Faculty of Language Studies and Communication Studies

REFUSALS IN THE MALAY CULTURE: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN FOCUS

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REFUSALS IN THE MALAY CULTURE: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN FOCUS

by

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Abstract

This paper investigated the differences between Malay males and Malay females students in signifying refusals. As such, this study analysed the frequency of direct and indirect refusals strategies for both genders and their choice of refusals based on semantic formula adapted from Beebe et.al (1990). This study also sought to discover whether culture is an influential factor in refusals choices strategy. 30 UNIMAS students participate in the research and specifically divided into 15 males students and 15 females students. This research was done by using three instruments which were demographic survey, written discourse completion test and interview. Some of the respondents were selected to be part of the interview by the researcher. The written DCT were analysed to show the frequency of direct and indirect strategies used as well as their choice of refusals. The interview session consists of 3 questions and were transcribed to get the data. The results showed that the males respondents used direct strategies more frequently than female respondents and females respondents had a higher frequency using indirect strategies. The data showed that both genders preferred to use negative willingness ability as their choice of refusals. Based on the findings from written DCT, it also revealed that refusals produced by Malay respondents were culturally-influenced. This research is very important in uncovering the women and men in their production of speech acts between men and women in order to have better understanding about their cultural views. This study also shed light on the relationship between gender and cultural influences.

Keywords: speech act, refusal strategies, culture, semantic formula

Abstrak

Kertas ini mengkaji perbezaan antara pelajar lelaki Melayu dan pelajar perempuan Melayu dalam menandakan penolakan. Ia juga menganalisis kekerapan strategi penolakan langsung dan strategi penolakan tidak langsung untuk kedua-dua jantina, pilihan mereka dalam penolakan berdasarkan formula semantik disesuaikan daripada Beebee et.al (1990) dan kajian ini juga menunjukkan sama ada penolakan dipengaruhi oleh budaya mereka. 30 pelajar UNIMAS telah digunakan sebagai responden dan mereka telah dibahagikan kepada 15 orang pelajar lelaki dan 15 orang pelajar perempuan. Kajian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan tiga instrumen yang iaitu kajian demografi, ujian wacana bertulis dan temu duga. Sebahagian daripada telah dipilih untuk ditemu bual oleh pengkaji. Ujian wacana bertulis dianalisis untuk menunjukkan kekerapan strategi penolakan langsung dan strategi penolakan tidak langsung yang digunakan dan pilihan mereka dalam penolakan. Sesi temu bual terdiri daripada 3 soalan dan kemudian ditranskripsikan untuk mendapatkan data. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar lelaki mempunyai kekerapan yang lebih tinggi dalam strategi penolakan langsung dan pelajar perempuan mempunyai kekerapan yang lebih tinggi dalam strategi penolakan tidak langsung. Untuk data strategi penolakan secara tidak langsung dari kedua-dua jantina, ia juga menunjukkan bahawa mereka lebih suka untuk menggunakan keupayaan kesanggupan negatif sebagai pilihan mereka menolak secara tidak langsung. Berdasarkan dapatan dari ujian wacana bertulis, ia juga mendedahkan bahawa penolakan yang dihasilkan oleh responden Melayu dipengaruhi budaya. Kajian ini adalah sangat penting dalam satu cara untuk mengetahui bagaimana wanita dan lelaki berbeza dalam pengeluaran pengucapan mereka dan juga dapat mengetahui pemahaman yang lebih baik mengenai pandangan budaya mereka. Kajian ini juga memberi penerangan terhadap hubungan antara jantina dan pengaruh budaya.

Kata kunci: lakuan bahasa, strategi penolakan, budaya, formula semantik

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DCT   Discourse Completion Test

UNIMAS   Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the background of study, theoretical framework, problem statement, aim of study, research questions, significance of study and limitations of study.

1.1 Background of the study

In linguistic and philosophy of language, speech act is an utterance that function performatively in language and communication. According to Searle (1969), in order to understand the language, one must understand the speaker's intention. This statement is supported by saying the language is an intentional behaviour thus the language should be treated as a form of action. When one failed to understand people's intention, it can result in breakdown of communication. Speech act also allows people to express meaning and also express their intention by using a speech act as proposed by Searle (1969). According to Searle (1969), there are a number of speech acts which have various types of functions. Representative is one of the types of speech acts that engaged a speaker to a truth of an expressed proposition. The paradigm cases for representatives are asserting, concluding, stating, describing, suggesting and boasting. For example in a sentence "I am a best student" and "She was a surgeon". Second type of speech act is commissives which allow the speaker to perform some future action. The situations like promising, threatening, vowing, pledging and offering are the paradigm cases for commissives. "I will go to your house tonight" is an act of promise from the speaker to someone. Next is directive that is used by the addressee to carry out an action from the speaker. "You better pick up the trash!" shows that a speaker gives a command to the addressee and this is one of the paradigm cases for directives speech act. Lastly is expressive speech act. This relates with some sort of psychological and emotion

state expressed by the speaker. For example "Your food taste so bad" shows a speaker expressed his/her negative emotion towards the food. Furthermore, a spcech act also may be come just in one word, as in "Good morning", "Sorry" to perform an greeting or apology and it may be come with several words or sentences : " Good morning! How do you feel today?", "Sorry. I couldn't make it. My daughter is sick". The speech act would be normally in a form of sentence but it also can be in a form of word or phrase as long as it accomplished the intention and signifies the meaning.

In tandem with the above examples, it can bc concluded that speech act plays an important role and a central role in communication on a daily basis. Speech act is also a part of a real life interaction or communication requiring one to have knowledgc about the language and the appropriate use of the language based on the culture. Everyone has their own perception since they use the language in different ways so their understanding about the politeness phenomena and appropriate use of the language will be different too. There are many theories that assumed language fundamentally shapes one's perception. For example the principle of linguistic relativity determinism proposed by Sapir-Whorf. This principle shows that the way speakers view his or hcr world is affected by the structure of language and it also influence their cognitive processes.

Regarding to their differences, refusals is considered to be a very sensitive type of speech act because it may result in breakdown in communication and unintentional offence (Sadler & Eroz, 2001). If someone used improper refusals strategies it may harm the relationship. Refusals is an act of refusing or the state of being refused. It is also a negatively respond to a request, invitation, command, offer, etc. According to Searle and Vandervken (1985), speech act of refusals is the negative counterparts to acceptance and agrcement. Refusals are subjected to this rule of speaking. As it is one of the types of speech act, refusals is very

complex because it involves certain level of offensiveness, as well as some levels of directness and indirectness based on the status and age of interlocutors (a person who take part in communication). The rules of speaking in a society have a big connection and closely related to its cultural values (Maros, 2006). Normally, for some non-native speakers, it is so hard and difficult to say "no" in certain situations. Regardless of cultures, it is very important on the manner of saying "no" because it is more important than the answer itself. Therefore, one needs to learn the appropriate context skill and ways to deliver a task of sending and received the message of "no" since the inability to say "no" appropriately caused many non-native speakers to displease their interlocutors. For example. when someone directly refuses "no" instead of giving a reason or explanation, it might hurt the receivers feeling. The speaker therefore must know how and when to use the appropriate form of refusals and its functions depending on the people's cultural-linguistic values.

1.2 The Malay culture

The Malay community is the largest ethnic group in Malaysia. One is considered a Malay when he or she is a Muslim, can speaks Malay language and practices the Malay culture and way of life (Awang & Maros, 2012). The Malays are known for their non-confrontational attitude or behaviour. For example, in the Malay culture, being silent is part of indirectness. Islamic religion teach to speak a kind word or stay silent. This is an advised to speak what is good and beneficial to other people and at the same time it is a warning to us to be very careful in what we might to say by avoiding saying something that is false and harmful. Speaking the truth and saying things that gives benefits to other people is a part of Muslims faith. This in return influence their choice of speaking indirectly in order to avoid conflicts and miscommunication. Anything that needs to be said therefore should be related in an indirect way to avoid offending others. As a result of practising indirectness in speech, the

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Malays are considered as an ethnic group that is always polite and indirect. Indirect speech refers as avoiding to tell someone a certain thing In a manner where the interlocutor would go beating around the bush before they express the real intention. Politeness is therefore achieved when the information or messages are indirectly conveyed. The Malays appreciate the indirectness in manner of speaking rather than direct because it maintain healthy relationship as by saving the face of interlocutors. In fact being indirect is considered as part of the moral system and signifies good behaviour.

The concept of face predominates a lot of the daily life transactions and interactions in the Malay culture . The concept of "Face" refers to how to take care of person dignity by not embarrassing them as an individual (Asmah Abdullah, 1996). The Malay concept of face is equivalent in Malay language as *"air muka"*. In its literal meaning, the concept of *air muka* in Malay is defined as a person facial expression or the emotion in one's face such as sadness, happiness and etc. But if the term of *air muka* is used in Malay socio-cultural context, it refers to a person's dignity and reputation. It is associated with his public image and feelings. The relationship between face and feelings states that a person feelings is attached to his face. If one's feels good it will improves his self-image, if one's feels bad or hurt it will damage his self-image (Goffman, 1967). There are lots of sayings and expressions in Malay language that makes the speaker to avoid to say something that might be hurt people feelings and be careful of what it is going to say (Goddard, 2000). The expressions like *jaga mulut* in Malay language "mind your mouth" and *rosak badan kerana mulut* "the body will suffered because of the mouth" and *berkata peliharakan lidah* "speak minding one's tongue". Another expressions that advise people to protect other people feelings is *jaga hati* orang "look after people feelings" and *memelihara perasaan* "protect the feelings".

1.4 Malay culture becoming irrelevant or less dominant and significant due to globalisation.

Global culture refers to the cultural components which dictate the usual rules of human life by the globalization process (Cheu, 1997). There are rapid change of goods, information and people in a worldwide by a globalization. The rapid growth of the use of computerized communication and electronic devices make the fast changing of information and the fast of global culture through the media gives positive and negative impacts on human communities. The positive impact is communicating between cultures from different ethnic background and geographical areas becomes communication easier and faster. However, the effects of global culture can give a negatives impact in which it will change the patterns of sociocultural in the society such as language, family and religion. It gives the impact on Malay family and community in the sense of their traditional culture. Information technology is a major factor including the way people speak and interact that cause linguistics change in the globalization of human communities. In Islamic religion, they find that secular influences from the West in science and technology impact traditional Islamic values negatively (Cheu, 1997).

Besides globalisation changes slowly how the Malays practice their culture, women empowerment also changes the way the Malay culture dictate their gender. The words Women Empowerment refers to a new environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits and society. It also refers to growth and improvement to the social, economic, political of the women, to guarantee the equal-right to women, and make them very confident to claim their rights. For example they can live freely with a sense of self-worth, dignity and sense of respect, they can have a full control and power of their life, they can make their own decisions and they have equal status in the society.

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1.5 Theoretical Framework

Since the concept of refusal is part of a face-saving strategy, the theories of face and politeness (Goffman, 1955) and (Brown and Levinson, 1987) are adapted in this study.

The Theory of Face:- When people talk to each other, they will attempt to handle, guide or control the impression by maintaining, fixing or changing the appearance, setting and manner (Goffman, 1982). Observance and maintenance (face) is an important condition that can help people to achieve the goal of communication. It is refers to one's self esteem which they want to protect (Goffman, 1957). He believed that all participants that involved in certain practices must avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others. Face relates to how people interact with and understand each other in their everyday lives.

Regarding to Brown and Levinson (1987), face is a person feeling of self-worth and self-image. The face can be divided into two types which are negative and positive face. Positive face talk about the desire to be liked by others, appreciated and approve by people and people need to feel that our social group have the same goals and common knowledge or information together. On the other side, one's desire to be imposed upon, to be free from obligation in people action and intruded by people are known as negative face. The failure to understanding and observe the face of the interlocutors can lead to breakdown of communication. The actions such as refusals, commands, requests, disagreement, criticism and etc in our social interactions may damage the face of an interlocutor because they go opposite to the wishes of the hearers. This will lead to the theory of face-threatening acts introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987). Face threatening act is an act such as promising, accepting and etc that are able to damage another person's reputation/threaten other peoples

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face. There are two types of face threatening acts namely act threatening your negative face and act threatening your positive face.

The Politeness Principle

This theory was introduced by Leech (1983) which is closely related to the Theory of Face by Lakoff (1973), and later developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). There are three types of politeness maxims that refers to the maintenance of face or relationships between people in communication (Leech, 1983). First is do not impose, second is give options and third is make your listener feels good. Normally we are free to use any strategies in refusal in any forms such as request, suggestion and invitation and etc, but we must not try to impose our refusal on the people who we refuse . We should negotiate with them, suggest a suitable options and thus make them feel good.. Based on Brown and Levinson (1987), in order to save the listener face, the politeness strategies are being developed. Brown and Levinson (1987) came up with few politeness strategies that have a connection with face threat such as Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Off record and Bald on record. The strategy of Bald-On-Record gives no attempt to reduce threats to the listener face. Meaning it does not usually recognise the addresses want of respect. Negative Politeness strategy takes into account the presumptions that the speaker is imposing on the hearer although he appreciate the listener want of face. Positive Politeness strategy acknowledge the listener interest, and desire to be respected. Off-Record strategy use an indirectness strategies in making a request. It attempt to recognise and appreciate the listener's face. It displays a bit or no threat at all to the listener. In working with the politeness, we must introduce the maxims that maximize the things that favour to the listener and minimize those things which are unfavourable to the listeners (Leech, 1983). According to Leech, these maxims are very relevant and useful in dealing with the negativeness such as type of speech acts that impose on listener refusal.

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Refusals are considered as negative in the sense that the listener has no option than to just received them when the refusals are expressed.

1.6 Problem of statement

Based on the previous research, there are a great number of studies about refusals have been done (Allami and Naeimi, 2011). Most of the study focus on refusals in different cultures and difference in gender. But there is only little research focus on the relation between gender and culture. It is also suggested that the refusal can be influenced by a several social factors: As such, factors namely gender, age, social distance and level of education can influence the way people signifying refused.

1.7 Aim of study

The aim of study is to identify the differences between Malay males and Malay females in signifying refusals.

1.8 Research Questions

Three research questions were formulated to guide this research at the end of the study. First is to find the frequency of the direct and indirect refusals strategies between Malay males and Malay females. Second is to analyse the choice of the refusals strategies between Malay males and Malay females students based on the semantic formula adapted from Beebe et. al (1990). Last objective is to find whether the findings in the first objective and second objective are culturally-influenced.

1.9 Significance of the study

Gender and refusal is a field which are worth studying since women and men are brought up in the different sub-culture even though they live in the same society, so women

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and men might view the same world from different perspectives (Bernard, 1973). This research is pivotal in gaining insights on how women and men differ in their production of speech acts to have better understanding of their cultural views. This study also sheds light on the relationship between gender and cultural influences.

1.10 Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study only are divided into participants, age. and setting. The respondents who participated in this study only 30 students in which all the respondents are Malay. The range age of the participants must be from 19 to 23 years old only which means only they were from the younger generations. The setting is only in UNIMAS. This is because the level of education will be at the same. The findings will be more reliable since the researcher make a social status variable constant.

1.11 Operational definition of key terms

The purpose of this study is to find the differences between Malay males and Malay females in signifying refusals. The term of differences is measured by calculating the frequency of direct and indirect refusals strategies for both genders. The objectives of this study is to analysed the frequency of direct and indirect strategies. This can be done by analysing the answers using a semantic formula table and same goes with finding their choice of refusals. Last objective is to find whether culture is an influential factor in refusals choices can be done by interview the respondents and transcribe the recording.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Politeness

Politeness refers to proper and good etiquette and speaking with a proper ways to a person without offending their politeness (Shukla, 2009). If someone wants to express something or to say something, they must be use proper words to convey something and avoid to be rude or offensive. While conveying something, people has to be very choosy about words that are going to be uttered because whatever that is conveyed must be expressed in a proper manner.

In every culture the definition of politeness is different because politeness is a phenomenon that is culturally-defined. Sometimes the words that are considered polite in one culture can be quite considered rude in other culture. For example, the study done by Sharyl Tanck (2002) found that the refusals by Japanese and Chinese speakers in English are considered to be too indirect and uncertain or they are lack of requisite excuse by American culture (Tanck, 2002). However, Korean speakers of English produced a direct refusal in the American cultural context (Tanck, 2002). In terms of appropriateness, the non-native of English speaker produces utterances that are not consistent and same as the native speakers and at the same time, it shows that the non-native of English speakers use only few components of the semantic formulae of refusals and complaint by Beebe et. al. This is shows that the non-native English speakers lack of cultural knowledge of American culture.

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Politeness and impoliteness are different between gender. Women linguistic behaviour is said to be more positively polite than men in which it is often being categorised as being very concerned with cooperation and it is said to be more negatively polite than men in which women try as much as they could to avoid to have a conflict (Holmes, 1995). For instance, women tend to be more attentive listeners because they want to ensure that everyone get a chance to talk, that is why women less interrupt in the conversation (Holmes, 1995). Women also use a certain speech act and interpret differently to the men. For example, women produce more apologies because they may have a greater sensitivity (Holmes, 1995).

Politeness and gender studies, the focus is on the relation between the strategies of using particular language and at the same time takes into account the social roles of men and women who use the language (Fabian, 2015). Men are more likely to express negative politeness while women likely to use positive politeness in which it is a strategies to minimized threatening their listener face (Fabian, 2015). Thus, this shows why women interrupt less in the conversation. The findings in this paper also show that, women who pay and receive more compliments accept that as a affective and positive politeness while men considered the compliments as a face threatening and an unambiguous in intentions. It may be due to different perception of the compliments (Holmes, n.d). Overall, the hypothesis stated the reason why women consider compliments as positive politeness is because they want to build a connection with others while men view compliments as evaluative judgements.

2.2 Study on Refusals and Request in Different Pragmatics: Chinese and English

Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) has attained its theoretical and empirical general foundation mainly in cross-cultural pragmatics (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). According to Cohen (1996), an effort has been made to recognize the universal norms of speech act to