

Verbal and Non-verbal Refusal Strategies in English: Refusing Promotions

Nour Al Okla

Department of Foundation and General Studies

Al Ghurair University

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Abstract

Since the speech act of refusal is a face-threatening act, it is essential that some strategies be used to soften the refusal to save the listener's face. Although the domain of refusal strategies is one of the very important domains in the pragmatic aspect in English, none of the studies conducted about the English language in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have studied refusal strategies used by people in this region. This study aims to investigate the strategies that different people in Dubai use to refuse promotions by sales assistants in different shopping malls in Dubai. The data in this study was collected during field observations conducted in two shopping malls in Dubai. The findings in this study show that most participants chose to refuse the promotions non-verbally. They used different refusal strategies such as avoidance, hand gestures, and nodding their heads. Only two verbal refusal expressions were used. The reasons for these findings might be related to different factors such as the different cultural backgrounds of the participants, the level of English proficiency, and the nature of promotions as imposition on people's privacy. Therefore, in order to enable second language learners to use refusal strategies politely and effectively, English teachers should introduce the different strategies that people might use to refuse offers or suggestions in English.

Keywords: English language, refusal strategies, verbal refusals

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Introduction

Every language has its own system to express politeness in different speech acts such as complaints, apologies, requests, refusals and many other speech acts. While politeness is a social characteristic before being a linguistic act, different cultures express politeness in different ways. Therefore, in a multi-cultural community where English is used as a lingua franca like in the UAE, for instance, misunderstanding and breakdown in communication might occur if the speakers as well as the listeners were not aware of these cultural and linguistic differences.

The speech act of refusals is one of the main speech acts that need to be tackled cautiously. Since the speech act of refusal is a face-threatening act, it is essential that some strategies be used to soften the refusal to save the listener's face. In a large and diverse community such as in the UAE, where English is used as a Lingua Franca, people need to be aware of different strategies on how to refuse a request or turn down an offer politely. Therefore, learners of English as a second language need to be acquainted with the best refusal strategies they might need to use in different situations. Teachers also need to have an awareness of the strategies that are adopted among people in order to reach the most polite as well as effective refusal strategy. First, we need to observe, understand, and analyze the way people refuse offers and requests in Dubai. Then a deep analysis of the results might lead to acknowledging certain strategies that might be taught to learners of English as a second language to enable them to communicate effectively. One area that includes rich data for refusals is the promotions that ordinary people come across on a daily basis. The main purpose in this paper is to investigate the strategies that different people, regardless of their native language, use to refuse promotions by sales assistants in different shopping malls in Dubai.

Significance of Research

Although there is abundance in literature that studies the speech act of refusals in different countries, most of these papers discuss the refusal strategies used by learners of English as a second language and compare these strategies to those used by native speakers of English. Moreover, many studies are located in different areas such as Turkey, Spain, China, and Saudi Arabia. However, to the best of my knowledge, no studies were geared towards studying the usage of refusal strategies in the U.A.E in general and Dubai in particular. Therefore, the significance of this study stems from the fact that it studies the different verbal and nonverbal refusal strategies among people in U.A.E where English is described as a Lingua Franca. The research question that this study aims to answer is:

- What refusal strategies do people usually use to refuse promotions from sales assistants in Dubai?

To answer this question, a secondary and a primary research were conducted. In the secondary research, several research papers were reviewed to investigate what different authors have written about refusal strategies used by different people.

Literature Review

Although politeness is a broad term, one of the specific usages of politeness strategies is needed in the act of refusal. To have a comprehensive view of the literature written on the speech act of

refusals we need to look at the definition of politeness. Then, a presentation of different studies about refusals will be provided. This will be followed by what we found in literature about the facts that might influence refusal strategies. Finally, a presentation of the pedagogical implications of the findings of different studies will be included in this literature review.

Definition of politeness

Politeness is a very broad term that can have different meanings in different contexts. Meier (1995) believes that though there were books written on politeness, the notion was never defined. Nevertheless, he refers to the different politeness strategies that are divided into positive and negative strategies. He explains how “negative strategies are characterized as expressions of restraint, formality, and distancing, whereas positive strategies are described as expressions of solidarity, intimacy, informality and familiarity” (p. 346). Therefore, refusal strategies might also differ according to the formality of the situation, the restraints the speaker or the listener might impose on the situation or the conversation, and the social distance between the two interlocutors. Refusing an offer from a friend might need completely different strategies than those needed when refusing an offer from a stranger for example. Similarly, Suzila & Yusri, (2012) indicate that politeness is essential for communication because it considers the face needs of others. They also believe that “social distance, formality of topic, and power difference may be affecting adherence to politeness expectations as it may mold behaviors in several ways” (p. 128).

Although politeness is essential in every cultural setting, different cultures express politeness in different manners. (Meier, 1995) suggests that some cultures relate politeness to indirectness whereas other cultures do not. For instance, the Japanese culture is known to associate indirectness to politeness. However, in the American culture being polite does not necessarily mean to be indirect (Meier, 1995). Therefore, “politeness can only be judged relative to a particular context and particular addressees’ expectations” (Meier, 1995, p. 352).

Therefore, the notion of politeness might differ from one culture to another. Likewise, refusals, being considered as speech acts where politeness is required, might differ from one context to another and from language to another.

Refusals

Different researchers have provided different definitions for refusal acts. For example, Felix-Brasdefer, (2008) states that refusals are “complex speech acts that require not only long sequences of negotiation and cooperative achievements, but also face saving maneuvers to accommodate to noncompliant nature of the act” (p. 196). Moreover, refusals are viewed as face threatening acts that need to be mitigated in order not to negatively affect the addressee. For instance, Mashiri, (2002) explains that the act of refusal “occurs when a speaker directly or indirectly says “no” to a request, invitation, offer, or suggestion” (p121). Furthermore, Hei, (2009) believes that saying “no” to others includes the risk of offending them and threatening their face. Therefore, “some speakers may be indirect so as to mitigate the face threatening acts whilst also preserving the face of the hearer” (Hei, 2009, p. 34). Therefore, the importance of refusals as speech acts stems from the fact that they are face-threatening acts that might offend others if not accompanied by certain strategies that might help to soften such an act. Researchers have introduced different types of

refusals. Hei, (2009) introduces four different areas that may require saying “no” using refusal strategies. These are declining an invitation, refusing an offer, rejecting a request, and avoiding a blame. Hei, (2009) also classifies refusing strategies as direct and indirect strategies. Under the direct refusal strategies, he states repeated emphasis, flat “no” or “cannot”, and “no” accompanied by a reason. Whereas the indirect refusal strategies are sarcasm, hedging with reasons, using fillers, avoiding the answer, turning negative into positive, showing ignorance, and question with question (Hei, 2009). Moreover, Chang, (2011) notices that the word “regret” can be used in refusals and concluded that “female Americans used “regret” more often than American males, whereas Japanese males used regret with almost the same frequency as Japanese females” (p. 74). Similarly, Abdul Sattar et al., (2011) state that “in the case of refusals, apologizing or expressing regret functions as an indirect refusal that politely mitigates the refusal to accept the request” (p. 77). Furthermore, Felix-Brasdefer, (2008) introduces an example of providing a refusal response accompanied by a positive remark such as an expression of gratitude like (*thanks for the invitation*), or a partial agreement like (*Yes, I agree, but ...*) (Felix-Brasdefer, 2008).

Moreover, nonverbal strategies are commonly used when it comes to refusal strategies. Such strategies would help the speaker mitigate the refusal speech act and save the face of the listener. Taguchi, (2013) refers to how people used nonverbal strategies to soften their refusals. For example, people used “communication strategies such as back channel cues (e.g., nodding, affirmative responses) as emphatic responses to mitigate the negative effect of refusals. They also used non-verbal expressions of affect (e.g., laughter) in order to mitigate refusals” (p. 103).

Different studies have compared the strategies used by native speakers of English with the refusal strategies used by learners of English as a second or a foreign language. For instance, Chang, (2011) states that Americans tend to give specific details and clear explanations when providing excuses compared with Germans and Saudis. Moreover, Khatib and Safari (2013) conclude in their study “intermediate EFL learners differ from native speakers in their use of politeness strategies” (p. 141).

Factors influencing the type of refusal strategies

Different factors play role in making the decision whether consciously or unconsciously to decide which strategy of refusal should be used in different situations. These factors might be related to different cultures and the way these cultures express politeness verbally and non-verbally, different languages, and the level of language proficiency.

It is acknowledged that different cultures express politeness in different ways. Therefore, the strategies that people from different culture use to refuse requests or offers might differ from one to another depending on their culture and how they perceive an act of politeness. For instance, Abdul Sattar et al., (2011) propose that “the interference of the background cultures of the non-native speakers may contribute to their “vague” excuses” (p. 78).

Furthermore, different languages have different terms and expressions to express politeness in different situations. Many studies focused on how learners of English differed from English native speakers because politeness is expressed differently in their language. For instance

Taguchi, (2013) states that learners of English as a second language used, in their refusal strategies, too direct expressions such as a direct “no” or too implicit strategies such as ‘*questioning*’. Some learners might refer to their native language and they might use the strategies they normally use in their native language to refuse politely. Therefore, Transfer from the native culture and the native language might influence the politeness strategies used by second language (L2) learners. Felix-Brasdefer (2008) believes that “the fact that most learners transferred their social perceptions and behavior from the L1 when declining an invitation caused pragmatic failure and unintentional misunderstandings” (p. 208). In addition, Abdul Sattar et al. (2011) indicate “three areas in which sociocultural transfer is present in Arabic EFL learners’ speech: the choice of semantic formulas, the length of responses, and the content of semantic formulas” (p. 72).

Moreover, language proficiency level has a major role in determining the way in which learners use different linguistic politeness strategies. For example, “Higher-proficiency learners were more skilled at locating appropriate linguistic forms and producing them efficiently under the on-line demand of speaking” (Taguchi, 2013, p. 115). Taguchi (2013), in her study, indicates that lower proficiency L2 learners use more direct expressions in their refusal strategies because they do not “know how to mitigate their refusals with hedging or indirect replies” (p. 116). Moreover, Felix-Brasdefer (2013) indicates that when L2 learners lacked control of L2 grammar, this could prevent them from “conveying a target-like refusal with high levels of mitigation and elaboration” (p. 207).

Pedagogical implications

It is evident that the way through which people refuse has a great impact on the communication among different interlocutors in different situations. Therefore, it is essential that language instructors have the pragmatic knowledge that is needed to teach L2 learners the pragmatic aspects of the second language in general and refusal strategies they might use to avoid embarrassment and face threat in particular. Several studies have touched upon this issue. For instance, Yu, (2011) indicates that it is important to study politeness in language usage because it “can be an important key to understanding a number of sociolinguistic problems and misunderstandings arising from differences in culture, as well as between individuals in interpersonal communication” (p. 385). Moreover, Félix-Brasdefer (2008) suggests that due to the complexity of refusals as speech acts L2 learners might learn and utilize certain strategies which they can use for different speech acts. Therefore, second language teachers need to provide the learners with different strategies which might be beneficial to avoid misunderstanding and pragmatic failure in different situations. Furthermore, Khatib and Safari, (2013) in their study conclude that politeness strategies “should be taught in a more conspicuous way, so that learners have more chance of noticing and learning them” (p. 141). Finally, Abdul Sattar et al., (2011) conclude that, “teaching the cultural aspects of language is a vital part of our duty as teachers to aid our students in becoming successful second- or foreign-language speakers” (p. 79). Therefore, instructors of English as a second or a foreign language need to be aware of the pragmatic aspects of the language and try to educate L2 learners not only in linguistic forms but also with pragmatic usage of the language to enable them to communicate effectively in the community.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate how people refuse different promotions offered to them by sales assistance in two shopping malls in Dubai. Therefore, the data that was collected for this study was collected through field observations. Two shopping malls in Dubai were randomly selected. The researcher intended to go and watch people around two different promotional stands. The first one was a travel agency that was promoting brochures in which trips were offered to people (for lower rates). Two men (seemingly Arab) were doing the promotion. The other promotional stand had two women who were promoting a gents' perfume. None of the sales assistants was informed about the research in order to keep the flow of the events as natural as possible.

The researcher observed people's reactions to these two promotions. The data was collected by observation, note taking, and recording the actual words that people used in their refusal strategies. The observation and note taking were useful to document non-verbal expressions, moves, and the face expressions that people used upon the refusal. On the other hand, the recording was essential to ensure the documentation of all the words used by people in their refusals.

Participants

The data was collected from 137 (66 in the first location and 71 in the second location) passersby who randomly happened to be there when the promotional offer was on. Since this is a naturalistic method where the data was collected by observation and there was no direct interaction between the researcher and the participants, no information about the participants in this study can be provided. They were from different age groups, different social background and from different cultures and countries. Some of them appeared to be Arab, while others were from India, Philippines, and other countries.

Analysis of data

The collected data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative data analysis was used to find patterns throughout the different refusal strategies used by different people and the possible reasons that might have led them to use these strategies in specific. On the other hand, quantitative data analysis was adopted in order to find out the most frequent strategies used by different people in Dubai, and to compare the different strategies used in the different settings.

Findings

The data that was collected through field observation was analyzed and categorized in different categories. The refusal strategies that people used in the two different settings consisted of different patterns. The main categories were verbal refusals and non-verbal refusals. The verbal refusal strategies consisted of only two patterns namely saying, "thank you" and "no, thank you". Whereas among the non-verbal refusal strategies we found different patterns like, ignoring the offer (avoidance), refusing with a hand gesture of "no", refusing with nodding the head only, smiling while walking away, and looking once while walking away.

These patterns in the refusal strategies, verbal and non-verbal, were manifested in both settings almost equally. The number of people who refused the promotion in the first setting during the observation was (66), whereas the total number of people who refused the promotion on perfumes during the observation time was (71). However, not all of the participants responded verbally. In fact, most of the responses in both settings were non-verbal refusals. As table1 indicates, only seven people out of (66) responded verbally to the travel agency sales assistants. Only two people said “thank you”, two more smiled while saying “thank you”, and three people refused saying “no, thank you”

Table 1: *Verbal refusal patterns in the travel agency*

Verbal refusal strategies (Travel Agency)	
Type of refusal	Number of refusals
Thank you	2
Thank you (with a smile)	2
No, thank you	3
Total number of verbal refusals	7

On the other hand, table2 shows that (59) people out of 66 participants used non-verbal refusal strategies to refuse the promotion at the travel agency. While (33) participants chose to ignore the promotion completely, (12) participants waved their hands while they walked away to indicate their refusal. Moreover, three people nodded their heads; signaling refusal, whereas only one person smiled at the sales assistants while walking away.

Table 2: *Non-verbal refusal patterns in the travel agency*

Non-verbal refusal strategies (Travel Agency)	
Type of refusal	Number of refusals
Ignoring	33
Hand gesture	12
Head gesture (nod)	3
One look	10
Smile only	1
Total number of non-verbal refusals	59

The results of the data collected from the perfume shop seem to resemble those of the travel agency in that people used less verbal refusals than non-verbal refusal strategies. However, the verbal

refusals to the perfume promotions were restricted to one phrase “thank you” accompanied with a smile. As table 3 indicates, none of the participants chose to refuse the perfume promotion only saying “thank you” (without a smile) or saying “no, thank you”.

Table 3: *Verbal refusal patterns in the perfume shop*

Verbal refusal strategies (Perfume Shop)	
Type of refusal	Number of refusals
Thank you	0
Thank you (with a smile)	5
No, thank you	0
Total number of verbal refusals	5

Nonetheless, as table 4 shows, the results for the nonverbal refusal strategies indicate that (21) people of the passers-by chose to ignore the promotion trying not to look at the sales assistants. Whereas, (19) participants waved their hands to signal their gentle refusal. Moreover, while six people nodded their heads to refuse the promotion, (10) people just smiled and walked away and (10) more looked only once and continued their way.

Table 4: *Non-verbal refusal patterns in the perfume shop*

Non-verbal refusal strategies (Perfume Shop)	
Type of refusal	Number of refusals
Ignoring	21
Hand gesture	19
Head gesture (nod)	6
One look	10
Smile only	10
Total number of non-verbal refusals	66

Table 5: *Comparison of verbal refusals in both setting (travel agency and perfume shop)*

Comparison of Verbal refusal strategies		
Type of refusal	Number of refusals (travel agency)	Number of refusals (perfume shop)

Thank you	2 (3% of total refusals)	0
Thank you (with a smile)	2 (3%)	5 (7%)
No, thank you	3 (4.5%)	0
Total number of verbal refusals	7 (10.6%)	5 (7%)

As table5 indicates, only seven people (10%) refused the promotion at the travel agency verbally compared to five people (7%). While only two people smiled when they said “thank you” to the travel agency sales assistants, all the people who responded verbally chose to smile politely while they said “thank you” to the sales assistants promoting the perfumes.

Table 6: Comparison of non-verbal refusals in both setting (travel agency and perfume shop)

Comparison of Non-verbal refusal strategies		
Type of refusal	Number of refusals (travel agency)	Number of refusals (perfume shop)
Ignoring	33 (50%)	21 (29.57%)
Hand gesture	12 (18%)	19 (26.76%)
Head gesture (nod)	3 (4.5%)	6 (8.45%)
One look	10 (15%)	10 (14%)
Smile only	1 (1.5%)	10 (14%)
Total number of non-verbal refusals	59 (89.39%)	66 (92.95%)

On the other hand, the majority of participants used non-verbal refusal strategies in both settings (travel agency and perfume shop). Table 6 indicates that (59) people (89.39%) used non-verbal refusals to respond to the promotion at the travel agency. Similarly, (66) people (92.95 %) chose to refuse nonverbally in the perfume shop. Therefore, in both settings the majority of the participants used non-verbal refusal strategies. While 33 people (50%) chose to completely ignore the sales assistants at the travel agency, only (21) people (29.57 %) ignored the sales assistants in the perfume shop. This indicates that more people chose to ignore the sales assistants at the travel agency. Moreover, (12) people (18%) waved their hands to indicate refusal at the travel agency compared to 19 (26.76%) people in the perfume shop. In addition, the number of participants who looked only once at the sales assistants and then moved away in both settings (travel agency and the perfume shop) is the same, 10 people. Nevertheless, there was only one person (1.5%) who smiled only while walking away at the travel agency compared to 10 people (14%) in the perfume

shop. This shows a difference between this refusal strategy used in the travel agency and the perfume shop.

Therefore, the majority of the participants used non-verbal strategies to refuse promotions from sales assistants in the travel agency and the perfume shops. Furthermore, although the majority of the participants used non-verbal strategies, they differed in their choices of these strategies. For instance, very few participants nodded their heads or smiled to respond to the promotion at the travel agency whereas more participants smiled to refuse the perfume sales assistants' promotion while they continued their way. This indicates that people might adopt different refusal strategies depending on different factors and variables.

Discussion

The results of the data analysis indicate different types of refusal strategies adopted by the participants. These strategies varied between verbal refusals and non-verbal refusal strategies. Most of the people who were included in this study preferred to respond to the promotions nonverbally. There might be several reasons for this choice in particular. These reasons could be related to the participants' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the participants' English language proficiency, the nature of the refusal speech act as a face-threatening act, and many other reasons related to social distance, power, and personality.

Different cultural backgrounds

The fact that most people refuse non-verbally (in different manners) indicates that they do not want to speak to the sales assistants. This coincides with what Felix-Brasdefer (2008) and Abdul Sattar et al. (2011) concluded in their studies. One reason for this might be due to the cultural differences among people living in Dubai. While people in the Arabic culture might refuse by just saying "thank you", in other cultures this expression might be used only to express acceptance. Therefore, when people encounter a situation where they do not know the cultural background of the addressee they might tend to use non-verbal strategies. Therefore, it is not surprising to find out that (125) out of (137) people (91.24 %) decided to refuse the promotion non-verbally.

English language proficiency

One reason that might prevent people from responding verbally to such promotions might be related to the participants' level of English language proficiency. Most of the participants were not native speakers of English. Therefore, they might have concerns about how to refuse politely in English. This coincides with the conclusions in various studies; Felix-Brasdefer, (2013) and Taguchi, (2013). Since English is used as the means of communication in Dubai, the first thought people would have that they need to refuse politely in English. However, if they do not know how to be polite in refusals in English, they might choose to use non-verbal refusal strategies.

Refusals as face-threatening acts

When people ignore the sales assistants, they actually try to avoid the promotion these sales assistants' offer because they do not want to embarrass the sales assistants. As indicated by Mashiri, (2002) and Hei, (2009), refusals are considered face-threatening acts because the speaker might embarrass or offend the addressee when saying "no". Therefore, it is important to refuse

politely. Although many participants avoided saying a direct “no” to the sales assistants, their reaction to the promotion can be considered one type of non-verbal refusal strategies. Therefore, these participants were trying to soften the refusal act by avoidance, raising their hands, looking once, or nodding. Some of them responded verbally saying “thank you”. However, only three people said a direct “no” that was accompanied with a softener, “thank you”. This indicates that the participants were trying to be polite and this might be the reason for their indirect refusals. In fact, in the second setting (the perfume shop) none of the participants used a direct refusal “no”. Furthermore, these participants did not only avoid refusing because of the face-threat directed to the sales assistants, they also avoided responding and totally ignored the promotion because they were trying to avoid the imposition that was caused by the promotion. In many people’s opinion, these promotions are just a way of imposing a product on the customers. This might explain the reason why most of the participants ignored and tried to avoid the promotion from the beginning. They were actually trying to avoid the imposition as well as the embarrassment they might encounter when they stop to listen to these sales assistants. Some people might not be able to say “no” and so, they end up buying a product they might not need. Therefore, for such people, avoidance might be the best solution.

Moreover, there are different factors that may play an important role in the way people respond to offers and requests in different situations. Formality of the topic, social distance, and power might affect the way in which people choose their refusal strategies (Suzila & Yusri, 2012). Customers usually have more power than sales assistants do because customers have the power to accept or refuse the offer. Therefore, the customers might choose different refusal strategies that need not always be as polite as when they deal with their managers, for instance. This might be another reason for people’s choice to ignore, wave their hands, or nod their heads only. Furthermore, the social distance plays an essential role in the way people refuse promotions. There is no personal relationship between these sales assistants and the customers. Therefore, some people might believe that they do not need to be polite to them since they do not see them frequently and they do not have a major role in their lives. However, some people might feel the opposite. Such people might believe that they should provide a polite image of themselves in front of strangers.

Compared to each other, the participants in both settings (the travel agency and the perfume shop) used the same refusal strategies. However, the number of people who avoided the promotion in the perfume shop was more than those who avoided the promotion in the travel agency. Moreover, the number of people who waved their hands to indicate refusal to the perfume promotion was more than the people who waved their hands in the travel agency. Nonetheless, while none of the participants used “no, thank you” to refuse the perfume promotion, three participants did at the travel agency. Moreover, 10 people smiled and continued walking at the perfume shop compared to one person who did so at the travel agency. This might be related to the fact that the sales assistants at the travel agency were both men whereas the sales assistants in the perfume shop were both young women. Furthermore, the women in the perfume shop were smiling while they were promoting the perfume and asking people to try it. This might have led people to smile back at them even if they wanted to refuse the offer.

Finally, one important finding is related to the use of “thank you” as a refusal. The expression “thank you” is a politeness marker that is often used to indicate gratitude and acceptance. However, in this case it is used to indicate polite refusal. First, this might be due to some cultural transfer from Arabic to English. In the Arabic culture (especially in the Middle East), people use the expression “thank you” to refuse promotions in the market. However, in English, this expression should be accompanied with a gesture to indicate refusal like waving the hand, shaking the head, or simply walking away. Therefore, people need to be aware of these differences in order to be able to communicate effectively and not cause a breakdown in the communication. People seem to use the expression “thank you” to be polite when refusing an offer. Nonetheless, it is essential for this specific expression with different refusal gestures to indicate that it is used for refusal rather than acceptance.

Pedagogical implication

Several authors have touched upon the importance of teaching learners of English as a second or a foreign language the pragmatic aspect of language. The importance of teaching politeness strategies in general and polite refusal strategies to learners of English in the UAE stems from the fact that the community in the UAE is diverse and consists of many intermingling cultures. Therefore, learners might encounter different situations where they need to refuse a request, an offer or a suggestion. These learners need to be equipped with the appropriate strategies to be able to be polite in their refusals in such situations. Avoidance or even non-verbal refusal strategies (as most of the participants in this study did) might not be considered polite in all situations. Therefore, learners need to have a comprehensive understanding of different politeness strategies used in English in general and polite refusal strategies in English in particular. Teachers of English as a second language should indicate to the learners the different ways through which they can refuse certain requests and offers politely. Most importantly, teachers should indicate that the expression “thank you” is a politeness marker that is usually used to express gratitude and acceptance. Therefore, when the learners feel that they might use it as an expression for refusal, it should be accompanied with an indicator of refusal; this might be a hand gesture, a nod, or just simply walking away. Moreover, smiling only, though it is a politeness marker, cannot be used alone to indicate refusal. To be used as a refusal strategy, smiling also should be accompanied with refusal gestures. Teachers of English need to indicate to their students the different uses of each of the politeness strategies explained above. Furthermore, it is highly important to equip English language teachers with the knowledge of the pragmatic aspects of English and the appropriate training to assist them in their mission to explore the pragmatic realms of the English language. Furthermore, Textbook designers need to include different situations where the students would need to refuse an offer, a request or a suggestion. Through these situations, teachers can introduce various activities of different levels to enable students to master the ability of being polite in different situations and eliminate their fear of using the English language in real life situations. These suggestions might help educators, textbook designers, and teachers to improve language learning and achieve the desired outcomes of learning English because language learning is not only learning grammar and structures; it is also about using the language appropriately in community.

Conclusion

To conclude, the current study investigated different people's refusal strategies used to refuse promotions in two separate settings in Dubai, U.A.E. The findings of the study indicate that people tend to use non-verbal refusal strategies more than they use verbal refusals. This might be due to different factors that are related to the various cultural backgrounds mirrored in the community, the level of people's English proficiency that might lead to the fear of using inappropriate forms of refusals, and the various factors that are connected to social distance, power, and the formality of the topic. Another important reason for the findings might be the nature of refusals as face-threatening acts and the nature of promotions that are mostly considered imposition on people's private identities.

Limitations of the study

The results of this study cannot be generalized to include all the communities in which English is used as a medium for communication. One reason for limitation is due to the fact that this small-scales study included only 137 participants in two shopping malls. These people were selected randomly and they were observed only once. Therefore, this small sample might not be representative of the population living in Dubai and in the UAE. Moreover, people's reactions to promotions might differ from one place to another. Therefore, the results of a similar study in another country might not be similar to the findings of this study. Furthermore, the naturalistic method adopted in this study was useful to provide us with real life situations where people acted naturally without the interference of the researcher. However, by adopting this method, the study lacks having any information about the participants. Therefore, this study actually lacks some important information about the cultural backgrounds and the interests of the participants as well as their English language proficiency. This type of information would have helped us gain a better view of the reasons that led the participants to prefer one or another type of refusal strategies.

Suggestions for further studies

Further studies might be helpful to investigate how different cultures might influence people's choice of different refusal strategies. Moreover, some studies might complement this study by selecting a number of participants who might be interviewed to have a view about their backgrounds and to know more about the reasons that might lead them to choose certain types of refusal strategies. Further studies might also be geared towards comparing the refusal strategies that people in Dubai use to those that are used in other diverse communities where English is used as a Lingua Franca.

There is a variety of refusal speech acts as well as non-verbal refusal strategies that are worthy of exploring and studying. Exploring refusal strategies and finding out the most effective and polite ways to refuse an offer or a suggestion would enable English teachers to guide second language learners to communicate more politely and effectively in any community.

About the Author:

Nour Al Okla is an English language instructor at Al Ghurair University in the United Arab Emirates. Her teaching and research interests include academic writing, learner motivation, material development, and language testing.

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