



THE USE OF REFUSAL STRATEGIES IN WORK PLACE SETTING IN STIA LAN BANDUNG

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to find out the refusal strategies in work place setting by 10 employees of STIA LAN Bandung. The questionnaire used was Discourse Comprehension Test (DCT) developed by Beebe et al (1990) in 12 different situations. The participants were asked to refusing 12 different situations to someone who comes from higher, equal, and lower status. The findings of this study show that the participants mostly used indirect strategies in refusing someone's request depend on the status in the work place. The findings also shown that the participants use 6 different strategies relate with 'saving face' and the highest percentage is regret strategy and the lowest percentage is 'other' strategy. In conclusion, the participants use different strategies; direct strategies to the lower status and indirect strategies to the equal and higher status.

Keywords: *refusal strategies, Discourse Comprehension Test*

1. INTRODUCTION

Most people have difficulties in refusing someone's order, especially in workplace setting. The difficulties happened because of the situation and the power relation between people in the work place. Besides the situation and the power relation, politeness also takes place. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness is one of the most important symbolic values to be socialized in our daily encounters as all cultures value politeness.

Politeness theory as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) provides one perspective on face work and face-threatening acts. Politeness is defined as behavior which takes into account a person's "face needs", a concept which derived from the work of Goffman (1967) and developed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

According to Brown and Levinson's theory (1987), politeness involves showing concern for two different kinds of face needs. First is negative face needs, or the need for privacy and distance from others, and second, positive face needs, the need to be approved of, liked, and admired.

Relate with "face needs", many investigations have been conducted about the strategy of refusing as a politeness strategy or an attempt to 'save face' when

refusing, e.g. Beebe *et al*, 1990; Nelson *et al*, 2002; Johnson, Roloff, *et al* 2004. In 'saving face' person do in different ways, especially when he or she is in the workplace setting. This study investigates the using of refusing strategy as a politeness strategy in workplace by employee in workplace.

2. METHODOLOGY

Subject

The participants of this study were 10 employees of STIA LAN Bandung. The participants were given a questionnaire consist of 12 situations, where in each situation, the participants should made a refusal to someone in higher status, equal status, and lower status in working situation.

Procedure

All the participants were asked 12 different situations in a questionnaire in a form of Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The DCT is a form of questionnaire depicting some natural situations which the participants are expected to respond making refusals. This test was originally designed by Blum-Kulka in 1982. The questionnaire used in this study was divided into twelve different situations where the situation was based on the refusal made to someone in higher status, equal status and lower status in work place situation.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the Discourse Completion Test are analyzed based on independent examination of each response. The answer to the questions filled in the questionnaire by the participants have been conceived based on their values, understanding of social contexts, rules, and appropriateness (cited in Okto 2006) which would most likely be the basis of their actual responses. The data analysis was conducted by marking each answer with the classification of strategies suggested by Beebe *et al*:1990 (cited in Okto, 2008). The classification categories are:

1. Direct refusal (e.g., I can't, I don't want to, no)
2. Indirect strategies
 - a. Reason (e.g. I have another appointment, I have to finish my homework)
 - b. White lie; A reason which is not in accordance with the true reason or situation given in the DCT
 - c. Consideration of interlocutor's feelings (e.g., thank you)
 - d. Suggestion of willingness (e.g., I'll do it next time, make it next time)
 - e. Suggestion (of solution) (e.g., why don't you ask B? I think he'll love to go. You can try and get a loan from the bank)
 - f. Let interlocutor (e.g., it's ok, don't bother)
 - g. Statement of regret (e.g., I'm so sorry)
 - h. Hedging (e.g., oh, I'm not sure)
 - i. Statement of Principle (e.g., I don't believe in dieting)

- j. Criticize the request/requester (e.g., you know I don't like jazz, why did you buy me a ticket?!)
- k. Request (e.g., I'm sorry I can't watch the concert, but may I have the ticket and give it to my sister? Or I'm sorry, I am not interested in Multi level marketing, can you just loan me some money?)
- l. Other (e.g., wah, waduh, walah, aduh, particles used to intensify surprise, appreciation or criticism)

Then, I coded the answer using those categories and I percentage it. The table of calculations uses to reveal the similarities and differences in refusal strategies used by the participants when they are make refusal to the same or different status.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1

Direct and Indirect Strategies used in refusal in workplace setting

Participants	Direct Refusal	Indirect Refusal
10 Employees	9.72%	82.37%

From the table above, we can see that most participants were used indirect strategies in refusing in work place setting. In the table 2, it clearer that the highest percentage of indirect strategies used is the strategy in showing regret. It is similar to the findings on Nelson et al (2002) as cited in Okto (2006) on Americans, most Indonesian respondents use expressions of regret such as 'maaf' (I'm sorry), 'sori banget' (I'm so sorry) as a 'Face-saving' strategy when refusing. In Nelson et al findings, Egyptians and Americans primarily use five indirect strategies in refusing.

But in this study, the participants used 6 indirect strategies; regret, reason, suggestion of willingness, suggestion of solution, requesting, and the last is 'other', which is the highest indirect strategies is in showing regret, and the lowest strategy used is 'other' strategy.

The Direct Strategies Used

As seen in the table 2 (appendix), the participants less in using the direct strategies. speakers use direct strategies when they refuse the request from the interlocutor who comes from lower status. The speaker uses his or her power to refuse the request directly. As cited in Aziz (2000) the term relative power refers to the degree of power which a speaker can impose on a hearer.

According to Brown and Gilman "one person may be said to have power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behavior of the other. Power is a relationship between at least two persons, and it is nonreciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behavior" (1960:255).

e.g. Situasi 3

Kerjakan saja sendiri!

(Do it yourself!)

Saya ga bisa bantu, lagi ada pekerjaan, sibuk!

(I can't help you, I have work to do, I'm busy)

Coba saya lihat, wah ini sih gampang! Kamu kerjain sendiri aja ya. Saya mau pulang klo sekarang.

(May I see, oh it is very easy! Do by yourself. I want to go home now)

The Indirect Strategies Used

First Strategy: Regret

Most the participants use expressions 'maaf pak', 'duh, sori..'to express apologize before they refuse the request.

e.g. Situation 1

'maaf, Pak'

(Sorry, Sir).

Apakah pekerjaan ini boleh saya kerjakan dirumah? Karena saya ada acara yang sangat penting.

(Can I do this job in my house? Because I have an important occasion)

From this example, it can take conclusion that the participants use expression of apologize before they do refusal. An expression of regret, helps people to 'save face' when refusing since the interlocutor may not interpret the refusal as a rejection. Usually, after the speaker use '*maaf*' (sorry), the speaker followed the expression by given an explanation to the interlocutor.

The Second Strategy: Reason

In general, giving reason is the most strategy used in refusing the interlocutor's request. Giving reason is considered very important when refusing. Most participants used giving reason strategy in refusing the interlocutor's request.

e.g. Situation 7

Sebenarnya saya akan membayar tagihan telepon dan harus hari ini dibayarkan karna dah nunggak selama 2 bulan dan kalau tidak dibayar hari ini jalur telepon akan dicabut.

(Actually I'm going to pay the telephone bill and it should be paid today because it hasn't been paid for 2 months and if I don't pay today it will be disconnected)



The Third Strategy: Suggestion of Willingness

The fourth most frequently used among the participants is communicating willingness.

e.g. Situation 8

Seandainya saya bisa membantumu. Untuk saat ini saya belum bisa membantumu.

(I wish I can help you. But for now, I can't help you)

In this strategy, the participant use expressing of willingness to 'save face', because it is important for the speaker to give understanding to the interlocutor that the refusal is caused by the speaker's inability to fulfill the interlocutor's request.

The Fourth Strategy: Suggestion of Solution

In this fourth strategy, the participants refuse the interlocutor's request by giving solution to the problem. Most the participants seen the suggestion of solution as the effective strategy in refusing the interlocutor's request without losing 'face'.

e.g. Situation 3

Saya harus segera pulang, jikalau anda mengalami kesulitan dalam mengerjakan rancangan project ini, coba anda minta bantuan rekan anda ya!

I need to go home now, if you find some difficulties in doing this design project, please try to ask for help to your partner!

The Fifth Strategy: Requesting

This indirect strategy used by the speaker to avoid directly says 'no' to the interlocutor's request, so the speaker pretends not understand of the interlocutor's request. As Aziz (2000) said that the speaker uses this strategy generally as a means of ensuring whether or not what he/she has heard is correct.

e.g. Situation 9

Untuk apa?

(For what?)

Penting ga pak?

(Is it important?)

The Sixth Strategy: 'Other'

This strategy mostly used discourse marker or pragmatic particle such as 'wah, ah, aduh, waduh, ihh, idih.' Beside that, the speaker sometimes uses their mother language in refusing the interlocutor's request when the speaker feels he/she has close relationship.

e.g. Situation 8

Waduh,,saya lagi gak ada uang nih. Coba pinjem ke yang lain.

(Oh..I don't have any money. Please try to somebody else)

Percanten ah bapak mah..

(I believe in you..)

The word '*waduh*' does not change the meaning of the response, as any pragmatic particle does (Holker, 1991 as cited in Okto, 2006). It adds an expression of emotion of the speaker to the interlocutor that may intensify the degree of regret or surprise. The mother language used by the speaker as a response in refusing interlocutor's request also seen as one of the close relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor.

4. CONCLUSION

In refusing, especially in work place setting, people use different strategies. Most people use indirect strategies to interlocutor who comes from higher status, but for interlocutor who come from equal status or lower status, the speaker use direct strategies. The highest strategy used by the participants in this study is expression of regret, where most Indonesian, and participants in particular to express their regret or to apologize before they refuse the requests or offers.

The last strategy used by the participants in this study is 'other' strategy. In this strategy, the participants used particle expression to show their uncertainty of their response. This strategy also shows that the speaker is unable to refuse directly. The findings show that direct refusals may not always be interpreted as impolite, since in some cases the degree of politeness are varies depend on the intonation, context, and the degree of closeness of the speaker and the interlocutor relationship.

5. REFERENCES

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APENDIX

P	Direct	Reason	White lie	Consideration of requester's feeling	Suggestion of willingness	Suggestion of solution	Off-hook	Regret	Hedging	Statement of principles	Criticizing interlocutor	Requesting	Other
1	-	16.66%	16.66%	-	16.66%	-	-	33.33%	-	-	-	-	16.66%
2	-	33.33%	-	-	16.66%	-	-	25%	8.33%	-	-	-	16.66%
3	-	8.33%	-	-	25%	41.66%	-	16.66%	-	-	-	8.33%	-
4	25%	8.33%	-	-	2.5%	8.33%	-	8.33%	-	8.33%	-	25%	-
5	16.66%	16.66%	-	-	8.33%	-	-	8.33%	8.33%	-	-	25%	16.66%
6	8.33%	8.33%	25%	-	25%	-	-	16.66%	-	-	-	8.33%	8.33%
7	16.66%	16.66%	8.33%	-	-	25%	-	16.66%	-	-	-	8.33%	-
8	8.33%	8.33%	-	-	-	16.66%	-	-	-	8.33%	8.33%	16.66%	33.33%
9	25%	16.66%	8.33%	-	-	8.33%	-	16.66%	-	8.33%	8.33%	-	-
10	16.66%	16.66%	8.33%	-	16.66%	16.66%	-	16.66%	-	-	-	-	-
Mean													
s of	11.66	14.99%	6.66%	-	13.33%	11.66%	-	15.82%	8.33%	2.49%	8.33%	9.16%	9.16%
percentage	%												