

**The Realization of Refusal Strategies by Parents and Children in
The Family Domain
(A Case Study)**

By:

Anisah Septiany

English Language and Literature Program

(E-mail: anisah.septiany@gmail.com / Mobile: 085659205178)

Anisah graduated in February 2013 from Linguistic Major at English Language and Literature Study Program,
Indonesia University of Education Bandung

Abstract

This study was aimed to discover the realization of refusal strategies by parents and children when refusing requests in a family domain. This study engaged a family including a father, a mother, and two children as the subject of the study. Observation was conducted by recording and noting some conversations in order to collect the data. The collected data were analyzed by applying a theory proposed by Aziz (2000). The theory was used to analyze the types of refusal strategies. The findings reveal that there are ten out of eleven strategies proposed by Aziz found in the family domain. Parents tend to use *giving reason or explanation, showing hesitation and offering alternative strategy* in their refusal statements whereas children mostly apply *showing hesitation, giving reason or explanation, and postponements strategy*. The result shows that power asymmetry in speaker-hearer relationship between parents-children and the hearers influence the selection of refusal strategies. The strategy of *giving an explanation and reason* is used by both parents and children frequently when refusing powerful hearers' requests while *hesitation strategy* is applied when refusing the requests from equal power hearers. It is discovered that in terms of the nature of request, both parents and children have similar tendency to use *giving reason and explanation strategy* when refusing high imposition nature of request.

Keywords: *Refusal, Refusal Strategies, Requests, Speaker-Hearer Relationship, Nature of Request*

INTRODUCTION

People as public-spirited individual need each other to help them living as a part of social community in order to fulfill their needs. As a part of community, people are required to interact and communicate with one another. When communicating, their utterances may contain hidden meanings and motives. Pragmatics as the study of meaning in interaction (Yule, 1996) covers theories that relate to the meaning behind words in linguistics field. One of the theories studied in pragmatics is speech acts theory. Searle (1976:16) defines speech acts as the basic units of linguistic communication that take part as the media which contains acts including refusal.

Refusal refers to a disapproval of the idea of hearers and the threat to hearers' face (Beebe *et. al.*, 1990 as cited Campillo, Safont-Jorda & Codina-Espurs, 2009). Refusals are categorized as commissive speech acts since it consists of speakers' commitment to perform action (Searle, 1977 as cited in Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). According to Aziz (2000), refusal is a negative

response towards directives speech acts including suggestions, request, offer, command, invitation, and suggestions. Reasons and explanations are necessary to be shown in refusal statements (Hassani, Mardani, & Dastjerdi, 2011) since the speakers break hearers' expectation toward something (Chen, 1996 as cited in Campillo, Safont-Jorda, & Codina-Espurz, 2009). Thus, performing refusal can be seen as a face-threatening act to the hearers and it requires high ability in pragmatic competence as well as in understanding it.

Application of refusal strategies is divided into three sequences namely pre refusal strategy, main refusal, and post refusal strategy (Hassani, Mardani, & Dastjerdi, 2011). Pre refusal strategy deals with the utterances uttered from the speakers as the preparation for the hearers for upcoming refusal. Main refusal bears the refusal. Post refusal strategy emphasizes, mitigates, and concludes the main refusal. Refusing something is realized through direct refusal

strategy as well as indirect refusal strategy (Beebe *et al.*, 1990 as cited in Hassani, Mardani, & Dastjerdi, 2011). According to Félix-Brasdefer (2008:43), direct refusal strategy “no” response expresses clarity and precision. This strategy seems appropriate to be used in delivering the terse refusal since it does not show hints or platitudes which may lead to misunderstanding from the hearers. Moreover, expressing refusal directly is considered as threatening action and blunt response towards hearers’ face since it may hurt their face where as expressing indirect refusal may maintain hearers’ face as well as their feeling.

Indirect strategy expresses ambiguity since it performs the degree of ‘hint’ of refusal in order to avoid negative effect of direct strategy (Beebe *et al.*, 1990 as cited in Hassani, Mardani, & Dastjerdi, 2011). Indirect statements of refusal may involve some extended specific strategies as hint or supportive to refuse. Indirect strategy is mostly used in refusing something with purpose to save the hearers’ face (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008:43). In

indirect refusal strategy, the main refusal is hidden in the refusers’ responses. Moreover, indirect strategy can be divided into some categorical strategies including showing the statement of regret, wish, excuse or reason or explanation, statement of alternative, set condition strategies, attempt to dissuade hearers, acceptance functions strategies, avoidance refusal strategies (Beebe *et. al.*, 1990).

To add more, Aziz (2000) who conducted a study of Indonesia refusal strategies and politeness implication classifies refusal strategies categorically into some numbers of strategies namely *direct NO, hesitation and lack of enthusiasm, offering an alternative, postponement, general acceptance with excuse, giving reason and explanation, conditional YES, complaining and criticizing, putting the blame on a third party, questioning the justification of a request, and threatening.*

This study was aimed to discover the realization of strategy in refusing request commonly used by

parents and children in a family domain including the differences of strategies performed by them with reference to speaker-hearer relationship and the nature of request. The study used case study in qualitative methods since qualitative methods are intended to investigate life history of people, their daily live behavior (Silverman, 2006:34) or cultural information and social identification (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Case study was conducted in order to describe the realization of refusal speech acts applied in the family domain. According to Frechtling and Westat (2010), case study examines a small number of community descriptively where the investigator itself be part in community's life.

A nucleus family including father, mother and two children, and also extended family including *uwa* 'aunt' and grandmother were chosen as the subject of the study. This study observed the refusal strategies used by the father, mother, and two children as a nucleus family when communicating with each other as well as with the extended family

members. The data were collected by conducting the technique of observation from June until October 2012. The observation technique involved audio recording and transcription to re-track the data, and field note to provide more in depth background or to help the observer remembers salient events.

THE REALIZATION OF REFUSAL STRATEGIES USED IN FAMILY DOMAIN

Based on the data, there are ten types of refusal strategies applied in the conversation in a family domain as presented below.




Table 1 The Distribution of Categorical Refusal Strategy used by Parents and Children in a Family Domain

No	Strategy	Frequency				Total	P (%)
		Parents		Children			
		F	P (%)	F	P (%)		
1	Direct NO	7	10.94	3	4.69	10	7.81
2	Hesitation and lack of enthusiasm	11	17.19	16	25.00	27	21.09
3	Offering an alternative	11	17.19	8	12.50	19	14.84
4	Postponement	6	9.37	9	14.06	15	11.72
5	General acceptance with excuse	2	3.12	5	7.81	7	5.47
6	Giving reason and explanation	12	18.75	12	18.75	24	18.75
7	Conditional YES	3	4.69	5	7.81	8	6.25
8	Complaining and criticizing	2	3.13	1	1.56	3	2.34
9	Put the blame on third party	4	6.25	3	4.69	7	5.47
10	Questioning and justification of a request	6	9.37	2	3.12	8	6.25
11	Threatening.	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	64	100	64	100	128	100

F: Frequency

P (%): Percentage

Note:

-  The most common used strategy.
-  The second common used strategy.
-  The third common used strategy.

From eleven refusal strategies as proposed by Aziz (2000), the most frequent strategy used in a family domain is *hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* strategy (21.09%). By applying this strategy, the speaker does not show the rejection directly, but they let the hearer know their unwillingness through the lack of enthusiasm expression (Aziz, 2000). This means that generally family

members let feelings intervene in their activity including when expressing refusal since *hesitation* strategy indicates the carefulness and harmless attitude of the speakers to refuse a request. Then, *giving reason and explanation* places the second most frequent strategy (18.75%). The utilizing of *giving reason and explanation* in a family domain strengthens the theory that almost

refusal strategies research result *giving excuse and reason* to as the most frequent of realization of refusal strategies (Al-Issa, 1998; Al-Shalawi, 1997; Beckers, 1999 cited in Felix-Brasdefer, 2010). Thus, *giving excuse and reason* is seen as the universal tendency element found in expressing refusal (Brumark, 2003). The findings result the absence of *threatening* strategy in the family domain. This means that every members of family avoid acting harmful since this strategy contains displeasing criticism (Aziz, 2000).

According to Table 1, parents tend to use *giving reason and explanation* strategy (18.7%). Example response [a] illustrates the use of *giving reason and explanation* strategy in father's responses.

Response [a]: In a family visit, mother refused child #1's request to stay in *uwa* 'aunt's house instead of accompanying father to office.

[a] 'I am afraid your dad will drive at speed, especially if he is in hurry like this. There must be someone who warns him. It is worrying.'

In [a], the mother explains her fear about the father's situation by saying 'I am afraid your dad will drive at speed' to child #1. Through this utterance, the mother explains that she is worried about the father's safety since he must drive in hurry. The mother's consideration regarding the father's safety is seen as the reason and explanation if her inability to do the request. *Hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* and *offering an alternative* share the second rank (17.2%). *Offering an alternative* strategy can be identified in the utterances which contain the alternative ideas to substitute the request. By offering an alternative, parents are likely to show their cooperative act to be responsible in fulfilling the interlocutors' needs. Based on the distribution of the three strategies used by parents frequently, it can be observed that they seem to show their logical and rational side which is indicated by the selection of *giving reason and explanation* and *offering an alternative* action and shows their consideration on the interlocutor's feeling by letting the emotions intervene their refusal as

shown in *hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* strategy.

According to Table 1, children apply *hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* strategy as the most frequent strategy (25.00%). Example response [b] illustrates the use of *hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* strategy in child #2's response.

Response [b]: On their way home when the child #2 asked the father to drop him in his friend's house, he refused mother's request to go home before dark.

[b] 'Insya Allah. Let us see. Hehehe.'

In [b], the child #2 who was asked to come home before the dark refused by saying 'Insya Allah. Let us see'. The utterance 'Let us see' shows the doubt from the child #2 to come early. The child #2 did not give certainty whether he would come home before dark or not. Thus, as the elaboration above, *hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* strategy is identified. *Giving reason and explanation* strategy is regarded as the second common strategy used by children in a family domain (18.75%). *Postponement* strategy gets

the third rank of the common strategy used by children. Based on the distribution of the three strategies used by children frequently, it can be observed that they are likely to show rejection through showing feeling and postponing.

THE DIFFERENCES OF PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S REFUSAL ALONG THE DIMENSION OF SPEAKER-HEARER RELATIONSHIP

In this study, it is observed that speaker-hearer relationship in the family domain is significant in the use of refusal strategy. Speaker-hearer relationship can be observed by analyzing their social variable including power possession. In this study, the power variable discussed was based on the status of the participants in family structure including parents, children, grandmother and *uwa* 'aunt'. There were three types of power possessed by the hearers namely less power, equal and more power. Based on these power determination possessed

by the hearers, then the relationship between the speaker and the hearers were identified in threetypes of power relations namely *lowerpower relation* (when the speaker refuses a request from less power hearer), *equal relation* (when the speaker refuses a request from equal power hearer) and *higher power relation* (when the speaker refuses a request from more power hearer).

Based on the grouping of hearers' types faced by the parents and the children, both parties faced two same groups of hearers including

equal and higher hearers. It is because the children did not meet the participants belong to lower status. Because of that, the children are seen as the lowest status in the family domain. The differences of categorical refusal strategies used by both parties in two types of power relations are presented in the following table.

Table 2 Differences between Parents' and Children's Categorical Refusal Strategies in 2 Types of Speaker-Hearer Relationship

No	Strategies	Distribution of Strategies used by Parents and Children in 2 Types of Speaker-Hearers Relationship							
		Equal				Higher			
		Parents		Children		Parents		Children	
		P (%)	R	P (%)	R	P (%)	R	P (%)	R
1	Direct NO	6.25	4	6.25	4	6.25	4	4.17	7
2	Hesitation and lack of enthusiasm	25.00	1	37.50	1	25.00	2	20.83	2
3	Offering an alternative	18.75	2	0	5	12.50	3	16.67	3
4	Postponement	18.75	2	4.69	2	0	5	12.50	4
5	General acceptance with excuse	6.25	4	12.50	3	6.25	4	6.25	6
6	Giving reason and explanation	12.50	3	6.25	4	31.25	1	22.92	1
7	Conditional YES	6.25	4	6.25	4	6.25	4	8.33	5
8	Complaining and criticizing	0	5	0	5	0	5	2.08	8
9	Put the blame on third party	0	5	0	5	12.50	3	6.35	6
10	Questioning and justification of a request	6.25	4	12.50	3	0	5	0	9

P: Percentage

R: Rank

Note:

	The most common used strategy
	The second common used strategy

Table 2 displays the differences of categorical refusal strategies applied by the parents and children in the dimension of power differences in speaker-hearer relationship. When facing the equal power hearers, the parents and the children prefer using *hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* and *postponement* strategy. It is observed from the similar rank resulted in both selection of strategies. Using *hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* indicates that when refusing a request, the parents and the children are sharing the feelings of unwillingness and hesitation to the equal power possession hearers. Applying *postponement* strategy in refusal statements shows parents' and children's willingness and intentions to fulfill the request but they give options of the time of execution about the request. This means that both parents and the children are willingly to fulfill the request but in other times.

The different result is drawn in higher power relations. In higher power relation, both parents and children have a similar tendency in choosing the refusal strategies. It is detected that *giving the reason and explanation* and *hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* are considered as the common strategies in refusing the higher power hearers. This means that as the powerless party, the parents and children may feel obligate to elaborate their reason behind the refusal without directly reject the request. By providing the reason when refusing the more power hearers, they elaborate the reason as clear as they could with purpose to refuse the request without hurting the hearers' face. *Giving the reason and explanation* help the powerful hearers to save their face since the speakers elaborate the reason of their rejection.

When refusing a request from powerful hearers and equal power hearers, the parents and the children

tend to make the refusal statements indirect as their way to show their appreciation towards the hearers. Reducing the harm of the refusal effect can be done by using hedging. It is observed that hedging may contain reduction of the speakers' position and acknowledgment sense before performing the main refusal. The example [c] illustrates the use of hedging in refusal statement.

[c] 'I would say, if you want to buy big size pants, then go to DSE instead. They sell many big size pants that cannot be found here.'

The statement above refers to the response from the child #1 refusing the mother's request. In statement [c], 'I would say' is identified as the hedging. This shows the speaker's awareness of her

position as the powerless party. In order not to cross her position in front of the hearers, the speaker used this utterance as the way to show the mother that a solution given is an advice which does not have to be approved.

THE DIFFERENCES OF PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S REFUSAL ALONG THE DIMENSIONS OF THE NATURE OF REQUEST

Regarding to the dimension of the nature of request, parents and children meet request with threedifferent degrees of impositions namely low, medium, and high. The following table shows the realization of refusal strategies along the nature of request.

Table 3 Differences between Parents' and Children's Categorical Refusal Strategies along the Nature of Request

No	Strategies	Categorical Refusal Strategies used by Parents and Children in 3 Types Nature of Request											
		Low				Medium				High			
		Parents		Children		Parents		Children		Parents		Children	
		P (%)	R	P (%)	R	P (%)	R	P (%)	R	P (%)	R	P (%)	R
1	Direct NO	23.08	2	4.17	5	0	6	3.23	5	16	3	11.11	3
2	Hesitation and lack of enthusiasm	15.38	3	29.17	1	0	6	22.58	1	20	2	22.22	2
3	Offering an alternative	23.08	2	12.5	3	23.08	1	16.13	3	8	4	0	4
4	Postponement	7.69	4	12.5	3	19.23	2	19.36	2	0	6	0	4
5	General acceptance	0	5	8.33	4	3.85	5	9.67	4	4	5	0	4

	with excuse												
6	Giving reason and explanation	30.77	1	25	2	3.85	5	9.67	4	28	1	33.33	1
7	Conditional YES	0	5	0	6	11.54	3	16.13	3	0	6	0	4
8	Complaining and criticizing	0	5	4.17	5	7.69	4	0	6	0	6	0	4
9	Put the blame on third party	0	5	4.17	5	7.69	4	3.23	5	8	4	11.11	3
10	Questioning and justification of a request	0	5	0	6	7.69	4	0	6	16	3	22.22	2

P: Percentage

R: Rank

Note:

- The most common used strategy
- The second common used strategy

Table 3 shows the differences of categorical refusal strategies applied by the parents and children along the dimension of the nature of request. According to Table 3, parents use *giving reason and explanation* strategy in refusing low ranking of request while the children apply *hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* strategy. When refusing requests with medium request, the parents tend to use *offering an alternative* strategy and the children prefer using *hesitation and lack of enthusiasm* strategy. The same result is found in the implementation of categorical refusal strategy in refusing high ranking of the nature of request. Both parents and children are likely to refuse by *giving reason and explanation* as supportive

statements to strengthen their refusal. Based on the distribution of the chosen categorical refusal strategy, it can be observed that the nature of request influences the selection of the refusal applications.

The nature of request influences the utterances uttered by the speaker in refusing a request. The characteristics of the words in refusal statements carry out the value of the request requested to the refuser. This assumption is illustrated in the example response [d].

Response [d]: A response from the child #1 when being asked to invite the *uwa* ‘aunt’ to Bosscha Observatory

[d] ‘Regarding to the rule, the public visitors can do an observation, if it is on certain schedules. If it is not on

group visit, then, it is on open house schedule.'

In [d], the child #1 gave a reason by making reference to official regulation. The hedging 'regarding to the rule' which is considered as the source of the inability implicitly carries out the child #1's control of nothing. This means in refusing high imposition nature of request, the speaker tries to referring the inability to strong source as the alibi.

CONCLUSIONS

Parents tend to use *giving reason or explanation, showing hesitation and offering alternative strategy* in refusal statements, while children apply *showing hesitation, giving reason or explanation, and postponements strategy*. The result shows that power asymmetry in speaker-hearer relationship among participants and the nature of request influence the application of refusal strategies in a family domain.

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