

Refusal Strategies in L1 and L2 by Native Speakers of Thai

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ABSTRACT

L1 culture has been regarded as one of the major defining factors affecting the production of L2. As a result, it is likely that English used by non-native speakers will reflect their own social and cultural norms and values. This study investigated strategies employed by native speakers of Thai in making refusals in Thai (L1) and in English (L2) to invitations, requests, offers, and suggestions. The participants were 60 Thai graduate students, 30 of whom responded in Thai (TTs) and 30 in English (TEs). Data were collected using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and a follow-up interview. The DCT included situations related to the participants' academic life. Data were coded based on the classification of refusals formulated by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) and analyzed in terms of frequency. The findings indicated that there were similarities in the choice, content, and order of refusal strategies used by TTs and those used by TEs. These were motivated by their sensitivity to a person of higher status and the Thai values of being caring and considerate, showing gratitude, and being modest. TEs, however, differed significantly from TTs noticeably in their use of direct strategies. The nature of the situations was another crucial factor influencing their strategy use. The pedagogical implications were also suggested.

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บทคัดย่อ

วัฒนธรรมของภาษาที่หนึ่งถือได้ว่าเป็นหนึ่งในปัจจัยหลักที่ส่งผลต่อการใช้ภาษาที่สอง ดังนั้นการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษของผู้ที่ไม่ได้พูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่จึงมีแนวโน้มที่จะสะท้อนบรรทัดฐานและค่านิยมทางสังคมและวัฒนธรรมของพวคุณเจาของ งานวิจัยนี้ได้ศึกษาลิบริที่ผู้พูดภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาแม่ใช้ในการปฏิเสธคำเชิญ คำขอร้อง ข้อเสนอ และคำแนะนำเป็นภาษาไทย (ภาษาที่หนึ่ง) และภาษาอังกฤษ (ภาษาที่สอง) ผู้เข้าร่วมงานวิจัยนี้ถือเป็นนักศึกษาระดับบัณฑิตศึกษาชาวไทยจำนวน 60 คน ซึ่งแบ่งออกเป็นนักศึกษาที่ตอบแบบสอบถามเป็นภาษาไทยจำนวน 30 คน และเป็นภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน 30 คน แบบสอบถามชนิดคิดเห็นเดิมที่บกสนทนาและการสัมภาษณ์แบบติดตามผลถูกนำมาใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูล แบบสอบถามตามชนิดคิดเห็นบกสนทนาประกอบไปด้วยสถานการณ์ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับชีวิตประจำวันของนักศึกษา ข้อมูลที่ได้รับนำมาเข้ารหัสตามเกณฑ์การปฏิเสธของบี ท้าภาษา ๒ และ ยูดิส-เวลท์ช (1990) และวิเคราะห์หาความลึก ผลการวิจัยพบว่า นักศึกษาที่ตอบแบบสอบถามเป็นภาษาไทยและเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ มีความคล้ายคลึงกันในการเลือกใช้กลไกการปฏิเสธ เนื้อหาของกลไกการปฏิเสธ และลำดับของกลไกการปฏิเสธ ซึ่งได้รับอิทธิพล

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มาจากความตระหนักต่อบุคคลที่มีสถานะสูงกว่าและค่านิยมแรงใจ ค่านิยมแสดงความกตัญญู และค่านิยมอ่อนน้อมถ่อมตนของคนไทย อย่างไรก็ตามนักศึกษาที่ตอบแบบสอบถามเป็นภาษาอังกฤษแต่ต่างจากนักศึกษาที่ตอบแบบสอบถามเป็นภาษาไทย อย่างมีนัยสำคัญโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในการใช้กลไกการปฏิเสธอย่างตรงไปตรงมา นอกจากนี้ธรรมชาติของสถานการณ์เป็นอีกปัจจัยหนึ่งที่ส่งผลต่อการเลือกใช้กลไก งานวิจัยนี้ยังได้เสนอการนำผลการวิจัยไปใช้ในการเรียนการสอนไว้อีกด้วย

Introduction

To communicate effectively and appropriately in a second or a foreign language, Niezgoda & Röver (2001) imply that non-native speakers need to possess at least two types of competence: 1) grammatical competence, which is a knowledge of the language code and the rules of the language, such as morphology, syntax, semantics, and phonology (Canale and Swain, 1980) and 2) pragmatic competence, which is the ability to use language effectively to accomplish a certain communicative intention as well as to understand language in a certain context (Thomas, 2006).

The pragmatic competence of non-native speakers has been generally studied by comparing the use of strategies for a particular speech act by non-native speakers to L1 and L2 baseline data (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996) so as to identify the instances of pragmatic failure (Nelson, Carson, Al Batal, & Bakary, 2002). According to Thomas (2006), pragmatic failure is “the inability to understand what is meant by what is said” (p. 22). One type of pragmatic failure is pragmalinguistic failure or the inappropriate use of strategies in realizing speech acts, which is likely to arise from pragmatic transfer or the transfer of strategies from a first language to a second or a foreign language (Nelson et al., 2002; Thomas, 2006).

Pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2 has manifested itself in a number of studies in pragmatics (e.g. Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Sairhun, 1999; Kwon, 2003; Al-Kahtani, 2005; Keshavarz, Eslami, & Ghahraman, 2006; Wannaruk, 2008; Boonkongsaen, 2013; Lin, 2014). Beebe et al. (1990), for example, reported evidence of transfer from Japanese to English in refusals made by Japanese ESL learners in terms of order, frequency, and content of semantic formulas. For instance, Japanese subjects were prone to provide less specific content in their explanations in both L1 and L2 than American native speakers of English. In addition, they tended to be more direct to a person of lower status and less direct to a person of higher status, which indicated their awareness of social status. Lin (2014) also found that L1 culture notably affected the content of excuses given by Chinese EFL learners. Specifically, Chinese subjects tended to cite family members and problems of health as grounds for refusals both in Chinese and in English whereas their American counterparts rarely used these reasons.

These studies provide strong support for the view that L1 culture is one major factor influencing the use of speech act strategies by non-native speakers. Therefore, it is undeniable that the

performance of speech acts in English by non-native speakers will mirror their native norms and values (Boonkongsaen, 2013; Shishavan & Sharifian, 2013). However, different cultures may perceive and interpret the notion of appropriateness and politeness differently (Wannaruk, 2008). To be specific, how to appropriately and politely perform speech acts can vary from one culture to another (Farnia & Wu, 2012). This means that the performance of speech acts in English by non-native speakers can cause misunderstandings, hard feelings, or even prejudices in their communication with other linguistically and culturally different groups (Pearson, 2010).

The present study attempts to investigate 1) *the use of strategies by native speakers of Thai in refusing invitations, requests, offers, and suggestions in Thai (L1) and in English (L2)* and 2) *the influence of L1 culture on the use of refusal strategies in English by native speakers of Thai*. A speech act of refusal is selected as the focus of the present study due to its face-threatening nature. In other words, improper performance of refusals can cause loss of face, either positive or negative (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Yule, 1996; Barron, 2003). Positive face is the desire to be accepted by others and connected with others whereas negative face is the desire not to be imposed on by others (Yule, 1996; Peccei, 1999; LoCastro, 2003). Furthermore, different contextual factors, namely the degrees of intimacy, relative power, and weight of impositions are to be taken into account (Brown & Levinson, 1987; LoCastro, 2003) and culture-specific knowledge is also necessary for appropriate realization of this speech act (Gass & Houck, 1999; Eslami, 2010). Making refusals is, therefore, a difficult task, particularly for non-native speakers (Beebe et al., 1990; Gass & Houck, 1999; Al-Kahtani, 2005).

Native speakers of Thai are of interest since Thai people are brought up in a culture that holds the values of being *caring* and *considerate* for others (Knutson, 1994), which makes it difficult for them to say *no*, especially when they are asked for help (Chaidaroon, 2003). As a result, in order not to hurt others' feelings and avoid conflicts, they tend to be indirect and reserved in their speech and behavior (Niratpattanasai, 2002, as cited in Barr, 2004), which can be misunderstood and viewed by another culture as impolite or even rude (Wannaruk, 2005; Pearson, 2010).

Methodology

Subjects

60 subjects participated in this study, including 30 Thai graduate students responding in Thai (TTs) and 30 Thai graduate students responding in English (TEs). All of them were currently studying a variety of academic majors at graduate level at Thai universities. The subjects in the TT group comprised 15 males and 15 females and their ages ranged from 24-36 years of age. Meanwhile, the

subjects in the TE group comprised 14 males and 16 females and their age ranged from 22-43 years of age. Only 6 TTs and 7 TEs had lived in English-speaking countries (i.e. Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and England) for less than 6 months.

Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

A written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was employed in collecting data in this study because a DCT allows the researcher to control contextual factors for each situation (Golato, 2003; Schauer & Adolphs, 2006). Furthermore, Beebe and Cummings (1996, as cited in Billmyer and Varghese, 2000) state that the main patterns and formulas gained from DCT data are similar to those gained from naturally occurring data. 12 DCT situations were designed based on actual situations in which refusals could be given and situations in previous research on refusals. All situations were related to academic life, which could be categorized into three invitations, three requests, three offers, and three suggestions from interlocutors of equal or higher status with whom they were familiar or unfamiliar (see Appendix A). The appropriateness of the situations was determined based on interviews with the graduate students. After the development of the DCT in English, two native English speakers were asked to check the correctness and the naturalness of the language in each situation. The DCT was later translated into Thai by the researcher who is a native speaker of Thai and assessed by two native speakers of Thai who are fluent in English. A follow-up interview was also conducted to obtain deeper insight into the subjects' perceptions of the situations as well as factors influencing their choice and content of strategies.

Data Analysis

Each refusal was analyzed as consisting of units in terms of semantic formulas, “a word, phrase, or sentence that meets a particular semantic criterion, any one or more of which can be used to perform the act in question” (Cohen, 1996, p. 254) and coded based on the classification of refusals developed by Beebe et al. (1990). It is important to mention that the classification was slightly modified based on the data found in this study (see Appendix B).

If a respondent, for example, responded to a situation in which a professor offered a teaching assistantship, by saying *“I really want to, but I can’t handle it. There are too many courses this term. Sorry”*, this refusal was analyzed as consisting of four units and coded as illustrated below:

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---------------|
| <i>I really want to,</i> | <i>but I can’t handle it.</i> | <i>There are too many courses this term.</i> | <i>Sorry.</i> |
| ‘Positive feeling’ | ‘Negative ability’ | ‘Explanation’ | ‘Regret’ |

All English and Thai responses were coded by the researcher. To ensure the reliability of coding, the English responses were coded independently by one trained native speaker of English and the Thai responses by one trained native speaker of Thai. The results showed a high level of consistency in coding (88.1% for the Thai data and 93.4% for the English data). The coded data were analyzed in terms of frequency. To compare the frequency between TTs and TEs, an independent-samples t-test was performed. Differences were considered significant if $p \leq 0.05$.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the three most frequently used refusal strategies for TTs and TEs, the most frequently used order of refusal strategies for TTs and TEs, and a comparison of refusal strategies between TTs and TEs according to the eliciting acts. Examples of the responses made by TTs are presented in Thai followed by their English translation for better understanding. Those made by TEs are shown without any grammatical corrections.

Refusals to Invitations

According to Table 1, in refusing a graduate student's invitation, both groups used 'Explanation' as the most frequent strategy. 'Regret' was the second most frequently used strategy for TTs and 'Positive feeling' for TEs. While TEs used 'Regret' as the third most frequent strategy, TTs favored 'Good wishes' which was used to extend congratulations, give speeches of good luck and success, and offer encouragement. For instance, they said នរាមានិទ្ទេយោលុខណ៍ តុង "You have my mental support. Go for it."

Table 1: Three Most Frequently Used Refusal Strategies for Invitations

| Situation | TTs | TEs |
|--|--|--|
| A graduate student's invitation to a thesis defense (=power, + distance) | 1. Explanation (26) 2. Regret (18) 3. Good wishes (8) | 1. Explanation (29) 2. Positive feeling (13) 3. Regret (11) |
| The Director of the Office of International Affairs' invitation to a welcome party for international students (+power, +distance) | 1. Explanation (28) 2. Regret (15) 3. Positive feeling (12) | 1. Explanation (27) 2. Regret (12) 3. Positive feeling (10) Negative ability (10) |
| An advisor's invitation to lunch (+power, -distance) | 1. Explanation (30) 2. Regret (15) 3. Future acceptance (5) Gratitude (5) | 1. Explanation (27) 2. Regret (13) 3. Negative ability (9) |

*number in brackets shows the frequency of a refusal strategy

**=power equal, +power higher / -distance familiar, +distance unfamiliar

In terms of order, TTs usually began their refusals with ‘Explanation’ followed by ‘Regret.’ For example, they stated *เราทำงานเดือนอยู่แล้ว ขอโทษที่ไม่ได้เข้าฟัง* “I’m working on labs. I’m sorry for not being able to attend.” TEs, on the other hand, preferred ‘Positive feeling’ followed by ‘Explanation’, such as “I’d love to if I’m free, but I have a class in the afternoon.” TEs may learn the use of ‘Positive feeling’ in the classroom since “I’d really love to, but...” or “That’s a good idea, but...” are examples of patterns typically taught as a common way to start a refusal to invitations (Wannaruk, 2008). When comparing the two groups, a significant difference was found in the use of ‘No’, $t(29.000) = -2.112$, $p = 0.043$. The result indicates that TEs are likely to employ ‘No’ while TTs never use this strategy.

In refusing the Director’s invitation, both TTs and TEs employed ‘Explanation’ and ‘Regret’ as the most and the second most frequent strategies, respectively. ‘Positive feeling’ was the third most frequent strategy for TTs. Meanwhile, TEs favored ‘Positive feeling’ as well as ‘Negative ability.’ Both TTs and TEs often began their refusals with ‘Regret’ followed by ‘Explanation.’ For instance, they said ต้องขอโทษด้วยค่ะ พอดีต้องเดินทางกลับบ้านที่ต่างจังหวัดค่ะ “I must apologize. I have planned to go back home in another province” and “I’m so sorry. I’ve got an appointment with my friend on Friday night.” TTs also favored ‘Positive feeling’ followed by ‘Explanation’, such as สน.ใจค่ะ แต่ไม่สะดวกเนื่องจากต้องไปรับพ่อคุณที่มาจากต่างจังหวัด “I’m interested, but it’s not convenient because I have to pick up my niece/nephew travelling from another province.”

Interestingly, an in-depth analysis of the content of ‘Explanation’ revealed that both TTs and TEs often referred to plans with or sickness of their family members in refusing in this situation. For example, they stated อาจจะไม่สะดวกค่ะ คุณแม่ป่วย ไม่มีใครดูแลท่านเลยค่ะ “Maybe, it’s not convenient. My mother is sick. There’s no one to take care of her” and “I think I have to pick up my brother.” This finding accords well with that of some other studies on refusals (e.g. Sairhun, 1999; Lin, 2014) which reported that specific reasons given by their participants were typically related to their family members whereas native English speakers hardly used these reasons. This suggests that the use of family members as grounds for refusals is possibly influenced by L1 culture. As giving family the main priority as well as showing gratitude towards family members, especially parents are highly valued in Thai society, referring to family members could be regarded as the most face-saving and the most persuasive content of ‘Explanation’ for Thai people.

When comparing the two groups, a significant difference was found in the use of ‘Pause filler’, $t(29.000) = -2.112$, $p = 0.043$. The result suggests that TEs tend to employ ‘Pause filler’ while TTs do not use this strategy at all. However, it does not mean that these linguistic features do not exist in the Thai language since TTs were found to mitigate their refusals by ‘Pause fillers’ in other situations.

One possibility is that pause fillers in Thai seem to be only the sounds in the throat (e.g. ອຸ່ນ “um”), which might not be as obvious in speech as pause fillers in English like *well*. Another possibility is the limitation of the research instrument which could not elicit other mitigating devices, such as tone of voice (Wannaruk, 2008).

In refusing an advisor’s invitation, the top two most frequently used strategies for both TTs and TEs were ‘Explanation’ and ‘Regret.’ For the third most frequent strategy, TTs used ‘Future acceptance’ (e.g. ດັ່ງໜີ້ໄປ່ພົດແນ່ເລີ່ມໜ້ວ “Next time, I will definitely not miss it”) and ‘Gratitude’ (e.g. ຂອບຄຸນນາກຮັບທີ່ໜານໝາ “Thank you very much for inviting me”) whereas TEs adopted ‘Negative ability’ (e.g. “I think I can’t join this time”). Consistent with the Director’s invitation, both TTs and TEs were found to cite plans with or sickness of their family members in refusing an advisor’s invitation. They said, for instance, *ອາກາຮັບວັນສຸກຮັມນີ້ນັດແລ້ວຮັບຕ້ອງໄປກໍາຮະກັນແນ່ “Professor, I already have an appointment on Friday. I have to run an errand with my mother”* and *“My son is sick. I have to go home tomorrow. I’ll come back next week.”* From these two invitations, it can be seen that both TTs and TEs often gave specific reasons when they refused interlocutors of higher status. This clearly indicates their high sensitivity to a person of higher status, which could be attributed to the social hierarchical society in Thai society as Knutson (1994) notes “Thai society is arranged in a hierarchy such that almost every relationship is defined in terms of superiority or inferiority” (p. 10).

As in the Director’s invitation, TEs typically began their refusals with ‘Regret’ followed by ‘Explanation’ in refusing an advisor’s invitation. TTs also favored ‘Regret’ followed by ‘Explanation’ and vice versa. Wannaruk (2008) reported that native speakers of Thai in her study were likely to express ‘Regret’ in refusing an advisor’s invitation to a party. Meanwhile, following the norms of native English speakers, Thai EFL learners in her study tended to employ ‘Positive feeling’ in the same situation. However, further studies are needed to verify whether or not TEs’ use of ‘Regret’ followed by ‘Explanation’ in this situation can be attributed to their L1 culture since Al-Kahtani (2005) found that American native speakers of English typically began their refusals with ‘Regret’ followed by ‘Explanation’ in refusing a boss’s invitation to a party. When comparing TTs and TEs, no significant difference was found.

Refusals to Requests

According to Table 2, when refusing a master’s degree student’s request, both TTs and TEs employed ‘Explanation’ and ‘Regret’ as the most and the second most frequent strategies, respectively, with relatively high frequency. For the third most frequent strategy, TTs used ‘Negative ability’,

‘Future acceptance’, and ‘Pause filler’ whereas TEs favored ‘No.’ The frequent use of ‘Explanation’ and ‘Regret’ by both TTs and TEs in this situation could be motivated by the values of being caring and considerate for others. Both groups may feel that they should not directly refuse a fellow graduate student when he/she is in need of help concerning their research and studies. However, some TEs were reported to use a direct ‘No’, which could be explained by the social distance between a speaker and a hearer. Based on the interviews, TEs employing ‘No’ seemed to agree that the interlocutor in this situation was of equal status and considered a complete stranger to them. This made it easier for them to say no directly to his/her request. Furthermore, both groups usually began their refusals with ‘Regret’ followed by ‘Explanation.’ For instance, they stated ຫອໄທຍນະຄົມ ພອດເຮືອນໄປປະໜຸນ “I’m sorry. I am in a hurry for a meeting” and “I’m sorry. I have to take a train in five minutes.” When comparing the two groups, a significant difference was found in the use of ‘No’, $t(29.000) = -2.693, p = 0.012$. The result suggests that TEs tend to adopt ‘No’ while TTs never use this strategy.

In refusing a roommate’s request, ‘Explanation’ and ‘Regret’ were the most and the second most frequently employed strategies for TTs and TEs, respectively. While TTs used ‘Future acceptance’ (e.g. ເຮັດວຽກຂ່າຍດູໃຫ້ຄົນນີ້ “I will help proofread it tonight”) as the third most frequent strategy, TEs favored ‘Negative ability’ (e.g. “I can’t help you”). Regarding the order of refusal strategies, both TTs and TEs often started their refusals with ‘Regret’ followed by ‘Explanation.’ For example, they said ຫອໄທຍນະ ພອດເຮືອນເນື້ອໄຈນີ້ເຮັດວຽກ “I’m sorry. I have an exam tomorrow” and “I’m sorry about that. I also have to finish my paper tonight.” Interestingly, both TTs and TEs were found to downgrade their ability in refusing a roommate’s request, such as ເຮັດວຽກກ່າວຍາຫວອນ “I’m not good at the language” and “...because I don’t have the accurate knowledge enough to proofread it.”

Table 2: Three Most Frequently Used Refusal Strategies for Requests

| Situation | TTs | TEs |
|--|---|---|
| A master’s degree student’s request to complete a questionnaire (=power, +distance) | 1. Explanation (30) 2. Regret (21) 3. Negative ability (3) Future acceptance (3) Pause filler (3) | 1. Explanation (30) 2. Regret (23) 3. No (6) |
| A roommate’s request to proofread a term paper (=power, -distance) | 1. Explanation (29) 2. Regret (14) 3. Future acceptance (8) | 1. Explanation (26) 2. Regret (20) 3. Negative ability (10) |

| Situation | TTs | TEs |
|---|--|---|
| The Dean of the Graduate School's request to demonstrate online registration for courses (+power, +distance) | 1. Explanation (29) 2. Regret (13) 3. Alternative (10) | 1. Explanation (27) 2. Regret (20) 3. Negative ability (12) |
| *number in brackets shows the frequency of a refusal strategy | | |
| **=power equal, +power higher / -distance familiar, +distance unfamiliar | | |

When comparing the two groups, three strategies showed significant differences, i.e. 'Negative ability', $t(49.180) = -2.249, p = 0.029$, 'Future acceptance', $t(45.758) = 2.121, p = 0.039$, and 'Pause filler', $t(29.000) = -2.408, p = 0.023$. The results suggest that TEs employ 'Negative ability' more frequently than TTs. In addition, only TEs adopt 'Pause filler.' Conversely, TTs use 'Future acceptance' more frequently than TEs. The frequent use of 'Future acceptance' by TTs may result from the fact that roommates are supposed to help and support each other both in terms of living and studying in order to live peacefully together. In order not to hurt a roommate's feelings as well as to maintain their own face, TTs usually set a condition for accepting the proposed request at the end of their refusals. For example, they said ແກໄທຍທີ່ວ່ຈັນຕ້ອງສ່ງງານພຽງນີ້ວ່ຈັນເດືອວັດ້ຈັນທຳນີ້ແສຮົງແລ້ວດັ່ງແກບໜີມີໄດ້ສ່ງອາຈາຣຍ໌ຈັນຈະໄປໜ່ວຍຕຽວໃຫ້ນະເວີຍ "I'm sorry. I have to submit my work tomorrow. If I finish it and you haven't submitted your work to the professor, I will help proofread it."

In refusing the Dean's request, TTs and TEs used 'Explanation' and 'Regret' as the most and the second most frequent strategies, respectively. For the third most frequent strategy, TTs employed 'Alternative' (e.g. ດັ່ງອາຈາຣຍ໌ມີງານຕຣີມອກສາຮອະໄໄຣໃຫ້ໜູ້ຈ່າຍ ບອກໄດ້ເລີນນະຄະ "If you need any help with document preparation, please feel free to let me know") and TEs 'Negative ability' (e.g. "I won't show up that day"). Interestingly, consistent with the previous requests, both TTs and TEs often started their refusals with 'Regret' followed by 'Explanation' in refusing the Dean's request. For instance, they stated ຂອໄທນະຄຣັບ ວັນອັງຄາຮ່ານໜ້າພມມີນັດພອດຕີເລີຍຄຣັບ "I'm sorry. I have an appointment next Tuesday" and "I'm sorry. Next Tuesday, I need to go to Bangkok for my friend's wedding." These findings not only accord with those of Beebe et al. (1990) which found that their Japanese subjects usually expressed regret before making excuses when they refused requests, but also confirm Sairhun's (1999) claim that 'Regret' seems to be an essential component of refusals to requests. When comparing the two groups, two strategies showed significant differences, i.e. 'Negative ability', $t(54.144) = -2.041, p = 0.046$ and 'No', $t(29.000) = -2.112, p = 0.043$. The results indicate that TEs employ 'Negative ability' more frequently than TTs. TEs also adopt 'No' whereas TTs never use this strategy.

Refusals to Offers

According to Table 3, when refusing a classmate's offer, TTs and TEs used 'Explanation' and 'Future acceptance' (e.g. ຖືກ່ອນຂອງທີ່ໄຫດມາແລ້ວຈະໄລຍ້ມນະ "If I finish reading what I have downloaded, I will borrow it" and "I'll have a look at it later") as the most and the second most frequent strategies, respectively. The frequent use of 'Future acceptance' by both groups of native speakers of Thai may display the transfer of the values of being caring and considerate from L1 to L2 production. According to Chaidaroon (2003), being caring and considerate means "to create, maintain, honor, and/or rebuild face of his or her interlocutor" (p. 302). Therefore, to show their care and consideration for a classmate's generosity, both TTs and TEs often made a promise of future acceptance which might not sound serious. Similarly, to maintain a harmonious relationship with interlocutors, Keshavarz et al. (2006) stated that Iranian participants often made ostensible refusals, ostensible invitations, and ostensible promises of future acceptance.

Table 3: Three Most Frequently Used Refusal Strategies for Offers

| Situation | TTs | TEs |
|--|--|---|
| A classmate's offer of a book of abstracts (=power, -distance) | 1. Explanation (21) 2. Future acceptance (16) 3. Positive feeling (14) | 1. Explanation (21) 2. Future acceptance (13) 3. Gratitude (10) |
| The Dean of the Graduate School's offer of a teaching assistantship (+power, +distance) | 1. Explanation (31) 2. Positive feeling (17) 3. Regret (10) | 1. Explanation (25) 2. Positive feeling (13) 3. Regret (8) |
| An advisor's offer of a research assistantship (+power, -distance) | 1. Explanation (31) 2. Positive feeling (9) 3. Future acceptance (5) Regret (5) | 1. Explanation (26) 2. Regret (13) 3. Positive feeling (9) |

* number in brackets shows the frequency of a refusal strategy

** =power equal, +power higher / -distance familiar, +distance unfamiliar

For the third most frequent strategy, TTs favored 'Positive feeling' (e.g. ຕີ່ຈັກເລຍ "That's so good") whereas TEs preferred 'Gratitude' (e.g. "Thank you for your kindness"). TTs usually employed 'Positive feeling' as a starter followed by 'Explanation', such as ສາມໃຈສີ ແຕ່ຕອນນີ້ເຮັດວຽກ ອ່ານນີ້ປີເປົ້ອຮ່ອງຢູ່ເລຍ "I'm interested, but now I'm still reading the paper." Meanwhile, TEs began their refusals with 'No', 'Gratitude', or 'Regret' followed by 'Explanation', such as "No. I don't think I'm interested in it now." When comparing the two groups, two strategies indicated significant

differences, i.e. ‘Positive feeling’, $t(55.383) = 2.246, p = 0.029$ and ‘No’, $t(38.304) = -2.633, p = 0.012$. The results suggest that TTs employ ‘Positive feeling’ more frequently than TEs. Conversely, TEs use ‘No’ more frequently than TTs.

In refusing the Dean’s offer, both TTs and TEs employed ‘Explanation’, ‘Positive feeling’, and ‘Regret’ as the most, the second most, and the third most frequent strategies, respectively. Also, both groups typically started their refusals with ‘Positive feeling’ followed by ‘Explanation.’ For instance, they said ສັນໃຈຄ່ວ່າ ແຕ່ກ່ອມນີ້ທຸກມີເຢີນວິຈາກນັກ ຈະ ທີ່ສັນນີ້ແລ້ວທີ່ “I’m interested, but this semester, all the courses I take are hard” and “I’m interested in teaching, but I have focused on my work as my advisor asks me to pay more attention to it.” When comparing the two groups, two strategies showed significant differences, i.e. ‘Explanation’, $t(41.769) = 2.604, p = 0.013$ and ‘No’, $t(29.000) = -2.693, p = 0.012$. The results suggest that TTs use ‘Explanation’ more frequently than TEs. Meanwhile, only TEs adopt ‘No’ in this situation.

Many research studies on refusals (e.g. Beebe et al., 1990; Nguyen, 2006; Wannaruk, 2008; Hassani, Mardani, & Dastjerdi, 2011; Boonkongsaen, 2013; Lin, 2014) found that their participants, particularly non-native English speakers were likely to be less direct to interlocutors of higher status. Similarly, it was reported that ‘No’, which is considered the most direct strategy, was rarely adopted by both groups of Thai participants in the present investigation, especially to a person of higher status. According to the interviews, most participants thought that making refusals was already face-threatening in nature (Brown & Levinson, 1987); therefore, saying no directly would sound even more impolite and could hurt their interlocutors’ feelings. However, a comparison between TTs and TEs revealed that TEs tended to adopt ‘No’ significantly more frequently than TTs in several situations, even to interlocutors of higher status. According to the interviews with some TEs who employed ‘No’ in several situations, they stated that besides their limited linguistic proficiency, they lacked knowledge of how to appropriately and politely refuse in English. The easiest strategy they could think of was to say *no* directly, sometimes along with an explanation which was often short or vague. For example, they said “No, I don’t want to do that” in refusing the Dean’s offer and “No, I not have time for orientation because I do something in that time” in refusing the Dean’s request.

When refusing an advisor’s offer, TTs and TEs used ‘Explanation’ as the most frequent strategy. Similar to the roommate’s request, both TTs and TEs were reported to downgrade their ability in the content of their explanations, such as ທຸກຄືດວ່າທຸກຄວາມສາມາດຮູ່ມີເຖິງຄ່ວ່າ “I think I’m not capable enough” and “...but I totally have no idea about this topic so it might not be useful for you to have me in a team.” The use of these modest explanations probably mirrors the Thai characteristics

of being modest (Wannaruk, 2008). This explanation is in agreement with Cedar (2006) as well as Chen and Boonkongsaen (2012) who hold that modesty in speech is highly valued in Thailand.

For the second most frequent strategy, TTs used 'Positive feeling' while TEs preferred 'Regret.' For the third most frequent strategy, TTs adopted 'Future acceptance' and 'Regret' whereas TEs used 'Positive feeling.' Similar to the Dean's offer, both TTs and TEs often began their refusals with 'Positive feeling' followed by 'Explanation.' For example, they stated ที่นี่ก็สนใจนั้น แต่ช่วงนี้ไม่มีค'อย มีเวลาอยู่ "I'm interested, but now I don't have time" and "It's a good opportunity, but I have a project to do." When comparing the two groups, two strategies showed significant differences, i.e. 'Explanation', $t(44.006) = 2.335, p = 0.024$ and 'Regret', $t(50.539) = -2.138, p = 0.037$. The results suggest that TTs use 'Explanation' more frequently than TEs. Meanwhile, TEs express 'Regret' more frequently than TTs.

The findings showed that TTs employed 'Explanation' more frequently than TEs in refusing offers from interlocutors of higher status, which tended to be influenced by the nature of the situation as well as the status of the interlocutors. Boonkongsaen (2013) revealed that her Thai participants perceived offers as more face-threatening than their Filipino counterparts, which led them to be less direct in this eliciting act. Based on the interviews, most TEs seemed to agree that as graduate students, refusing offers from interlocutors who had absolute social and academic power over them (i.e. the Dean and an advisor) was already difficult. It was even more difficult when those offers (i.e. a teaching assistantship and a research assistantship) were beneficial for them in terms of academic and professional development and not many graduate students would receive such opportunities. As a result, TTs felt the need to provide reasonable and sufficient explanations in refusing these offers. However, with limited linguistic means, most TEs said that they could not provide longer and more elaborate reasons as they would be able to in their L1. Instead, TEs may frequently use 'Regret' not only to express their genuine apology, but to compensate for their inability to give sufficient reasons.

Refusals to Suggestions

According to Table 4, in refusing a graduate student's suggestion, both TTs and TEs used 'Explanation' as the most frequent strategy. For example, they said ไม่มีวิชาที่เรารอขายเรียนและคิดว่าจะลงลงทะเบียนแล้วจ้า "I already have a course that I want to study and that I think I will register for" and "I've got a full schedule this semester." While TTs employed 'Pause filler' as the second most frequent strategy, TEs favored 'Postponement' (e.g. "Let me think"). For the third most frequent

strategy, TTs employed 'No' whereas TEs used 'Positive feeling' (e.g. "Yeah, it's very useful for me"). Both groups typically used only 'Explanation' in this situation. When comparing the two groups, no significant difference was found.

Table 4: Three Most Frequently Used Refusal Strategies for Suggestions

| Situation | TTs | TEs |
|---|--|--|
| A graduate student's suggestion to take a course (=power, +distance) | 1. Explanation (25) 2. Pause filler (5) 3. No (4) | 1. Explanation (21) 2. Postponement (8) 3. Positive feeling (6) |
| A classmate's suggestion to narrow down a research topic (=power, -distance) | 1. Self-defense (12) 2. Explanation (11) 3. Positive feeling (7) Postponement (7) | 1. Explanation (18) 2. Gratitude (10) Self-defense (10) 3. Negative ability (7) |
| An advisor's suggestion to present research in Singapore (+power, -distance) | 1. Explanation (26) 2. Positive feeling (9) 3. Gratitude (5) Alternative (5) | 1. Explanation (27) 2. Positive feeling (9) 3. Negative ability (8) |

*number in brackets shows the frequency of a refusal strategy

**=power equal, +power higher / -distance familiar, +distance unfamiliar

In refusing a classmate's suggestion, TTs employed 'Self-defense' (e.g. *เรา่ว່ານັ້ນດີແລ້ວນະ* "I think it's good already") whereas TEs favored 'Explanation' (e.g. "...but in my view, if I narrow it too much, my topic will not be helpful for other generation of Thai learners"). While 'Explanation' (e.g. *ແຕ່ເຮົາວ່າກາງວິຊຍ໌ນີ້ມີຂອບເຫດກວ່າງ ຈີ່ກໍ່ທ້າທາຍດີນະ* "...but I think research with a broad scope is challenging") was used by TTs as the second most frequent strategy, TEs favored 'Gratitude' and 'Self-defense.' For the third most frequent strategy, TTs used 'Positive feeling' (e.g. *ເຮົາກີ່ດີແບບນັ້ນ* *ເກີ່ມືອນກັນ* "I think so too") and 'Postponement' (e.g. *ຈະດອງກັບໄປຄົດອີກທີ່* "I'll think about it again") whereas TEs used 'Negative ability' (e.g. "I can't change it anymore"). TTs tended to begin their refusals with 'Self-defense' followed by 'Explanation', such as *ແຕ່ເຮົາວ່ານັ້ນນໍາຈະໄອເຄນະ* *ກຮອບຄລຸມ* *ນະຮະເດືອນທີ່ຕ້ອງກາຮັດວຽກ* "But I think it should be okay. It covers the points I want." Meanwhile, TEs used 'Gratitude' followed by 'Explanation' (e.g. "Thank you for your suggestion, but it's just a tentative topic") or only 'Explanation.'

When comparing the two groups, two refusal strategies showed significant differences, i.e. 'Negative ability', $t(39.119) = -2.344, p = 0.024$ and 'Insistence', $t(29.000) = 2.112, p = 0.043$.

The results suggest that TEs employ ‘Negative ability’ more frequently than TTs. In contrast, only TTs use ‘Insistence.’ Some TTs possibly felt that their negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987) had been threatened because before they conducted a research study, a research topic had to be already approved by an advisor who is highly specialized in the field. Therefore, whether or not they agreed with their classmate’s suggestions, they insisted on an original topic, following their advisor’s advice.

In refusing an advisor’s suggestion, both TTs and TEs employed ‘Explanation’ and ‘Positive feeling’ as the most and the second most frequent strategies, respectively. For the third most frequent strategy, TTs employed ‘Gratitude’ (e.g. *อาจารย์ค่ะ ท่านขอบคุณมากเลยนะครับที่อาจารย์นีก็อิงท่าน* “Professor, thank you very much for thinking of me”) and ‘Alternative’ (e.g. *ผมว่าจะส่งไปที่การศึกษาในปีนี้เลย* “I think I will submit it to the conference in Korea. It will be held this year”) whereas TEs used ‘Negative ability’ (e.g. “Maybe I can’t go”). TTs usually adopted only ‘Explanation’ in making a refusal in this situation, such as *แต่ที่นี่รู้สึกว่าที่นี่ยังไม่พร้อมเลยครับ วิจัยของท่านก็ยังไม่เรียบร้อยสมบูรณ์* “But I feel I’m not ready yet. Also, my research is not fully finished.” Meanwhile, TEs often started their refusals with ‘Positive feeling’ or ‘Regret’ followed by ‘Explanation.’ For example, they said “Great, but I need to revise my work first. I think I am not ready for this time” and “Sorry. I am not ready yet.” When comparing the two groups, a significant difference was found in the use of ‘Negative ability’, $t(45.758) = -2.121$, $p = 0.039$. The result suggests that TEs adopt ‘Negative ability’ more frequently than TTs.

Although being categorized as a direct strategy (Beebe et al., 1990), ‘Negative ability’ does not show the intention to refuse as clearly as ‘No’ (Wannaruk, 2008) as well as conveying a degree of politeness since modals (e.g. maybe) or subjectivizers (e.g. “I’m afraid...” or “I think”) were typically utilized as an initiator (Félix-Brasdefer, 2004; Lin, 2014). TEs chose to employ ‘Negative ability’ more frequently than TTs in several situations, even to a person of higher status because they may have wanted to be direct while remaining polite (Wannaruk, 2008). Another possibility could be the effects of classroom instruction. Kwon (2003) points out that expressions like “I don’t think I can” or “I can’t” are often introduced in the English language classroom in Korea as a means to show inability to accept the proposed acts. These expressions are frequently taught as well in the English language classroom in Thailand.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study revealed that similarities existed in the choice, content, and order of refusal strategies employed by Thai graduate students in Thai and in English. These

similarities suggested that there was a transfer of pragmatic norms from L1 to L2 as Beebe et al. (1990) mention when they state that it is not easy to give up deeply held native values in realizing speech acts, including refusals. As a result, it was likely that refusals made in English by Thai graduate students in this study mirrored their native norms and values, for example, a high sensitivity to a person of higher status, the values of being caring and considerate, the characteristics of being modest, and the value of showing gratitude. However, TEs significantly differed from TTs notably in their use of direct strategies. Specifically, with limited English proficiency, some TEs had limited linguistic means to express politeness in refusing, which led them to adopt 'No' more frequently than TTs, even to interlocutors of higher status. Meanwhile, the frequent use of 'Negative ability' by TEs tended to result from the teaching of expressions commonly used to show inability or unwillingness to comply with the proposed acts.

As regards the pedagogical implications, the findings of the present study could be of great help in teaching not only the Thai language, but also the English language. It was reported that graduate students employed communication strategies more frequently and more appropriately after the training program in which specific communication strategies were taught and more opportunities to practice them were given (Prinyajarn & Wannaruk, 2008). Similarly, in teaching learners of the Thai language to make appropriate and polite refusals, the teacher can introduce to the learners the top three most frequently used strategies for TTs in refusing invitations, requests, offers, and suggestions from interlocutors of equal or higher status and provide them with multiple opportunities to practice these strategies in the classroom. Additionally, as 'Explanation' was employed most by TTs, which supports Hassani et al.'s claim (2011) that 'Explanation' should be considered a universal politeness strategy in realizing a speech act of refusal, learners should be exposed to different situations in the classroom in which they can practice giving explanations. Furthermore, they should be reminded that displaying care and consideration as well as modesty in their refusals is considered appropriate in Thai culture. In terms of order, learners should be taught that in refusing all requests, they should start their refusals with 'Regret' followed by 'Explanation' or in refusing offers, especially from a person of higher status, they should begin their refusals with 'Positive feeling' followed by 'Explanation.'

As for EFL learners, the ability to understand speech acts cross-culturally should be promoted due to the rapid growth of cross-cultural exchanges and encounters in English (Fahey, 2005). One of the ways to promote this ability is to raise the learners' awareness that pragmatic rules can vary from culture to culture, which results in differences in realizing speech acts (McKay, 2002). Based on the findings of the present study, the three most frequently used refusal strategies and the most

favored order of refusal strategies for TEs in each situation can be integrated into the English language classroom. This information can be used as baseline data for Thai EFL learners to compare with other cultures and vice versa. More importantly, to prevent cross-cultural misunderstandings, English users from other cultures should be taught to be aware that native speakers of Thai may sound rather direct when refusing in English and that their choice and content of refusal strategies may result from their L1 norms and values. In the meantime, Thai EFL learners should be careful about employing direct strategies, promises of future acceptance that they do not intend to keep, and explanations that refer to family members or downgrade their ability since these choice and content of refusal strategies can be seen as inappropriate and impolite in other cultures.

To obtain a more comprehensive picture of the use of refusal strategies by native speakers of Thai, further studies may be conducted with other groups of Thai students or other groups of native speakers of Thai. However, researchers must be cautious when classifying the relationship between a speaker and a hearer in the design of the research instruments since the participants may have different views of close or distant relationships (Li, 2008). Furthermore, they may employ other research instruments such as role-plays to gain better insight into turn-taking behavior and negotiation of meaning (Golato, 2003; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2011). Finally, future studies may investigate the influence of L1 culture on the use of refusal strategies by other cultural groups which are likely to use English increasingly, such as the member states of the ASEAN Community (AC).

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Appendix A: 12 DCT Situations according to Eliciting Acts

Invitations

1. A graduate student invites another graduate student from the same department, to whom he/she has talked a few times before, to his/her thesis defense.
2. The Director of the Office of International Affairs invites a graduate student to a welcome party for new international students.
3. An advisor invites an advisee to lunch with other advisees.

Requests

1. A master's student requests a graduate student, whom he/she meets for the first time, to complete a questionnaire for about 20 minutes.
2. A roommate requests his/her roommate to proofread a term paper.
3. The Dean of the Graduate School requests a current graduate student to demonstrate online registration for courses to new students at an orientation.

Offers

1. A classmate offers a book of abstracts to his/her classmate.
2. The Dean of the Graduate School offers a teaching assistantship to a graduate student.
3. An advisor offers a research assistantship to an advisee.

Suggestions

1. A new graduate student suggests another new graduate student take a certain course.
2. A classmate suggests his/her classmate, who works in the same field, narrow down a research topic.
3. An advisor suggests an advisee present research at an international conference in Singapore.

Appendix B: Classification of Refusals Modified from Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990)

I. Direct

- A. Performative (e.g. "...to refuse your offer")
- B. Nonperformative statement
 1. "No"
 2. Negative willingness/ability (e.g. ໝາຍຄວາມຈະຢູ່ມີຢູ່ຢັ້ງຢັ້ນ "I probably won't be there.", "I don't think so.")

II. Indirect

- A. Statement of regret (e.g. ຫອໄທ້ມ່ຈົງໆ ນະ “I’m really sorry.”; “It’s a pity.”)
- B. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g. ແຕ່ນ່າຍນີ້ຮ່າມີເຮີຍນີ້ລຶ່ງນ່າຍສີໄມ້ງ “...but in the afternoon, I have a class until 4 p.m.”; “...but I’m busy with my proposal defense this term.”)
- C. Statement of alternative (e.g. ຂະລົບນາກໄໝໝ່ານຄ້ານ່າງຈະຂອໃຫ້ເຂົ້າສົ່ງຮາຍງານນາໄທ້ເຮົາກາງອື່ນດີ “Is it convenient for you to send the paper to me via e-mail?”; “I think you should ask someone else.”)
- D. Set condition for past acceptance (e.g. ດ້ວຍຕືດເຮີຍນີ້ຂ້າວັນສາກ ພັນຄອງຕ້ອງໄປຮ່ວມງານແນ່ນອນ “If I did not have a class on Saturday morning, I would definitely join the party.”)
- E. Promise of future acceptance (e.g. ໄວ້ວ່ານຂອງທີ່ໄຫດຄມາແລ້ວ ຈະໄປຢືນນະ “If I finish reading what I have downloaded, I will borrow it.”; “Maybe next time I will help you.”)
- F. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor
 - 1. Criticize the request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or opinion); insult/attack (e.g., ຜູ້ຈຳ “Mind your own business.”)
 - 2. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request (e.g. ອາຈາຮ່າຍ້້າໃຈຫຼຸນນະ “Please understand me, professor.”; “I hope you understand me.”)
 - 3. Let the interlocutor off the hook (e.g. ໃນເປັນໄຮ້ໜ້ວ “It’s okay.”; “Take your time.”)
 - 4. Self-defense (e.g. ເຮົາວ່ານັ້ນດີແລ້ວນະ “I think it’s good already.”; “...but I think it’s appropriate.”)
 - 5. Insistence* (e.g. ພັນວ່າຈະລອງທຳດັກກ່ອນ “I think I will try working on it first.”)
 - 6. Sarcasm* (e.g. ສັ້ນເກີດມາໄທ້ໜ່າຍອ່ອຍດີ “Can you come up with a better idea?”)
- G. Avoidance
 - 1. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g. ວັນອັງຄາຮຣອດນະ “Tuesday?”; “Next Tuesday?”)
 - 2. Postponement (e.g. ພັນຈະລອງກລັນໄປຄົດດູ “I’ll think about it.”; “I’ll discuss with my advisor later.”)
 - 3. Hedging (e.g. ຂັງໄມ້ແນ່ນໃຈເລຍຄະວ່າຈະວ່າງທຽບເປົກຄ່າ “I’m not sure if I will be free.”; “I’m not sure.”)

Adjuncts to Refusals

- 1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement (e.g. ກົດຈົງນະ “That’s true.”; “Actually, I would like to join the party.”)
- 2. Pause filler (e.g. ອືນ “um”; “well”)

3. Gratitude/appreciation (e.g. ຂອບຄຸມອາຈາຮຍ້ມາກ ທ ນະຄະ “Thank you very much, professor”; “Thank you.”)
4. Expressing good wishes* (e.g. ເຮັດວຽກ ໃຫ້ເຊືອໄຫວດິນຊ “I wish you luck.”; “Good luck.”)
5. Expression of surprise* (e.g. ແຈງຫວັດ “Really?”; “Really?”)
6. Request for more information* (e.g. ຕິບປັລັດ “Is it urgent?”; “Can you suggest that?”)
7. Asking for approval* (e.g. “Is that ok?”)
8. Statement of acknowledgment* (e.g. ພົບຄົກທ່ານ “I see.”; “I see your point.”)

*other refusal strategies found in the data in the present study

