked for evidence of pragmatic transfer as a source of similarities and differences between the learner's language and the native speaker of the target language.

1.3. Possible Factors Contributing to Choice of Refusals

Refusal strategies are influenced by social variables, including gender, age, educational level, language proficiency, occupation, power, and distance (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Beebe et al., 1990; Fraser, 1990; García, 2007; Tabatabaei, 2019; Xiao, 2015). Fraser (1990) focused on L2 learners and pointed out that saying 'no' is probably not uncommon in many cultures. Most people express themselves indirectly when refusing something that involves social variables. Beebe et al. (1990), Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1991) and García (2007)

found that social status, gender and age strongly influence refusal. These studies are consistent with those of Tannen (1990), Holmes (1995) and Scollon et al. (2012), who emphasise that gender and speech behaviour are interrelated. In particular, females appear to be more polite than men due to gender inequality.

Several studies on refusals (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Chang, 2009; Félix-Brasdefer, 2006, 2013; Nelson et al., 2002) have identified how perceptions of social power and status in other languages and cultures influence ESL/EFL learners' use of refusals. For example, Chang (2009) concluded that social status and culture play an important role in the choice of an appropriate reason for refusal, as differences in the degree of directness and content specificity were found between American native English speakers and Chinese EFL learners when refusing a request from an interlocutor of equal or higher status. Chang's findings correspond to those of Nelson, Carson, Al Batal and El-Bakary (2002), who applied a modified version of the DCT to investigate the differences in refusal of interlocutors with different status between Egyptians and Americans. Their study revealed that both Egyptians and Americans preferred indirect strategies over those with equal status when rejecting interlocutors with lower and higher status. In addition, Egyptians were more likely to use a refusal strategy than Americans in their refusals to lower-status interlocutors. They argued that refusals are even more threatening in the Arabic language and culture than in American culture. Félix-Brasdefer (2006) examined refusals in the Mexican-Spanish language by using open-ended role-plays supplemented by retrospective verbal reports, and found that refusal strategies of a person of higher power status are more complex than refusing a person of equal or lower power status. In particular, social power and social distance actively contribute to the choice of linguistic strategies used by Mexican speakers of Spanish. Therefore, linguistic forms and social and contextual factors should be taken into account in order to acquire pragmatic knowledge effectively.

Previous studies investigating the pragmatic transfer of refusals (e.g., Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Lee, 2013; Wannaruk 2008) have also shown that the ability to produce refusals is influenced by linguistic competence. Lee (2013) examined the ability of Korean EFL learners to formulate refusals in role-plays and found that those who had lower language proficiency had greater difficulty in formulating refusals appropriately. In terms of social power, most Korean EFL learners had difficulty rejecting lower-status interlocutors. This finding is in line with those revealed in Wannaruk's (2008) study which focused on rejections between American speakers and Thai learners with different language levels. Using DCT-based interviews to identify different situations for rejections, Wannaruk's study showed that language proficiency influences the transmission of vocal rejection acts. That is, Thai learners with low language proficiency often transfer from Thai (L1) to English (L2).

Allami and Naeimi (2011) investigated the shift and content of linguistic formulas at different levels of fluency, the status of the interlocutor, and the type of actions in the implementation of refusal strategies produced by Iranian EFL learners. The study found evidence of pragmatic transfer in the production of refusal strategies among Iranian EFL learners as a positive correlation was found between language proficiency levels and pragmatic transfer. In particular, upper intermediate learners transferred more socio-cultural norms from Persian (L1) to English (L2). In line with Tabatabaei's (2019) and Hassani et al.'s (2011) study, Iranian learners (EFL) were found to be more inclined to use indirect strategies in Persian (L1) than in English. Furthermore, a pragmatic transfer was found in learners who used more indirect strategies in Persian when speaking with interlocutors of higher social status. Therefore, it is essential for language learners to develop their pragmatic and sociolinguistic rules of language

use to understand, realize and produce appropriate language according to the situation in which they are functioning.

1.4. Previous Research on Refusal Strategies in the Thai Context

Many previous studies have examined the realisation of refusal speech acts by Thai people in various settings and speech communications. For example, Zheng et al., (2013) investigated teachers' refusal strategies between Thai and Chinese university students. Their study found similarities between these two groups of students, with Thai students using more direct strategies than their Chinese counterparts, who preferred indirect strategies for refusal requests from their teachers.

Pinyo (2010) investigated Thai English teachers' pragmatic competence in making, accepting and declining requests. It was found that Thai teachers' pragmatic competence was at a moderate level. Limited pragmatic knowledge, transfer from L1 and linguistic deficits were identified as possible causes for the teachers' lack of success in pragmatic competence. Ongwuttawat (2017a) investigated the refusal of good intention in a Thai context and discovered that most Thai learners indirectly rather than directly refused. The findings reflect an aspect of Thai society that people usually compromise, as Thai people always try to retain a relationship with their interlocutors by using refusal strategies. It is therefore argued that people have been brought up to care about the feelings of others because of collectivism. This is in line with another study by Ongwuttawat (2017b), which looked at linguistic strategies for cancelling promises and the role of seniority in Thai society, and found that Thai learners primarily used indirect strategies to cancel promises from ordinary people, featuring the hierarchy and seniority of Thai society.

Having grown up in a culture that cultivates values of caring and consideration for others (Knutson et al., 2003), Thai people are not supposed to say 'no' directly, especially when being asked for help. Thai people politely decline so as not to hurt others' feelings, and tend to use indirect and reserved language and behaviour (Niratpattanasai, 2004). Such behaviour can be misunderstood by other cultures as impolite or even rude, rather than a politeness strategy (Han & Burgucu-Tazegül, 2016). Weerachairattana and Wannaruk (2016) investigated how Thai (L1) culture affected the production of English (L2) and discovered that there are similarities in the choice, content and order of refusal of invitations, requests, offers and suggestions in Thai and English. Ongwuttawat (2017b) demonstrated that Thai values such as care and consideration, gratitude and humility have a higher status and significantly influence the use of these strategies. In short, as a polite communication style, Thai culture encourages Thai people to be very reluctant to make a refusal.

The existing literature on refusals indicates that studies in interlanguage research have shifted attention to cross-cultural perspectives and examined the similarities and differences in intercultural communication in the act of refusal. Most of the studies reviewed focused on different aspects in relation to the characteristics of learners from different environments and backgrounds and used distinctive methods to collect data. Based on Beebe et al.'s (1990) schemes, the results of previous studies are mostly consistent and show that L2 learners' L1 pragmatic knowledge has an impact on their pragmalinguistic production in a second language. However, the use of DCT is often criticised for simplifying the speech act in interactions because it lacks contextual specifications (Nelson et al., 2002). Moreover, because speech production is culturally shaped, refusals can be misconceived and misinterpreted by people from other cultures. In order to further extend the research on refusals, the aim of this study is to draw on the findings from previous refusal research to

gain new empirical insights into Thai students' refusal attitudes and to explore the role of social power in their choice of linguistic expression. This study also aims to explore how their L1 values and cultural conceptualization are represented in their refusals in naturally occurring conversations.

2. Method

2.1. Research design

To investigate the speech act of refusal of Thai learners, a mixed-methods approach was undertaken in the present study. The research design in this study involves the use of an Oral Discourse Completion Test (ODCT), as the main data source. The frequency and content of semantic formulas used by these students with respect to the status of interlocutors (lower, equal and higher) and types of eliciting acts (requests, invitation, offers and suggestions) on realisation of the strategies were examined.

2.2. Participants

A total of 157 participants took part in the study, including 63 male and 94 female students aged between 19 and 22 years majoring in English at a medium-sized university in Thailand. All had never travelled to an English-speaking country before. The participants had studied English for an average of 10 years, including their formal university education. At the time of the study, they were in their fourth year of study and enrolled in Project Presentation Skills in English and Introduction to Research Writing in English courses. Before the study, they were asked to take a TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication). With an average score of 560 out of 990, they had approximately intermediate to upper-intermediate English language skills. These characteristics ensure that the participants had an adequate level of foreign language proficiency to understand and perform the required tasks.

2.3. Instruments

The main instrument in this study was the Oral Discourse Completion Test (ODCT), which was adapted from the DCT (Beebe et al., 1990). The DCT traditionally consists of a brief written description of various situations, incorporating participant variables such as age, gender and social distance. It is considered a useful research tool for socio-pragmatic knowledge of contextual factors, especially for capturing realisation patterns of a particular speech act (Kwon, 2004; Nurani, 2009; Yuan, 2001). The DCT is commonly used to collect the speech acts of refusal studies in a single language or culture, rather than cross-cultural studies (Hahn, 2006; Nittono, 2003). Administratively, the DCT allows the researcher to collect a large amount of data in a short period of time (Beebe & Cummings, 1996) and also allows the researcher to control for variables such as age, gender and social status of the interlocutor (Kwon, 2004).

Although the original DCT version has been used extensively in pragmatic research, it has been criticised for its limitations. First, data collected in hypothetical situations may not reflect actual spoken responses because respondents have more time to answer the prompts. Second, Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019) argue that DCT is not able to investigate non-verbal features and semiotics that are prevalent in natural data. Beebe and Cummings (1996) agree with this idea because prompts do not capture the full range of negotiations in natural data.

Given these caveats, it was clear to me that using the DCT might not uncover some authentic conversational patterns that represent everyday human interactions. Therefore, as a starting point for this study, the DCT was tailored to the oral DCT (ODCT), which initially consists of 24 different scenarios based on real-life situations and the social power differences of the

interlocutors. To ensure that the situations included in the ODCT were appropriate for the Thai culture and context, a pilot study was conducted with 30 Thai university students who had similar characteristics to the participants in the main study. They were asked to complete the 24-item ODCT and indicate how likely they thought the scenarios were. The time allocated for the pilot study was approximately 40 minutes. Based on their comments and suggestions, especially on time allocation and complexity of the scenarios, 12 out of the 24 scenarios were then carefully selected and included in the final ODCT. These 12 situations covered all forms of refusal strategies in daily life: three suggestions, three requests, three offers and three invitations. These four sets of scenarios involve different status or distance encounters: lower, equal and higher status, to investigate the role of the power relationship between the speaker and the refuser (see Table 1 and Appendix for more details).

Table 1.

The description of the refusal scenario in the ODCT

ODCT no.	Stimulus type	Refuser's status	Refuser's distance	Situations
1	Suggestion	Lower	+Distance	An advisor suggesting applying for a scholarship to study aboard
2	Offer	Lower	+Distance	A senior offering you a dinner treat
3	Request	Lower	+Distance	A professor asking for assistance
4	Suggestion	Higher	-Distance	A junior classmate suggesting a dessert cafe
5	Offer	Equal	-Distance	A friend offering you a ride
6	Invitation	Higher	-Distance	A brother inviting you to go to the floating market
7	Request	Higher	-Distance	A junior asking for a tutorial session
8	Suggestion	Equal	+Distance	A friend suggesting a business communication course
9	Invitation	Equal	+Distance	A friend inviting you for a party
10	Offer	Higher	+Distance	A shop assistant offering a discount promotion
11	Invitation	Lower	-Distance	Parents inviting you to make a merit
12	Request	Equal	-Distance	A roommate asking you to post a parcel

2.4. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in the second semester of the 2019 academic year. Participants voluntarily participated in the study and two research assistants assisted the researcher in data collection. Although the ODCT was initially created in a paper and pencil format, here I investigated how participants express naturally-occurring spoken refusals. Data were collected in the form of interviews, with the ODCT serving as a prompt. Before the data collection procedures commenced, participants were informed of the research objectives and procedures and asked for permission to use their responses for research purposes.

The participants were then asked to complete Part I, which is their background information. To create the oral responses, I read the different scenarios listed in Part II of the ODCT to the participants and then asked them to respond orally to each scenario. In doing so, I tried to re-enact the situations orally by controlling the intonation of the voice and the variation of the initiating speech act, which helped to maintain the naturalness of the responses to the initiating act as much as possible. All interviews or oral responses were recorded and noted by the researcher and two research assistants. It should be noted that participants' refusals were collected in different university contexts, e.g., outside classrooms, canteens, department meeting rooms, lecturers' offices and libraries. Each interview lasted about 25 minutes.

2.5. Data Analysis

After data collection, the researcher analysed all interactions, supported by descriptive statistics. For the qualitative analyses, a verbatim transcription of everything said during the interviews was recorded. Based on Beebe et al.'s (1990) categorisation of semantic formulas, all responses were first categorised and coded into two main types of semantic formulas, including direct strategies and indirect strategies, and adjuncts. Then, all responses were systematically coded according to their subcategories when refusals were realised. After coding the data, the frequency and percentage of strategies and semantic formulas found in each category were calculated.

3. Findings

3.1. Types of Refusal Strategies

Based on 12 scenarios, 157 Thai undergraduate students reported a total of 2,589 refusal strategies. At the category level, the results indicated that most Thai students used indirect strategies in refusal (approximately 1,689 responses or 65.24%), followed by adjuncts to refusal (652 responses or 25.18%) and direct strategies (248 responses or 9.58%). The highest value for the use of refusal strategies was found in situation 7 (Request) with 194 responses or 7.49%. These findings reflect that Thai EFL students are aware of how to mitigate the negative effects of their refusal and how to maintain a good relationship with their interlocutors by favouring the use of various indirect strategies such as excuses, reasons, explanations and statements of regret. Figure 1 shows how Thai university students categorise the different types of refusal strategies into 12 scenarios.

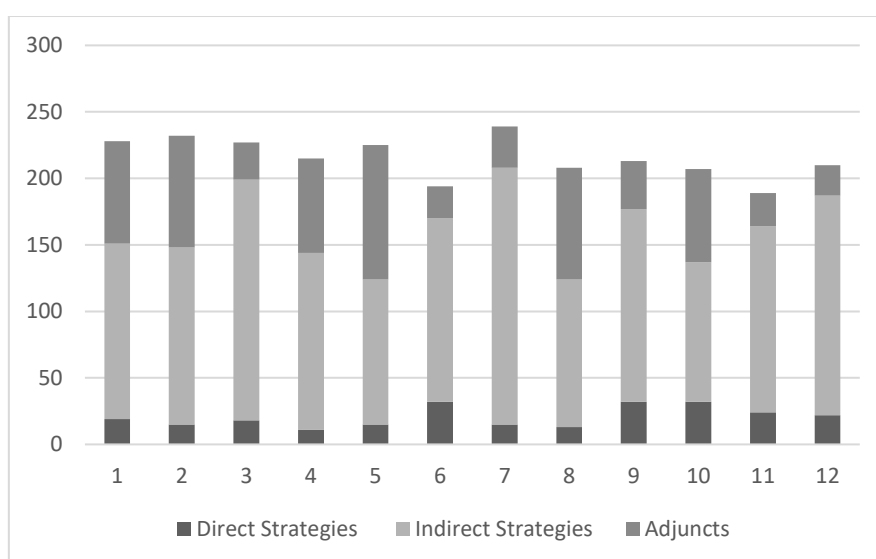


Figure 1. The overall usage of types of refusal strategies

3.2. Refusal Strategies Used by Thai Students

In the following, the results of the analysis are presented according to the eliciting acts: suggestions, offers, requests, and invitations. Refusals by Thai university students are reported with respect to the most frequently used strategy in each situation. Since I considered that all responses are L2 pragmatics, the examples of Thai students' responses are presented as they are, without grammatical corrections.

3.2.1. Refusals to suggestions

With respect to refusals to suggestions, Table 2 shows that most Thai students used indirect strategies rather than direct strategies. When they refused an advisor's suggestion to apply for a scholarship to study abroad, they started their refusal with the indirect strategy of expression and excuse, give reasons or explain' to carry out the rejection. For example, a typical refusal is *'I'd love to, but I have another plan in England'*, which had a remarkably high frequency (36.84%). When refusing a junior classmate's suggestion to go to a dessert café, Thai students often began their refusal with indirect strategies such as *'I'm on a diet'* (27.91%). When refusing a friend's suggestion to take a business communication course, Thai students used 'excuse, give reasons or explain' with an expression such as *'I don't think I have enough money to attend this course'* (39.42%). Interestingly, it was found that the Thai students were likely to use the 'excuse, give reasons or explain' strategy among other strategies. It is possible that with this strategy, Thai students sounded more polite as they rarely used any direct refusal strategies. In addition, it seems that adjuncts were used in refusing suggestions, especially 'pause fillers' such as *'Umm'*, which was used most frequently in situation 2 (16.83%). In this regard, it is important to note that *'Well'*, *'Err'* do not necessarily always have the function of pause fillers, as the word is multifunctional depending on the context. However, in this context, it was used as a signal to take some time to think about possible reasons before the speaker gives an excuse for not accepting suggestions.

Table 2.

The most frequently used refusal strategies to suggestions for each category

Refusals to Suggestions			
Situations	Types of Refusal Strategies	Frequency	Examples
1	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	18	<i>No, I don't want to go to Australia.</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
- Excuse, give reasons or explain	84	<i>I'd love to but I have another plan in England.</i>	
	Adjuncts		
- Pause fillers	36	<i>Well, Umm.</i>	
4	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	11	<i>Nope.</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
- Excuse, give reasons or explain	60	<i>I'm on diet.</i>	
	Adjuncts		
- Pause fillers	40	<i>Umm.</i>	
8	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	13	<i>No.</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
- Excuse, give reasons or explain	82	<i>I don't think I have enough money to attend this course.</i>	
	Adjuncts		
- Pause fillers	35 (16.83)	<i>Umm, Err.</i>	

3.2.2. Refusals to offers

In terms of refusing offers, the majority of respondents were the same in each category in terms of the strategies they used most often. Table 3 demonstrates that the Thai students most frequently used the ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ strategy such as ‘*I’m quite busy tonight.*’ (29.74%) when refusing a meal offer from a supervisor. The other strategy employed quite frequently was ‘pause fillers’ such as ‘*Oh*’ or ‘*Err oh.*’ with about 41 responses (17.67%). Sometimes they expressed their gratitude and appreciation by saying ‘*Thank you.*’ for example (39 responses or 16.81%). Some of the responses were brief, such as ‘*I can’t.*’ (6.47% or 15 responses), which was considered a direct strategy.

Table 3.

The most frequently used refusal strategies to offers for each category

Refusals to Offers			
Situations	Types of Refusal Strategies	Frequency	Examples
2	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	15	<i>I can’t.</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
	- Excuse, give reasons or explain	69	<i>I’m quite busy tonight.</i>
	Adjuncts		
	- Pause fillers	41	<i>Oh, Err oh.</i>
	- Gratitude or Appreciation	39	<i>Thank you.</i>
5	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	15	<i>No.</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
	- Excuse, give reasons or explain	96	<i>I can go by myself.</i>
	Adjuncts		
	- Gratitude or Appreciation	68	<i>Thank you.</i>
10	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	32	<i>No.</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
	- Excuse, give reasons or explain	86	<i>I have only 40 Baht.</i>
	Adjuncts		
	- Gratitude or Appreciation	42	<i>Thank you.</i>

When declining a friend’s offer of a ride, the strategy Thai students used most often was to give the interlocutor an ‘excuse, reason or explanation’, such as ‘*I can go by myself.*’ (42.67%). They also used ‘gratitude or appreciation’, for example, they said ‘*Thank you.*’ (30.22%). However, some of them started their refusal with direct strategies, including ‘*No.*’ (6.67%), followed by ‘explanation’. This finding advocates the idea of speech act sets (Válková (2012, 2013) of refusals, rather than taking them as a speech act.

When refusing a shop assistant’s offer for a discount promotion, ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ was also used, such as ‘*I have only 40 Baht.*’ (41.55%). Similarly, when refusing a friend’s offer of a ride, Thai students used ‘gratitude or appreciation’, such as ‘*Thank you.*’ (20.29%). Interestingly, it was observed that ‘*No.*’ was said more often when refusing a discount offer from a salesperson than in other situations (15.46%). These findings suggest that to sound polite, the participants equip their refusals with certain mitigators or politeness markers (Kreishan, 2018). Again, it is noticeable that the expressions ‘*Oh*’ and ‘*Err oh.*’, which are considered as varieties of adjuncts, can have different functions depending on the context.

3.2.3. Refusals to requests

Table 4 shows that most of the Thai students' expressions when refusing a professor's request for assistance were quite long and specific, mentioning an important thing to do at that moment. For example, *'I have to meet my friend and now I'm late.'* (39.65%). In most cases, 'excuse, give reasons or explain' was used together with a 'statement of regret', such as *'I apologise to you.'* (37.00%). It is interesting to note that some of the respondents mitigated their refusals with pause fillers such as 'Umm' and 'Err' (11.45%). In contrast, some of the responses were direct, such as *'I can't take you to the Lecture Hall.'* (7.93%).

When refusing a junior's request for a tutorial session, the most common strategy used by participants was 'excuse, give reasons or explain' such as *'because I have to read a book.'* (38.08%). This strategy was used together with 'statement of regret' such as *'I'm sorry.'* (29.71%). Some direct strategies, for instance, *'I can't help you.'* (6.28%) were found, but they were hardly used compared to the other strategies.

Similar to asking a student for a tutorial session, most Thai students used the same first three strategies, including 'excuse, give reasons or explain', along with 'statement of regret', 'pause fillers' and 'direct strategies' when refusing a roommate's request for posting a parcel. The responses were also relatively similar in order and perhaps in frequency. In particular, most responses were likely to be linked to a specific explanation, as they usually mentioned important matters that needed to be taken care of that day. For example, *'I also have an appointment now.'* (42.38%). Adjuncts, such as 'Umm' and 'Oh' (10.48%) were examples of commonly used 'pause fillers'. In this situation, the use of 'direct strategies' such as *'I can't go.'*, was also observed (10.48%).

Table 4.

The most frequently used refusal strategies to requests for each category

Refusals to Requests			
Situations	Types of Refusal Strategies	Frequency	Examples
3	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	18	<i>I can't take you to the Lecture Hall.</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
	- Statement of regret	84	<i>I apologise to you.</i>
	- Excuse, give reasons or explain	90	<i>I have to meet my friend, and now I'm late.</i>
	Adjuncts		
- Pause fillers	26	<i>Umm, Err.</i>	
7	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	15	<i>I can't help you.</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
	- Statement of regret	71	<i>I'm so sorry.</i>
	- Excuse, give reasons or explain	91	<i>..... because I have to read a book.</i>
	Adjuncts		
- Pause fillers	30	<i>Umm, Err.</i>	
12	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	22	<i>I can't go.</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
	- Statement of regret	57	<i>I'm so sorry.</i>
	- Excuse, give reasons or explain	89	<i>I also have an appointment now.</i>
	Adjuncts		
- Pause fillers	22	<i>Umm, Oh.</i>	

3.2.4. Refusals to invitations

Although most of the participants used ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ most often when declining different invitations, the content of the ‘explanation’ or ‘reasons’ varied. When refusing a brother’s invitation to go to the floating market, Table 5 shows that most responses were specific in that Thai students gave reasons why they had to decline the invitation. For example, ‘*I don’t wanna go because I want to stay at home.*’ (46.91%). Meanwhile, when making refusal to other invitations, they usually said: ‘*I have an appointment with my friend already.*’ (43.66%) or ‘*Tomorrow I have to deal a project with my friend.*’ (49.71%). Adjuncts such as ‘*Umm*’, ‘*Err*’ and ‘*Ob*’ (13.05%) were still observed as ‘pause fillers’ strategy when declining invitations. Surprisingly, as opposed to other situations, ‘*Nab!*’ (16.49%), an expression for a direct strategy, was most frequently used to decline a brother’s invitation to the floating market.

In refusing a friend’s invitation to a party, three types of refusal strategies, including ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’, ‘pause fillers’ and ‘non-performative strategy’, such as ‘*I have an appointment with my friend already.*’ (43.66%), ‘*Umm, Err.*’ (13.05%) and ‘*I think I cannot join you.*’ (14.55%), were found, respectively.

When Thai students declined their parents’ invitation to make a merit at the temple, the most common strategy was ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’. They usually mentioned a task, deadline, project, etc. that they had to complete, for example: ‘*Tomorrow I have to work on a project with my friend.*’ (49.74%). The expression, ‘*I can’t go.*’ (12.17%), was also used as the most direct strategy, followed by a short explanation such as ‘*I can’t go because I have homework to do.*’ It seems that these strategies enable them to make their refusal sound more polite. This pattern of implementation also shows that speech acts can be seen as chains of smaller units rather than individual speech acts.

Table 5.

The most frequently used refusal strategies to invitations for each category

Refusals to Invitations			
Situations	Types of Refusal Strategies	Frequency	Examples
6	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	32	<i>Nab!</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
	- Excuse, give reasons or explain	91	<i>I don’t wanna go because I want to stay at home.</i>
9	Adjuncts		
	- Pause fillers	19	<i>Err.</i>
	Direct Strategies		
	- Non-performative	31	<i>I think I cannot join you.</i>
11	Indirect Strategies		
	- Excuse, give reasons or explain	93	<i>I have an appointment with my friend already.</i>
	Adjuncts		
	- Pause fillers	28	<i>Umm, Err.</i>
11	Direct Strategies		
	- 23	22	<i>I can’t go.</i>
	Indirect Strategies		
	- Excuse, give reasons or explain	94	<i>Tomorrow, I have to deal a project with my friend.</i>
11	Adjuncts		
	- Pause fillers	22	<i>Emm, Umm, Ob.</i>

3.3. Semantic Formulas and Effects of Social Status

The analysis also showed the differences in the use of linguistic expressions and the frequency with which the Thai students used them. When speaking to an interlocutor who had a higher status than them, students usually gave reasons after refusing the interlocutor in situation 1 (Suggestion), situation 3 (Request), situation 10 (Offer), and situation 11 (Invitation). In particular, in situations 3 and 11, students reported the use of ‘statement of regret’ (e.g. ‘*I’m sorry.*’) and ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ (e.g. ‘*My children will be home that night.*’) in about 16.26% and 7.18% of responses, respectively. On the other hand, in situation 1, most of them expressed ‘gratitude or appreciation’ (e.g. ‘*Thank you.*’) and ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ (4.73%) and used a non-performative statement (e.g. ‘*No, I can’t.*’), while ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ (e.g. ‘*I have only 40 Baht.*’) was used by 5.29% in situation 10. Table 6 demonstrates the frequency of linguistic expressions used by most Thai students in different situations according to social status.

Table 6.

Frequency of semantic formulas based on different social statuses

Social status	Situations	Semantic formulas	Frequency	Examples
Higher	Suggestion	Thank you (for) + reason	25	- <i>Thank you. I would love to, but I'm on diet.</i> - <i>Thank you. But, I can't. I am quite busy now. I will think about that later.</i>
	Offer	I can't/ No + reason	28	- <i>No. I can't. I have only 40 Baht.</i> - <i>No. I don't have enough money for three. Maybe next time.</i>
	Request	Sorry + reason	86	- <i>I'm so sorry. I have to read books.</i> - <i>Sorry. I can't help you. I am not good at this subject.</i>
	Invitation	Sorry + reason	38	- <i>I'm sorry. I don't wanna go because I want to stay at home.</i> - <i>Sorry. I don't like that place.</i>
Equal	Suggestion	I would love to + reason	26	- <i>I would love to. It sounds good, but I will go then when I'm ready.</i> - <i>I would love to, but I don't think I have enough money to attend this course.</i>
	Offer	Thank you (for) + reason	69	- <i>Thank you. I can go by myself.</i> - <i>Thank you. But it is not that far. I can walk.</i>
	Request	Sorry + reason	56	- <i>I'm so sorry. I have an appointment now.</i> - <i>I'm sorry. I can't go.</i> - <i>I'm sorry. I can't go. Do you want me to call a grab delivery because it might be faster?</i>
	Invitation	Sorry + reason	46	- <i>Sorry. I think I cannot join you.</i> - <i>Sorry. I have another appointment with my friend already.</i>
Lower	Suggestion	Sorry + reason	25	- <i>I'm really sorry. I have to collect the money first, then I can go there.</i> - <i>I'm so sorry. I don't want to go to Australia. I prefer to go to England to Australia.</i>
	Offer	Sorry + reason	31	- <i>I'm so sorry. I can't. I'm busy tonight. Maybe next time.</i> - <i>I'm so sorry. I think it seems better if I treat you.</i>
	Request	Sorry + reason	72	- <i>I apologize to you. I can't take you to the Lecture Hall. I have to meet my friend and now I'm late.</i> - <i>I am afraid that I can't do so. Can you ask someone else?</i>
	Invitation	I can't/ No + reason	27	- <i>I think I can't. Tomorrow I have to deadline with my project.</i>

Social status	Situations	Semantic formulas	Frequency	Examples
				- <i>No, mom. I can't. Can we go another day?</i>
	Total		529	

With respect to the equal status, a number of participants used ‘statement of regret’ and ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ in 8.70% of situation 9 (Invitation) and in 10.59% of situation 12 (Request), respectively. Interestingly, ‘gratitude or appreciation’ and ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ were used in 13.04% of situation 5 (Offer), while ‘statement of positive opinion/feeling of agreement’ (e.g. *That’s a good idea...*, *I’d love to...*), ‘apologizing’ (*Sorry, I’m (so) sorry, but...*) and ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ were used most frequently (about 4.91%) in situation 8 (Suggestion). These mitigators prepare the refused person for disappointment before hearing the response. This strategy, often consisting of a long sequence of semantic formulas, was considered polite as most participants apologised to mitigate the threat of the refusal (Tamimi Sa’d & Mohammadi, 2014), and to save face (Krulatz & Dixon, 2020)

The results show that in situations 2 (Offer), 4 (Suggestion), and 7 (Request), Thai students used ‘statement of regret’ and ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ 5.86%, 5.10%, and 13.61% respectively, when rejecting a person of lower social status. However, in situation 6 (Invitation), ‘Non-performative statement’ and ‘excuse, give reasons or explain’ were used most frequently (5.10%) when refusing an invitation from someone of lower status.

In addition, as it is noticeable from the analysis, the responses regarding speech acts and the influence of social status also reflect the fact that speech acts can also be considered as chins of smaller units that can form complete speech acts (Válková, 2013). That is, the Thai students’ refusals were often accompanied by other speech act types such as thanks and apologies. When these smaller units or discrete speech acts are produced together, they contribute in specific ways to a global scenario that constitutes a sequentially emergent complete speech act (Válková, 2012, 2013). It could be argued that the content of the scenario drives participants to give answers and that ODCI as a method is problematic because it does not reflect what they would actually say, but what is suggested to them. However, the procedures were conducted with care and the responses obtained reveal at least some speech patterns and structural configurations. This suggests that speech acts, or perhaps L2 speech acts, should be addressed within the framework of a modified model of speech act set theory.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study provides new insights on and a better understanding of how Thai students perform the speech act of refusal in English. The analysis revealed that most participants generally preferred indirect strategies to direct strategies in refusals. Specifically, the majority of Thai students avoided direct refusal and, in turn, were likely to give reasons, explanations or excuses as their main strategy to indicate their unwillingness or refusal. It can be said that Thai students often give reasons and explanations as an effective strategy to soften their rejection and to make them more polite in communication. This finding supports previous research that has indicated that most EFL learners, regardless of nationality, frequently use reasons and explanations compared to other semantic formulas (Al-Issa, 2003; Kwon, 2004; Nelson et al., 2002; Shishavan & Sharifan, 2016; Wannaruk, 2008).

Regarding refusals in four contexts that were separated into 12 situations (three offers, three invitations, three requests and three suggestions), Thai students used more indirect than direct strategies in each situation. As far as sociopragmatic factors such as power and distance are concerned, the participants in this study seemed to be aware of the way they used refusal strategies when they had to reject an interlocutor with a different social status (higher, equal, and lower). The analysis indicated that, regardless of whether the interlocutor had the same or higher social power compared to the respondents, which is considered as L2 pragmatics as 'intercultural pragmatics' (McConachy, 2019), the Thai students used indirect refusal strategies, especially saying '*sorry + reason*', '*I'm sorry, but...*', '*I'd love to, but...*', or '*I can't/No*' followed by giving reasons in every situation, more frequently than direct ones in order to avoid or perhaps soften the negative effects of a direct refusal. Essentially, social status differences, among the factors, affect the choice of refusal strategies as well as the degree of directness (Kreishan, 2018; Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016), and the estimation of the appropriateness of L2 learners' refusal production (Alemi & Tajeddin, 2013). These speech acts of refusal necessitate pragmatic competence (Han & Burgucu-Tazegül, 2016). This strategy could possibly be explained by the notion of 'face', as speakers would like to avoid threatening their interlocutor's positive 'face' (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and hurting their feelings. Therefore, it is possible that Thai students would like to do their best to soften or lessen the disappointment by using these mitigators to prepare the interactant for disappointment before hearing a refusal. In this regard, this finding supports Allami and Naiemi (2011), Tamimi and Mohammadi (2014) and Shishavan and Sharifan (2016) who suggest that Asian EFL learners use less direct strategies in response to interlocutors with higher or equal social status. This finding is also consistent with some other research indicating that fewer direct refusals are made to interlocutors with higher social power compared to equal status (Beebe et al., 1990; Chang, 2009)

Responses, as emergent from the present study, substantiate a variety of language-in-action modifications. That is, refusals produced by the Thai participants are frequently accompanied by other speech acts or strategies (e.g., thanks or apology). This finding collaborates Válková's (2012, 2013) work in that speech acts can be approached as chains of sequentially activated smaller units or discrete speech acts which, if produced together, contribute in a specific way to a global scenario representing a 'sequentially' complete speech act. I would argue that, rather than single acts, these strategies should be treated as speech act sets which serve one communicative purpose. According to Válková (2013), this speech act set model opens up space for identifying more systematic and, meanwhile, more transparent methodological approach to real-life language manifestations both from the intra- and cross-cultural similarities and differences.

Interestingly, this finding of the current study can be explained by the cultural norms of collectivism (Ongwuttivat, 2017b) prevalent in their speech product, as well as the socio-cultural norms expected in Thai society, which might be deeply rooted in the community. Based on this notion, the language used to talk about an older person and those who have a distant social relationship must be appropriate. In the milieu of communication, expressing refusals directly is perceived as disrespect to the interlocutors and is not encouraged in Thai society. Another institution that seems to play a salient role in suppressing the adoption of this modesty culture is Buddhism (Kanoksilapatham, 2007). As Thailand is predominantly Buddhist, Thais adhere to the traditional teachings of being modest and humble. Therefore, this proclivity of refusal strategies with modesty and humility is appreciated and expected when communicating with elders, senior fellows, and non-related persons who have distance social relationships. This fact, then, reflects the idea of the culture-bound setting of language

use. Even though many other studies in this research area (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Dewi et al., 2019; Lee, 2013; Rahayu, 2018) assume that speech acts such as offers, requests, suggestions and invitations have the same socio-pragmatic status in all cultures, knowledge gained from the cross-cultural perspective should be taken into account because the findings of this study add evidence that Thai students commonly negotiate the refusal through supportive statements, which help lessen the offensive and perhaps maintain other's negative face. However, turning down a request is not preferred in some cultures than in others. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that requests have different socio-pragmatic functions in different cultures. In other words, knowledge of the different socio-pragmatic functions in different cultures should not be disregarded in communication.

It is undeniable for the fact that English is widely regarded as a lingua franca, and thus remarks the way people from different backgrounds share how English is used in communication differently. As illuminated by the findings of the current study, Thai students' L2 pragmatics can be seen as intercultural pragmatics as a deficit in relation to a norm or standard of English. However, I would argue that an L2 English speaker's pragmatics should be seen as a reflection of his or her own identity and should be valued and considered as equal in intercultural encounters rather than as "pragmatic errors" as suggested by Allami and Naeimi (2011) and Benz (2012), especially in the field of intercultural pragmatics.

Pedagogically, the findings of this study could be beneficial to instructors and practitioners who aim to deepen their understanding of the complexity of speech acts and L2 pragmatics. To avoid unintended breakdowns in cross-cultural communication, instructors may raise students' pragmatic awareness by providing activities and/or opportunities for communicative practice in performing successful refusals. In class, several situations requiring different levels of pragmatic competence can be used to explicitly present and explain refusal strategies and the necessary reasons for refusal. Since most Thai students preferred to use indirect strategies in refusals, they can be introduced to other semantic formulas and learn how to say 'no' politely in English to enhance their pragmatic awareness of different and effective strategies for polite refusals for appropriate development of L2 pragmatic competence (Ahmadian, 2018; Eslami, 2010; McConachy, 2019). In addition, given the importance of socio-cultural context, students should also be taught to be aware of pragmlinguistic and socio-pragmatic behaviours (Kasper, 2009) and cross-cultural pragmatic differences (Asmali, 2013; Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016; Wannaruk, 2008) in order to use appropriate linguistic-pragmatic knowledge in the socio-cultural setting so that the other person understands what the intended utterances mean. At this phase of instruction, practitioners can help support creating materials and lessons that promote and develop students' pragmatic competence in English so that they can make their own informed pragmatic choices to use the language effectively for communication.

The present study has certain limitations that need to be acknowledged. First of all, caution should be exercised as the results may not be generalised at large since only one group of L2 students participated in the study. The findings should possibly be considered as not applicable to other contexts or participants with distinctive characteristics. In addition, the data were not collected in a natural setting and situation, although the use of the ODCI in the present study aimed to obtain long and more natural speech and responses. The refusal responses obtained in each situation were a single-turn refusal response. Therefore, the data cannot be perceived as the entire patterns of refusals that are likely to occur in longer spontaneous conversations.

Further research is needed to investigate the formulation of refusal strategies in natural conversations. It is strongly suggested that further empirical research using different data collection methods, such as role-playing the refusal situation and ethnographic observation, would provide more insight into the development of a more grounded approach to pragmatic studies. Another direction for future studies is to investigate the effect of proficiency on L2 learners' performance to act adaptively in terms of pragmalinguistic forms and their functions in different situations pragmatically. Moreover, further studies exploring other types of refusal strategies, when speakers express their refusal in various social settings in other forms, such as facial expressions, electronic messages, non-verbal expressions and even by people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, are also encouraged.

Ethical Issues

This study is exempt from the current research requirement in Turkey for ethics committee approval that came into force in 2020 since the data of this study were collected in March 2019.

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Appendix

Oral Discourse Completion Test (ODCT)

Part I: Background Information

Name..... Surname

FacultyMajorYear of Study

Gender

Male Female

Age:

Have you ever been abroad?

Yes, I have. Country: How long: year(s)month(s)

No, I have not.

Part II: Oral Discourse Completion Task

This part consists of 12 different situations. Please read the following scenarios and then respond orally. Please give your responses as you feel in each of the scenarios in English respond as naturally as possible. The data will be used for research purposes only.

Situation 1

Interlocutor: Mr Srinon, your advisor. You have two tutorials a week with him. (You do not feel close to your advisor.)

Setting: In a classroom

After considering your grades in the transcript, Mr. Srinon **suggests** you to apply for a scholarship to study abroad in Australia. However, you do not want to do so because you would like to further your study in the UK.

Mr. Srinon: "Why don't you study abroad? I think you could get a scholarship to Australia."

You:

Situation 2

Interlocutor: Bank, a senior (You are not so close to him.)

Setting: In a corridor

While you are walking in a corridor, you accidentally meet Bank. He **offers** to treat you a dinner because you will be graduating next month, but you are not available at the time he suggests.

Bank: You will graduate next month, so do you fancy eating out together tonight? It's my treat.

What do you think?

You:

Situation 3

Interlocutor: Mrs Chusri, one of your instructors (You used to enrol in her class for the last two years.)

Setting: A parking building

After you finish your class and you are back to your place, you meet Mrs Chusri. She **asks for** a ride to the lecture hall, but you can't do so because you have an important meeting with your roommate.

Mrs Chusri: "I have a class in 10 minutes! Can you give me a ride to the lecture hall now?"

You:

Situation 4

Interlocutor: Lin, your junior classmate (You are close to her. You can speak to her about everything.)

Setting: In an English classroom

While you are waiting for a class, Lin, who is sitting next to you, is telling you what she did on her holiday in Bangkok. She visited a dessert café and tried ice-cream. She thinks it was very delicious and **suggests** you visit there and try some.

Lin: "Last week, I went to Mon-Nomsod, and the dessert was really good! You can't miss out! Why don't you go there?"

You:

Situation 5

Interlocutor: Tob, your best friend

Setting: A restaurant on your campus

While having lunch, you tell Tob that you have something important to do in Bangkok this Saturday. Tob, therefore, **offers** you a ride, but you are considerate to him. You decide to refuse his offer.

Tob: "How are you going to get there? Actually, I can drive you to Bangkok tomorrow if you want."

You:

Situation 6

Interlocutor: Tonwan, your younger brother

Setting: At home

Tonwan **invites** you to visit the Aumphawa floating market on the weekend. He watched a TV program and found that the place looked interesting. However, you are really not into it because the market is usually crowded and packed.

Tonwan: "I know you are free this weekend. You wanna go to the Aumphawa floating market?"

You:

Situation 7

Interlocutor: Namtan, a junior (You are close to her.)

Setting: At a dormitory

Namtan came to you and **asked for** your help with tutoring the lessons in the course of Introduction to Linguistics for her. But you are not free because you are reviewing for an exam tomorrow.

Namtan: "I don't understand the lessons in the Introduction to Linguistics course, and I want to know more about them. I've an exam tomorrow. Could you explain them to me?"

You:

Situation 8

Interlocutor: Phukkhom, your friend (You are not close to him.)

Setting: At the central library

While you are sitting in the library and reading books, you and Phukkhom are talking about life after graduation. You express an anxiety regarding work and workplace because your business communication skills are limited. Phukkhom therefore **suggests** you take a business communication course, but you cannot afford it.

Phukkhom: "I have been taking a communicative course by Professor Somsri for three months, and I have noticed that it helps me develop my communicative skills. Why don't you try it?"

You:

Situation 9

Interlocutor: Kratai, a friend in your group (You are not close to her.)

Setting: At the cafeteria

While you and Kratai are having lunch, Kratai **invites** you to a party because your favourite band will have a mini concert there.

Kratai: "It's Friday! Let's party for a while. Are you in?"

You:

Situation 10

Interlocutor: A shop assistant

Setting: A gift shop

While you are looking for something for one of your classmates at a gift shop, a shop assistant **offers** you a discount for 10 baht if you buy three items. However, you need to buy only one item; therefore, you refuse her offer.

Auntie Anne: "So, it comes to 40 Baht. Why don't you buy three and get a 10 Baht discount?"

You:

Situation 11

Interlocutor: Your parents

Setting: At home

Because tomorrow is the Buddhists' Lent day, your parents **invite** you to go to the temple to make a merit. You do not want to go with them due to a lot of homework.

Parents: "We have planned to go to the temple tomorrow morning. We hope you can come with us."

You:

Situation 12

Interlocutor: Jay, your roommate

Setting: At the dormitory

Jay has a tutorial session with his advisor and, thus, cannot post a parcel himself. He **requests** your help to post it on his behalf, but you do not want to do so because it is hot and the post office is quite far away from your dormitory.

Jay: "Can you do me a favour? Can you help me by going to the post office now to post this parcel to my mom?"

You: