

## REFUSAL STRATEGIES TO INVITATION BY NATIVE AND NON NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

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### ABSTRACT

*In Javanese context, refusal tends to threat the feelings and self worth of addressees while in British, refusal is not normally face threatening or at least it is not as face threatening as it is in the Javanese context. This paper compares sequencing of semantic formulae and adjuncts of refusal to invitations phrased by native speakers of British English and Javanese learners of English. The data of refusal are elicited through written discourse completion tasks (DCT) involving nine scenarios. Refusal strategies are classified based on a modified version of refusal taxonomy by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990). Overall the refusal strategies employed by the two groups are similar. Few differences in sequencing of semantic fomulae and adjuncts of refusal are due to politeness function.*

**Keywords:** *refusal, sequential order, semantic formula, adjunct.*

### ABSTRAK

*Dalam konteks masyarakat Jawa, penolakan cenderung mengancam perasaan dan harga diri petutur, sementara dalam kontek masyarakat Inggris, penolakan cenderung tidak mengancam muka positif petutur, meskipun dalam kontek tertentu penolakan juga dapat mengancam wajah positif namun efeknya tidak begitu serius. Makalah ini membandingkan sekuensi dan frekuensi penggunaan semantic formula dan adjunct dalam tindak tutur penolakan yang dilakukan oleh penutur asli bahasa Inggris dan penutur bahasa Jawa pembelajar bahasa Inggris. Strategi penolakan yang digunakan oleh penutur asli bahasa Jawa juga disajikan guna melihat apakah strategi yang berbeda yang digunakan oleh pembelajar bahasa Inggris merupakan pengaruh dari strategi bahasa ibu. Data penelitian diperoleh melalui discourse completion task (DCT) yang melibatkan sembilan skenario percakapan. Strategi penolakan diklasifikasikan berdasarkan pada taksonomi penolakan oleh Beebe, Takahashi, dan Uliss-Weltz (1990). Hasil studi menunjukkan bahwa strategi pragmalinguistik tindak tutur penolakan yang digunakan oleh kedua kelompok penutur pada umumnya sama, meskipun strategi yang digunakan oleh pembelajar bahasa Inggris juga ada yang berbeda, khususnya semantic formula dan adjunct yang digunakan untuk mengungkapkan kesantunan.*

**Kata Kunci:** *tindak tutur penolakan, sequential order, semantic formula, adjunct.*

## 1. Introduction

Speech act of refusal is interesting to be studied for a number of reasons: its strategies are culturally specific (Yang, 2008; Liao and Bresnahan, 1996) and it is sensitive to different social status and initiating acts (Al-Kahtani, 2005; Nelson, Carson, Al-Batal, and El-Bakary, 2002; Kwon, 2004). Refusal is intrinsically a face threatening act (Brown and Levinson, 1987) which has been considered as “a sticking point” by native and non native speakers (Beebe, Takahashi, Uliss-Weltz, 1990). There have been some studies on EFL refusals strategies, yet they mostly covered Japanese EFL; those from other cultural backgrounds need to be studied and hence this present study is pertinent. This present study also considers the claim of Nelson et al. (2002:164) that ‘cross cultural study of speech acts is important to provide background knowledge of speech act strategies of both L1 and L2 by which possible pragmatic failure could be predicted whether as the results from L1 transfer or from other resources’.

The research questions addressed in this paper were whether the Javanese learners of English and native speakers of English used similar or different sequencing of semantic formulae and adjuncts and whether they used similar or different frequencies of semantic formulae and adjuncts.

A number of refusal responses have been classified relating to varied initiating acts of refusals. Early refusal responses are classified by Labov and Fanshel (1977) on the speech act of request including two categories: putting off a request by which the speakers try to do verbal avoidance and refusing a request with explanation (e.g. ‘I can’t, I have to work late’) or without explanation (‘I can’t’). More elaborated classifications of refusal to request are proposed by Turnbull and Saxton (1997) which include five general strategies: (1) negate request (e.g. ‘I don’t think so’) (2) performative refusals (e.g. ‘I better say no to this then’) (3)

indicative unwillingness (e.g. ‘I really don’t think I want to do that one’) (4) negated inability, (e.g. I don’t think I should’) and (5) identify impending statement (e.g. ‘I have to work on Saturday’). The strategies of *initial* and *subsequent* refusals are identified as responses to offers (Barron, 2003: 129–130). Initial refusal is the first declination in interactional exchanges whereas subsequent refusal is realized at subsequent interactional turns other than the first refusal. Initial refusal is classified into two types: (a) ritual refusal which is commonly used by speakers to show politeness and (b) substantive refusal that is genuine refusal. Ritual refusal is always followed by either subsequent refusal or an acceptance in a later move. Subsequent refusal usually takes the form of a substantive refusal or further ritual refusal.

Some other general or universal refusal responses are proposed to respond various types of speech act. For example, *non-accept* responses are proposed by Gass and Houck (1999:3-5) as general strategies to respond wide ranges of initiating acts of refusals such as request, invitation, offer, and suggestion. The non-accept responses occur when other interlocutors do not concur to the initiating acts and hence may result in further discussion or negotiation. However when the initiator or the first speaker agrees with the non-acceptance, the negotiation will be settled. If the non-accept response is not agreed by the initiator or the first speaker it will be resolved in the next negotiation to reach a final resolution. The outcomes can be a refusal, postponement, and alternatives. More elaborated classifications of refusal strategies are proposed by Rubin (1983) including: (1) be silent, hesitate, show a lack of enthusiasm, (2) offer an alternative, (3) postponement, (4) put the blame on a third party or something over which you have no control, (5) avoidance, (6) general acceptance of an offer but giving no details, (7) divert and distract the addressee, (8) general acceptance with excuses, and (9) say what is offered is

inappropriate suggested. These classifications have provided a fundamental concept for the most seminal refusal strategies proposed by Beebe et al. (1990).

Beebe et al. (1990) categorize refusal strategies in two broad categories: direct and indirect refusals. They break down refusal responses into semantic formulae that is the main utterances to perform refusal and adjuncts to refusal that is utterances which by themselves do not express refusal but go with the semantic formulae to provide particular effects to the given refusal. A direct refusal strategy consists of either:

- a. A performative refusal (e.g. 'I refuse')
- b. A non-performative statement expressing negative willingness or inability and "No" directly (e.g. 'I can't', 'I don't think so, 'No').

An indirect strategy is expressed by means of one or more semantic formulae, of which the following are the most common types:

- a. Apology/regret. (e.g., 'I'm sorry ...', 'I feel terrible ...' etc)
- b. Wish. It is conducted by wishing that an interlocutor could do something. (e.g. 'I wish I could go to your party')
- c. Excuse, reason, explanation for not complying. (e.g. 'My children will be home that night'; 'I have a headache')
- d. Statement (offer or suggestion) of an alternative. (e.g. I can do X instead of Y e.g., 'I'd rather ...', 'I'd prefer ...'; Why don't you do X instead of Y e.g., 'Why don't you ask someone else?')
- e. Set conditions for future acceptance. It is performed by providing a condition over the acceptance of an invitation, offer, and suggestion. (e.g. 'if I am not busy, I will...; if you asked me earlier, I would have...')
- f. Promise of future acceptance. (e.g. "I'll do next time")
- g. Statement of principle. It is a statement of an interlocutor's a standard or rule of per-

sonal conduct (e.g. 'I never do business with friend')

- h. Statement of philosophy. It is a statement of a personal outlook or view point (e.g. 'one can't be too careful; things break any way; this kind of things happen')
- i. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor with some strategies such as stating negative consequences to the requester (e.g. 'I won't be any fun tonight.') or a guilt trip (e.g. 'I can't make a living off people who just order coffee' said by waitress to a customer who wants to sit a while) or a criticism on the request or the requester (e.g. 'that's a terrible idea'.) or a request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request or letting off a hook (e.g. 'That's okay') or a self-defence (e.g. 'I'm doing my best'.)
- j. Acceptance that functions as a refusal. Instead of refusing at first hand, interlocutors initiate their refusals by giving an acceptance to the invitation, offer and suggestion. (e.g. 'yes, but...; Ok I will but...; alright I would go, but..)
- k. Avoidance: This may be expressed by means of a verbal act (such as changing the subject, joking, or hedging), or by means of a non-verbal act (such as silence, hesitation, or physical departure).

In addition Beebe et al. (1990) identify four adjuncts that may be added to either of the two basic strategies:

- a. Positive opinion/feeling/agreement (e.g. 'that's a good idea/ I'd love to...')
- b. Empathy (e.g. 'I realize you are in a difficult situation')
- c. Fillers (e.g. 'uhh', 'well', 'oh', 'uhm')
- d. Gratitude/appreciation (e.g. 'thanks')

Some other semantic formulae complemented the taxonomy of Beebe et al. (1990) are proposed by Gass and Houck (1999) including: (1) *confirmation* in which refusers restate or elaborate their previous refusal responses (2) *request for clarification* which

is used by refusers as a verbal avoidance, and (3) *agreement* which is employed by refusers when they are finally unable to re-fuse. Some others are proposed by Kwon (2004), for example *passive negative willingness*, *saying I tries/considered*, *statement of solidarity*, *elaboration on the reason*, *statement of relinquishment*, and *asking a question*.

A recent classification of refusal responses based mainly on the taxonomy of Beebe et al. (1990) is that of Campillo (2009). The author classifies refusal strategies into direct and indirect strategies along with adjuncts of refusal. The direct strategy consists of *bluntness* (e.g. 'No' and 'I refuse') and *negation of proposition* (e.g. 'I don't think so/I can't'). As for indirect strategy, Campillo retains some of Beebe's *et al.* semantic formulae, for example *reason/explanation*, *regret/apology*, *principle* and *philosophy*. However, the statements of *principle* and *philosophy* are merged into a single category of *principle/philosophy*. The additional formulae proposed by Campillo in the indirect strategy are *plain indirect formula* (e.g. 'it looks like I won't be able to go') and *disagreement/criticism/dissuasion*. *Change option* (e.g. 'I would join you if you choose another restaurant') and *change time* ('I can't go right now, but I could next week') are proposed as sub-categories of an alternative strategy. Regarding adjuncts to refusals, Campillo retains the classification of Beebe et al., for example *positive opinion/feeling/agreement*. This is however broken up into three categories each of which functions separately: *positive opinion* (e.g. 'this is a great idea, but...'), *willingness* (e.g. 'I'd love to go but...'), and *agreement* (e.g. 'fine, but...'). Statement of empathy is reclassified as *solidarity/empathy* (e.g. 'I am sure you will understand but...'), whilst gratitude/appreciation remains the same.

## 2. Research Method

This is descriptive research which elucidated the differences and similarities of refusal

strategies phrased by two groups of participants: Javanese learners of English (referred to henceforth as JLE) and native speakers of English (referred to henceforth as NSE). The JLE group consisted of 50 participants, comprising thirty eight (38) female and twelve (12) male undergraduate students studying at an English department in Central Java, Indonesia. The age of the students ranged between 19 to 24 years old. The NSE group consisted of a total of 20 participants, comprising sixteen (16) students at a British university; three (3) members of the administrative staff at the same university; and one additional adult British speaker. Six (6) participants were male and fourteen (14) were female. The age of the students ranged from 19 to 25 years old and the age of the others ranged from 42 to 52 years old.

The data obtained from JLE and NSE was respectively referred to as interlanguage data (IL) and target language data (TL). The data of the study from the two groups comprised a series of written responses which were collected by means of a series of discourse completion tasks (DCTs). DCTs are short written descriptions of scenarios, followed by a short dialogue between one participant in the scenarios, whose utterances are typically provided verbatim or in summary, and the research informant, whose utterances are left entirely or partly blank. The informant is asked to write in the gaps what he or she would say, based on the provided situations (Kasper and Dahl, 1991; Brown, 2001).

The DCTs designed for the present study consisted of scenario descriptions and conversational turns. In the scenario description, the participants were provided with a specific social situation, the setting, their own roles, and the relative social status of the collocutors. The scenarios thus set the social background for completing the dialogue by filling in the required conversational turns. In order to overcome one of the criticisms of DCTs, those used

in this study included prompts for the conversational turns, as suggested by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) and Billmyer and Varghese (2000), as a guide to the participants, rather leaving these entirely to their imagination. As the DCTs were intended to elicit data from different groups, the scenarios and social situations were designed to be as realistic as possible to both British and the English learners' cultural contexts.

The data were classified into categories and sub-categories of refusal strategies based on the taxonomy of refusal by Beebe et al. (1990). As for this present study the refusal taxonomy was modified slightly in order to account for certain patterns of the data from the present study. A sub-strategy was added to indirect refusals: *statement of inapplicability* ('It doesn't apply to me/ I don't need it'). Two further adjuncts were also added: (1) *Asking for assurance* which was generally applied by hearers over acceptance of an offer in order not to suggest that they would directly accept the offer. (e.g. '*If I use your printer, you will run out your ink, are you sure?*'). (2) *Wishing for good luck*. (e.g. 'have a good time'; 'I hope you have a great party'; 'I do hope your festival is enjoyable for all'). Thus, for example,

"uhm I am sorry I can't make it, I have some work to do this night. Thanks your invitation though".

is made up of filler + apology+ inability + excuse/explanation + gratitude.

To obtain the general sequential orders of semantic formula and adjuncts, each semantic formula or adjunct of refusal strategies (direct and indirect) was segmented into strings. The semantic formulae and adjuncts having the highest frequencies were taken to represent the contents of a typical slot. Adjuncts or similar semantic formulae which were expressed more than once within the string were treated as a repeated representation of a single slot. If various semantic formulae or adjuncts occurred

with a similar frequency in the same slot, they were classified as alternative expressions of the same slot; therefore they were included in a single formula. The ones which were relatively common but used with lower frequency than other segments in a dominant sequential order were considered as an optional segment and marked with  $\pm$ . Z test with a confidence level of 95% or  $\alpha=0.05$  was used to verify whether the similarities and differences in frequency of semantic formulae and adjuncts were significant. It should be noted that the grammar errors made by the learners were beyond the discussion.

### 3. Research Finding and Discussion

#### 3.1. Refusal to invitations to a collocutor of equal status

DCT Scenario:

It is Friday afternoon. You meet your close friend in the front of the library. He says that he is going to the beach next Sunday and invites to join, but you cannot go.

Your friend : "hey, I am going to the beach next Sunday, do you want to come along?"

You say : .....

##### 3.1.1. Sequencing of semantic formula and adjunct

Most JLE used **inability** with one or more semantic formulae which rarely occurred in the first slot in the strings as it was commonly introduced with **apology/regret** or sometimes adjuncts. The combination of **adjunct  $\pm$  apology + inability + excuse** was the most common sequential order to express direct strategies for example:

"I really want to, but I am sorry I can't. I have another business next Sunday".

"I'd love to go to the beach, but sorry I can't joint it with you. I am very busy".



In some longer utterances, this sequential order was used, but in low frequencies, in conjunction with some other semantic formulae such as **future acceptance** and **set condition for future acceptance**. While **inability** was also recurrently used by NSE in conjunction with **excuse/explanation** it was mostly preceded by adjunct, e.g. **positive opinions**, very rarely was initiated with **apology/regret**, for example: “That sounds really cool. I can’t though, I’m busy”.

JLE indirect refusal strategies mostly comprised **apology/regret** and **excuse/explanation**. These were typically initiated with adjunct(s) which were mostly **positive feeling** and/or **filler**, for example:

“It is a good idea, but I am so sorry I have another appointment”.

“wow, it’s a good vacation but I am so sorry I am very busy”.

By comparison, NSE’s indirect strategies commonly involved **excuse/explanation**. These were commonly started with adjuncts (mostly **positive opinion**). NSE also used **excuse/explanation** in conjunction with **future acceptance** and concluded refusals with wishing for **good luck**, for example:

“I’d love to, but I have plans. Have fun though”.

“I’d love to, but I have other plans, maybe next time”.

To express direct refusal strategies, NSE and JLE applied slightly a different sequential order. This was due to the application of **apology/regret** in the second slot that was not normally used by NSE. To express indirect strategies, NSE used a different sequential order as compared to JLE. The typical sequencing of semantic formulae and adjuncts used in direct and indirect strategies can be seen in table 1 below.

**Table 1. Typical sequencing of refusal to an equal status**

Group	Strategy	Sequential order			
		1	2	3	4
JLE	Direct	± Adjunct	Apology	Inability	Excuse
	Indirect	Adjunct	Apology	Excuse	-
NSE	Direct	Adjunct	Inability	Excuse	-
	Indirect	Adjunct	Excuse	Future acceptance/ adjunct	-

3.1.2. Frequencies of semantic formula and adjunct

To decline an invitation to a collocutor of equal status directly, the two groups used **inability** more often than **direct No**. **Inability** was employed by JLE more often than it was by NSE, although no significant difference was found. **Excuse/explanation** and **apology/regret** were very commonly employed by the groups. The former was used more or less

equally, while the latter was used by JLE significantly more frequently than it was by NSE. **Future acceptance** and **set future acceptance with condition** were used by the groups with no significant differences. As for adjuncts **positive opinion** was used by NSE more or less equally with JLE. **Filler** was used very commonly, with no significant differences between the groups. Preferences for semantic formulae and adjuncts were different: **alterna-**

**tive** and **good luck** were used only by NSE. The frequencies of semantic formulae and adjuncts used in direct strategies are presented in table 2.

**Table 2. Frequencies of semantic formula and adjunct used in direct and indirect refusal strategies to an equal status**

Semantic formula/ Adjunct	Frequencies used in <i>direct strategy</i>		Z-Value	Frequencies used in <i>indirect strategy</i>		Z-Value
	JLE	NSE		JLE	NSE	
No	1.9	1.5	0.18	-	-	-
Inability	18	13.6	0.80	-	-	-
Apology	16.1	6.1	2.04**	5.6	4.5	0.32
Excuse	16.1	9.1	1.39	10.6	16.7	-1.27
Alternative	-	1.5	-	-	-	-
Set. future acceptance	0.6	1.5	-0.65	-	-	-
Future acceptance	1.9	1.5	0.18	1.9	3	-0.54
Dissuasion	-	-	-	1.2	-	-
Avoidance	-	-	-	0.6	4.5	-2.04**
Positive opinion	5.6	9.1	-0.96	5.6	12.1	-1.70
Filler	4.3	3.0	0.46	4.3	3	0.46
Gratitude	3.1	1.5	0.68	2.5	-	-
Good luck	-	1.5	-	-	6.1	-

*Z table value with 5% significant = 1.96*  
*\*\*Significant difference is observed when Z test value is > -1.96 or Z test > 1.96*

To decline an invitation to a collocutor of equal status indirectly, the two groups frequently used **excuse/explanation, apology/regret** and **future acceptance** but with no significant difference. **Avoidance** was used by NSE significantly more frequently than it was by JLE. **Positive opinion** was expressed by NSE more often than by JLE, but no significant difference was found. **Filler** was used by the groups similarly. Preferences concerning semantic formulae also occurred, for instance **dissuasion** and **gratitude** were expressed only by JLE, whilst **good luck** was employed only by NSE.

### 3.2. Refusals to an Invitation to a Collocutor of Higher Status

DCT Scenario:

You are about to leave your office. On the way to parking lot, your boss stops you and invites you to go to his house warming party. As you cannot go, you decline his invitation.

Your boss : “*oh incidentally, we are going to have a house warming party next Saturday. My wife and I would be very pleased if you could come*”

You say : ...

### 3.2.1. Sequencing of semantic formula and adjunct

Most JLE’s direct strategies consisted of **inability**, **apology/regret** and **excuse/explanation** which were commonly preceded by adjunct(s), although in some strategies other semantic formula such as **future acceptance** was also used.

“It’s really a great pleasure for me can attend your party, but I am so sorry I can’t, because I should back home early. My mother waited me”.

“I am sorry sir, I can’t come there. I have been promise with my family to go to my mother. There is a party there. Maybe another time I and my family go to your new house”.

NSE’s direct strategies also commonly included **apology/regret**, **inability**, and **excuse/explanation**. Unlike those of JLE and NJ however, these were often concluded with an adjunct, mostly including **wishing good time** or **gratitude**, for example:

“Thanks very much, I appreciate the invitation! Unfortunately I can’t go, but *I hope you have a great party*”.

To express indirect refusal strategies, JLE often used **apology/regret** in conjunction with **excuse/explanation** which was frequently initiated with various adjuncts (**filler**, **positive opinion** or **gratitude**), for example:

“Oh I am happy to hear it, but I am so sorry I had planning next Saturday and I cannot cancelled my planning”.

“Thank you ma’am for your invitation, but I really sorry ma’am. I have promise with my parents”.

In some excerpts, **acceptance** and **avoidance** were also used to express indirect strategies, but in low frequency. By comparison NSE’s indirect strategies comprised ranges of sequential orders mostly including the combination of **excuse/explanation** with mixed adjuncts (**positive opinion/feeling**, **gratitude**, and **filler**). In some data, this core sequential order was used in conjunction with **apology/regret** and/or wishing for **good luck**.

“Oh that sounds really nice! Unfortunately, I’ve got to go to my cousin’s wedding. Thank you for inviting me though”.

“I’d love to, thanks for asking me, but I have a prior arrangement – please send my apologies to your wife and ... I hope you’re very happy in your new home – Good Luck!”

To express direct refusal strategies, the two groups used approximately a similar sequential order, though NSE often used adjuncts alternatively in the last slot. To express indirect refusal strategies, they also used roughly a similar sequential order, although NSE often concluded refusals with adjunct(s), see table 3 below.

**Table 3. Typical sequencing of refusal to a higher status**

Group	Strategy	Sequential order			
		1	2	3	4
JLE	Direct	Adjunct	Apology	Inability	Excuse
	Indirect	Adjunct	Apology	Excuse	-
NSE	Direct	Adjunct	Apology	Inability	Excuse/ good luck
	Indirect	Adjunct	±Apology	Excuse	Good luck/ gratitude



### 3.2.2. Frequencies of semantic formula and adjunct

In direct refusal strategies, **inability** and **apology/regret** were used by JLE significantly more often than they were by NSE. **Excuse/explanation** was made by JLE more often than it was by NSE, although there were no significant differences found. While **gratitude** was expressed by NSE more often than it was by JLE, but here, too, the difference was not significant. Some semantic formulae were used by one particular group for instance **direct No**, **alternative**, **set future acceptance**, **future acceptance**, **acceptance**, **positive opinion**, and **filler** were used only by JLE; wishing for **good luck** was expressed only by NSE.

In indirect refusal strategies, **excuse/explanation** was the most common semantic formula used by NSE who used it significantly more often than did JLE. **Apology/regret**, **future acceptance** and **avoidance** were also commonly expressed by the groups, although with no significant difference. As for adjuncts, **positive opinion** was expressed by NSE significantly more often than it was by JLE. **Gratitude** and **filler** were employed by the groups with no significant difference. Preference concerning semantic formulae was observed. **Wish** and **acceptance** were made only by JLE, whilst **alternative** and wishing for **good luck** were employed only by NSE (see table 4).

**Table 4. Frequencies of semantic formula and adjunct used in direct and indirect refusal strategies to a higher status**

Semantic formula/ adjunct	Frequencies used in <i>direct</i> <i>strategy</i>		Z-Value	Frequencies used in <i>indirect</i> <i>strategy</i>		Z-Value
	JLE	NSE		JLE	NSE	
No	1.2	-	-	-	-	-
Inability	16	5.6	2.18**	-	-	-
Apology	16	5.6	2.18**	6.2	11.3	-1.34
Excuse	11.7	4.2	1.80	11.7	22.5	-2.13**
Wish	-	-	-	1.2	-	-
Alternative	0.6	-	-	-	1.4	-
Set. future acceptance	1.2	-	-	-	-	-
Future acceptance	2.5	-	-	1.9	1.4	0.24
Avoidance	-	-	-	0.6	1.4	-0.60
Acceptance	1.9	-	-	1.9	-	-
Positive opinion	3.1	-	-	5.6	16.9	-2.78**
Filler	5.6	-	-	2.4	5.6	-1.22
Gratitude	3.7	4.2	-0.19	4.9	8.5	-1.04
Good luck	-	2.8	-	-	8.5	-

Z table value with 5% significant = 1.96  
 \*\*Significant difference is observed when Z test value is > -1.96 or Z test > 1.96

### 3.3. Refusals to an Invitation to a Collocutor of Lower Status

DCT scenario:

You are a senior lecturer at school of Arts and Literature. In your break time, you happen to have a small chat with a graduate student representative at a cafe of the campus. He is organizing some programs for fresher week orientation. He says that at the end of the fresher orientation days, there will be a party. He invites you to go to the party, but you cannot go.

Student : “we are going to have a party next Saturday night. We would be very pleased if you could come”

You say : ...

#### 3.3.1. Sequencing of semantic formula and adjunct

JLE normally initiated direct refusals with an adjunct followed by **apology/regret** before they expressed **inability**. **Excuses/explanation** was the most prevalent semantic formula used to justify their inabilities to accept the invitation, for example:

“It will be great. I’d love to but I’m sorry I can’t. There’s something that I should do at Saturday nite”.

“Thank you, but so sorry. I can’t go there. I have some event on Saturday night too”.

Like JLE, NSE commonly initiated their direct refusal strategies with an adjunct followed by **apology/regret** before expressing **inability**. **Excuse/explanation** was someti-

mes used to justify their inabilities to accept the invitation.

“Thanks for inviting me, but I’m afraid I won’t be able to make it”.

“Oh gosh, sorry, I can’t make it. I am babysitting my sister’s children that evening”.

To express indirect refusal strategies, JLE mostly included **excuse/explanation** that was commonly initiated with adjuncts and/or **apology/regret**. These strategies contained shorter strings.

“I’m sorry that night I am very busy”.

“I’d love too. But, I’m sorry. I have other appointment”.

“Oh I am sorry actually I want to come but on Saturday night I have to go for my business”.

By comparison, NSE’s indirect refusal comprised a variety of sequences in which the combination of **adjunct**, **apology/regret**, and **excuse/explanation** was the most common order.

“I would love to, but unfortunately I have other engagement. I hope the party will be great”.

“I’m sorry, I already have plans. But I hope you have a good time”.

Both groups shared more or less a similar sequential order in direct and indirect refusal strategies, although in indirect refusal strategies NSE often concluded refusal with

Table 5. Typical sequencing in refusal to a lower status

Group	Strategy	Sequential order			
		1	2	3	4
JLE	Direct	Adjunct	Apology	Inability	Excuse
	Indirect	Adjunct	Apology	Excuse	-
NSE	Direct	Adjunct	Apology	Inability	±Excuse
	Indirect	Adjunct	Apology	Excuse	Good luck

an adjunct (**wishing for good luck**), see table 5 below.

### 3.3.2. Frequencies of semantic formula and adjunct

Table 6 shows that in direct refusal strategies, **inability, apology/regret and excuse/explanation** were the most common semantic formulae used by the groups, but with no significant difference in usage. **Filler** and wishing for **good luck** were used with no significant difference. **Gratitude** was expressed by NSE significantly more often than it was by JLE. **Avoidance** and **positive opinion** were expressed only by JLE. In indirect refusal strategies, **apology/regret and excuse/explanation** were used by NSE more often than they were by JLE, although no significant difference was found. Other semantic formulae and adjuncts such as **positive opinion, avoidance, filler, and good luck** were used by JLE and NSE more or less similarly. **Gratitude** and **wish** was used only by NSE.

To sum up, JLE tended to use the similar sequential order to decline an invitation to collocutors of equal, lower and higher status. In spite of a few variations in usage, they tended to use adjunct + apology/regret + inability + excuse/explanation to express direct refusals and adjunct + apology/regret + excuse/explanation to express indirect ones. Unlike JLE, NSE diversified their sequential orders based on the refusals to a collocutor of equal status the one hand and refusals to those of unequal status (lower and higher) on the other hand in each strategy type. In spite of few variations in usage, to decline an invitation to a collocutor of equal status directly, they often used adjunct + inability + excuse/explanation, while to decline an invitation to those of unequal status (lower and higher), they frequently used adjunct + apology/regret + inability + excuse/explanation/wishing good luck. To express indirect refusals to a collocutor of equal status, JLE often used adjunct + excuse/explanation + future acceptance/adjunct (wishing good

**Table 6. Frequencies of semantic formula and adjunct used in direct and indirect refusal strategies to a lower status**

Semantic formula/ Adjunct	Frequencies used in <i>direct strategy</i>		Z-Value	Frequencies used in <i>indirect strategy</i>		Z-Value
	JLE	NSE		JLE	NSE	
Inability	19.1	15.5	0.67	-	-	-
Apology	18	12.7	1.03	6.6	11.3	-1.25
Excuse	16.9	9.9	1.42	8.7	12.7	-0.94
Wish	-	-	-	-	1.4	-
Future acceptance	0.5	1.4	-0.70	-	-	-
Avoidance	0.5	-	-	0.5	1.4	-0.70
Positive opinion	10.4	-	-	6.6	5.6	0.27
Filler	3.8	2.8	0.39	2.2	1.4	0.40
Gratitude	2.2	14.1	3.73**	-	4.2	-
Good luck	2.2	1.4	0.40	1.6	4.2	-1.22

*Z* table value with 5% significant = 1.96  
 \*\*Significant difference is observed when *Z* test is > -1.96 or *Z* test > 1.96

luck), while to those of unequal status (lower and higher), they often used adjunct + apology/regret + excuse/explanation+ adjunct (wishing for good luck).

JLE and NSE commonly used **apology/regret** to show politeness; nevertheless NSE commonly used **apology/regret** when they declined an invitation to a collocutor of unequal status (lower or higher), while JLE used it across the refusals to those of the three status levels. This could be that JLE had different perception on the perceived threats on the refusals to those of the three status levels.

The two groups used adjuncts as they declined an invitation, but of a different kind. NSE appeared to emphasize considerateness: they began mostly with **positive opinion/agreement**. By contrast, JLE began refusals with **positive opinion, filler** and **gratitude**. NSE, unlike JLE however, often concluded refusals with wishing for **good luck**. For NSE, wishing for **good luck** is a courteous behaviour to attend addressee's positive face (Leech, 2005).

JLE tended to use a similar sequential order when they declined an invitation to those of the three status levels (equal, lower, and higher) using both strategy types (direct and indirect), while NSE tended to vary sequential orders according to different status levels. This seemed to suggest that JLE were uncertain about the appropriateness of the strategies or they might use the similar sequential order as a safe strategy. The most typical JLE strategies in refusals to an invitation were:

Adjunct + apology + inability + excuse (direct strategy)

Adjunct + apology + excuse (indirect strategy)

By comparison, NSE demonstrated:

Adjunct + apology + inability + excuse/good luck (direct strategy)

Adjunct + apology + excuse + good luck (indirect strategy)

In refusals to an invitation, there were similarities between the two groups in the means used to express direct refusals; they employed **inability** more often than **direct No**. This finding suggests differing pragmatic intentions: on one hand, to be unambiguous and, on the other hand, to be polite. **Inability** was possibly chosen as a compromise, clearly producing the intended illocutionary force whilst not sounding impolite.

To decline an equal status JLE significantly used **apology** more frequently than did NSE, particularly when they used direct strategies. In indirect strategies, NSE used **avoidance** significantly more often than did JLE. To decline a higher status directly, JLE used **inability** and **apology** more commonly than did NSE, but when declining them indirectly NSE used excuse and positive opinion significantly more often than did JLE. To decline those of lower status directly, NSE expressed gratitude more frequently than did JLE.

JLE and NSE used **excuses/explanation** recurrently. Ideally **excuse/explanation** given should be specific and plausible, so as to sound convincing. According to Grice's (1975:45) sub maxim of quantity 'make your contributions as informative as required', providing credible **excuses/explanation** is one of an indication of cooperation between a speaker and a hearer. NSE and JLE in this present study tended to use unspecific content of **excuses/explanation**. This may, however, be culturally specific. For example, Beebe et al. (1990) found that American NSE used much more specific **excuse/explanation** than did Japanese learners of English who opted for vague excuse. As individual privacy is highly maintained and valued by British NSE (Hickey and Orta, 1994; Sifianou, 1992), the application by NSE of unspecific **excuse/explanation** suggested that they might intend to protect their own privacy or personal territory.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the findings presented and discussed in the previous section, no simple answer could be given to the research questions, although certain points were relatively clear. JLE tended to use a similar sequential order when they declined an invitation to collocutors of the three status levels (equal, lower, and higher), while NSE tended to vary sequential orders according to different status levels. A few differences were found relating to variations of semantic formulae and adjuncts used to express politeness. JLE commonly used **apology/regret** when they declined an invitation to all status levels; while NSE expressed **apology/regret** as they declined an invitation to a collocutor of unequal status (lower or higher). NSE, unlike JLE however, often con-

cluded refusals by wishing for **good luck**.

Some similarities and differences in the type and frequency of semantic formulae and adjuncts were found, though the proportion of the similarities was greater than that of the differences. The differences mostly consisted of idiosyncratic usages which were seen primarily on the extensive use by JLE of **apology**. Reflecting Javanese politeness norms, JLE tended to consider the feelings of other interlocutors, e.g. using **acceptance** which was not normally used by NSE. Reflecting western norms of politeness, NSE tended to attend the negative face of other interlocutors by involving some particular semantic formulae and adjuncts, e.g. **gratitude**, wishing for **good luck**, **positive opinion/feeling** and **avoidance**.

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