SPEECH ACT: THE USE OF DCT INVENTORY ON RESEARCHING REFUSAL ANDCOMPLAINTS

Jonri Kasdi
Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau
jonri.kasdi@gmail.com

Abstract

The specific speech act instruction could lead to greater pragmatic competence for speakers. It suggests that teachers could use DCTs in the classroom to focus on social distance between speakers, and then use role play activities to mimic an authentic situation, beginning with the more semantically formula apologies and requests. These speech acts may be easier for students to acquire than refusals and complaints, which demand more social interaction as well as many face-saving moves. The instrument is The Discourse Completion Test, or DCT, was composed of six prompts. Four prompts were created to elicit the specific speech acts comprising the focus of the study, complaints and refusals; two distractors were also included. (These distractors elicited an apology and a request, and are not included in the results of the study). Moreover, the subjects are Indonesian colleagues, who study at university across Malaysia. Ninety percent of them are female respondents, which researcher accidentally met at various places (campus, meeting, restaurant, and house). The overall males and females consist of 15 persons; 9 persons female and 6 persons male.

Keywords: *speech act, refusal, complaints, Discourse Completion Test (DCT), gender*

Introduction

This paper discussed the production of refusals and complaints on foreign language learners. It is hoped that it will provide a more broad understanding the production of complaints and refusals among foreign language learners, rather than those studies that tend to exist between American speakers and speakers with a particular first language.[1] The discovery of more general patterns of pragmatic failure as produced by a group of subjects from foreign language environment could be helpful to find any variation and bring the positive point of view of research, particularly in speech act studies.

Ordinary conversation contains a large number of elements, both single words and phrases, which are either not found, or found with much less frequency, in written language. These elements, variously called discourse or pragmatic particles, or markers, or connectives or expressions, do not contribute to the meaning of utterances. Rather they provide what might be called pragmatic orientation to the utterance to which they are attached.

Others, often referred to as hedges, perform evidential functions, expressing degrees of speaker certainty of, or commitment to, their message (*I mean, I think, sort of*). Some like *oh..*, indicate speaker knowledge or recognition, while others, like *you know*, indicate speakers' belief about or addressee knowledge or recognition. *Well* canbe seen as a display of incipient disagreement either with the content or

---

[1] Beebe *et al.* 1990, *Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals: Developing communicative competence in a second language,* New York: Newbury House Publishers, 63

the formulation of the preceding utterance. Some perform more affective or facilitative functions.[22] *You know* can indicate emphasis or express solidarity. Tag questions can be used to draw an addressee into the interaction.

Discussion of speech act; Refusal and Complaints produced by men and women

Gender is an important variable in all types of sociolinguistics studies, which the relationship between language and gender will be complex, and the relevant evidence on that relationship difficult to develop and interpret. And many phenomena that might at first seem clearly and directly related to gender, may well be reflecting some more basic factor whose effects are simply being mediated.

For example, many studies involving phonological and syntactic variables have shown women more likely than men to use standard variants. Also, studies of discourse variables (discourse markers, hedges, tag questions, politeness formulas, patterns of turn taking, use of minimal responses, etc.) in both western cultures have often shown women more likely than men to use facilitative devices in their speech, with men often going beyond less facilitative into confrontation. Such of that have been explained that women are 'politer' or more sensitive to social status, or more insecure and that they then create a style of speech reflecting these aspects of their identities, or alternatively, that women are more concerned with the solidarity building aspects of conversation. Thus these explanations locate the sourse of the differences in gender.[3]

Furthermore, ethnographic study of Malagasy society remind us that 'politeness' is culturally constructed, and that the role of polite speaker need not be reserved for women. Rather, in this society where politeness is so closely intertwined with rhetoric and political power, it is a characteristic of male speech.[4]

A speech act set is a combination of individual speech acts that, when produced together, comprise a complete speech act. Often more than one discrete speech act is necessary for a speaker to develop the overarching communicative purpose or illocutionary force desired. For example, in the case of a refusal, one might appropriately produce three separate speech acts: (1) an expression of regret, "I'm so sorry," followed by (2) a direct refusal, "I can't come to your graduation," followed by (3) an excuse, "I will be out of town on business". The speech act set is similar to the speech event, which takes into account the speech acts of all interlocutors. For example, the speech event "asking for the time," could be composed of four speech acts. The first speaker may (1) excuse him or herself for interrupting, then, (2) ask the listener for the time. The second speaker will likely (3) state the time, and the first speaker will (4) thank him or her for the information.[5]

One of very famous findings from research into language and gender differences is the men interrupt women. It appears that men interrupt women more than they interrupt other men, or vice versa, that more women interrupt men. For a bit more clear, we might see from the table below some

---

[2] Holmes, Janet, 1986, *Function of 'You know' in women's and men's speech,* Language in Society 15, 4

[3] Holmes, Janet 1995, *Women, Men and Politeness*, London: Longman, 40

[4] Op.cit.56

[5] Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, *Language and Gender*, United Kingdom, Cambridge university press, 104

stereotypes about gender differences inlanguage used.

Female	Male
• Less assertive (more tentative) • Fewer taboo form and moreeuphemisms. • Talk more • Speak more polite	• More assertive • More taboo and less euphemisms. • Talk less • Speak less polite

Many researches have been conducted research to prove these phenomena where we can learn it as clear evidence in order to answer our common sense ambiguous. However, we have to focus upon quite specific and discrete ways of doing things, suchas using them into *question* or *interruption.*

An important point of language and gender research has focus on how female and male speakers interact with one another, in variety of contexts ranging from informal conversations to more formal meetings, interviews, seminars and so on. Here are some previous findings, which differentiate between males and females use the language;

o   Women tended to ask more question than man.

For instance, women found to ask more questions than men when buying ticket at Central station in Amsterdam, especially the ticket seller was male.

o   Women asked two and a half times more questions than the men did.

Fishman sees men produced twice statements than women in the same conversation; women were doing to keep conversation going. These tendencies are considered in relation to topic initiation. He found: "women made 62 percent of all attempts to introduce topic but only 38 percent of these attempts achieved joint development. It is clear, nearly all the topics initiated by men; usually in the form of statements, on the other hand women responded more positively to topics raised by men."

Means, women had to work harder to establish topics, which required themto use more question.

o   Women used more tag question.

First of all, it found male tended to use more tag than women. There is what he called checking tag (speaker-oriented) and another one is facilitating (addressee-oriented).[6]

Latest research, which showed about the preferred style of speech and what is popularly thought of as women language, which looked at some range of a single type workplaces, namely the `call centre`, an institution in which people are employed to make or take telephone calls. From one of sub-categories of his finding, i t is not surprising that service workers should receive instructions on the subject of asking questions, since question-answer routines are characteristic of institutional talk. What is more interesting, however, is the stress placed on using questions not merely to elicit information, but to display interest in the customer as a person, to make the interaction a more genuine dialogue, and to give the customer `space` to speak freely and at length. Women may be considered `naturally good at that sort of thing`, but the `thing` in question is not just `being women`,

---

[6]   Scollon, R. and Scollon, S.W., 2001, *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach,* Oxford, UK:Blackwell Publishers, Ltd, 87

and the same style is also expected of men.[7]

However, the verbal hygiene practices which are the subject of this article are not interest for what she tells us about the relationship between language and gender. I argued that the regulation and commoditization of language in service workplaces has characterized, include expressiveness, caring, empathy and sincerity; characteristics popularly associated with the speech of women

In another research, it found, an interruption event has been defined as an instance of simultaneous speech that involves a deep intrusion into the internal structure of a speaker's utterance. It is believed 96 percent of the interruptions were made by males to females. It is also generally believed that, interrupting women far more often than males are interrupted by women, men attempt to dominate and control them in spontaneous conversation.[8] In addition to the studies showing contrary evidence, there are design limitation in previous research that force one to be suspicious of claims that males overwhelmingly interrupt fameless and do so to obtain dominance and control. It is possible that although males routinely interrupt females in cross-sex interaction they might also interrupt males as often as they interrupt females.

In further research, there are more specified their research into focusing on type of interruption; simple interruption, overlapped interruption, butting-in interruption and silent interruption. There were 60 participant were chosen from Grades 4 and 9 and college and separated into two groups, younger group, thirty students (half male, half female) were randomly chosen and teachers were then asked to pair each student with a friend. Thirty college students (half male, half female) were obtained through advertisements.[9] In this study provided little support for a sex related difference in interruption behavior. Their findings also appear inconsistent with claims that males believe females to be more interrupted than they interrupt within same gender. The males in this study did not appear to use interruption as a tool to maintain status.

There are a number of reasons why they did not find sex differences in interruption behavior whereas many other studies have. They did not merely treat interruption as a unitary phenomenon or as a controversial device that reflects dominance and control, rather than they used a well defined and objective definition of interruption.

Otherwise, the inconsistence finding also appear, that males believe females to be more interruptible than they are and that what females have to say is less important than what males have to say. The males in this study did not appear to use interruption as a tool to maintain status. Then, the acceptance of their finding is not really warranted, because of its micro-political interpretation. Moreover, to examine a particular register, interviewing, in which females speakers employ questions or requests for information both to get information and maintain conversation. The study examines differences between male interviewers in topical and political interviews on radio and television. The female interviews employ more indirect requests for information than do the male interviewers; however, since

---

[7] Cameron, Deborah, 2000, *Styling at the worker-gender and the commodification of language in the globalized service economy,* journal of sociolinguistics, 4 (3), 325

[8] Holmes, Janet 1995, *Women, Men and Politeness,* London: Longman, 73

[9] *Ibid,* 104

Jonri Kasdi

indirect requests for information can be provocative as well as polite, use of provocative forms constitutes an enabling strategy. While the male interviewers favor indirect forms, the female interviewers favor indirect forms that engage their interviewees. The female interviewers employ indirect requests for information to ask tough questions, maintaining a line of questioning and maintain their position as speakers who have power.

In this discussion, we try to analyze other speech acts, including refusal and complain. However, this study has been conducted which investigates the differences between native and non-native English speakers' production of refusals and complaints.[10]

Speech acts of refusal

The speech act of refusal occurs when a speaker directly or indirectly says *no* to a request or invitation. A study of refusal produced by American English speakers and Japanese EFL learners, analyzed the refusals as a formulaic sequence, comprised in the case of refusing an invitation; an expression of regret, followed by an excuse, and ending with an offer of alternative. In studying these refusals, they found that Japanese speakers of English and native speakers differed in three areas: the order of the semantic formula, the frequency of the formula, and the content of the utterances. While the Japanese speakers appropriately produced the same semantic components as their American peers, the quality of the utterances was very different. American subjects tended to offer specific details when giving explanations, while the Japanese subjects often produced explanations that might be interpreted as vague by Americans.[11]

Many studies conducted toward the young adult learners. However, it has conducted study of agreement and refusal massages in young French children aged 21 to 27 months. The purpose of his study was to analyze how the gestural and verbal forms of agreement and refusal messages vary according to the social function they fulfill. Two types of messages were considered: assertive and directive. Children interacting with an adult were observed individually. The adult prompted the child to produce agreement and refusal messages of the assertive or directive type by proposing objects that either fit or not into the interaction situation e.g. is this and X?, were X was or was not the piece being presented, or Should I give you the X? for pieces that did or did not go with the puzzle the child was doing. The result showed that the children's message forms varied with these children both type of message and type of speech act.

The Speech Act of Complaints

The speech act of complaint occurs when a speaker reacts with displeasure or annoyance to an action that has affected the speaker unfavorably.[12] It studied the speech act of complaint as produced by native and non-native speakers of Hebrew. The researchers developed five categories of speech acts that were based on severity of the complaint for a specific scenario, in which one colleague had waited for another colleague, who arrived late to a scheduled appointment. The five categories were: (1) below the

---

[10] Ibid, 106

[11] Beebe *et al.*, 1990, *Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals: Developing communicative competence in a second language,* New York: Newbury House Publishers, 156

[12] Tanck, Sharyl, 2006, *Speech Act Sets of Refusal and Complaint: A Comparison of Native and Non-Native English Speakers' Production,* Second Language Acquisition, 202

level of reproach, "No harm done, let's meet some other time;" (2) disapproval, "It's a shame that we have to work faster now;" (3) complaint, "You are always late and now we have less time to do the job;" (4) accusation and warning, "Next time don't expect me to sit here waiting for you;" and, (5) threat, "If we don't finish the job today I'll have to discuss it with the boss". They found that both groups, regardless of first language, made use of each strategy, while – at least for this particular scenario

– tending to prefer the middle of the scale – disapproval, complaint and accusation – rather than the extremes of the continuum (below the level of reproach and threat), avoiding being either too soft or too confrontational.

It examines a corpus of audio and audiovisual recordings of people engaged in acrimonious argument, in which complaints and accusations are being made about the behavior of present parties. The Analyses focus on the sequences immediately following complaints. The initial replies predominantly consist of denials, which are made up of two main types; "didn't do it" and "not at fault" denial. The shape and distribution is considered with special references to claims that have been made concerning the reversal of the preference for agreement with in argument sequences. It also provided of the ways in which the original complainers treat initial replies from complainees. These are shown to be consequential for the subsequent of the sequence. The complainer and complainee alignments are also constructed so as to preserve a relation between them in which one is the complainer, the other the complainee.

Research methodology

The use inventory on discourse analysis is one of techniques of collecting data to diminish an orthon-effect of the study, where the data is gathered and explore without any affecting the respondents to manipulate situation. However, the researchers have the authenticity of data,

In the written Demographic Survey, subjects were asked to provide basic information (age, gender, and course of study) as well as more specific information; English study experience, to whom they speaks , and how fluent their English.

The Discourse Completion Test, or DCT, was composed of six prompts. Four prompts were created to elicit the specific speech acts comprising the focus of the study, complaints and refusals; two distractors were also included. (These distractors elicited an apology and a request, and are not included in the results of the study). The prompts suggested equal or unequal power in the relationships of the speakers;

scenarios involved either the subject and another classmate, or the subject and a professor. In each scenario, the subject is familiar with the interlocutor. Each prompt simulated a situation that could occur in a university setting. While the six prompts were listed in random order based on speech acts within the DCT, the DCTs issued to the subjects were identical to each other. The subject of each prompt is listed below:

1) *Refusal* of invitation given by professor
2) *Request* (distractor)
3) *Refusal* of invitation given by classmate
4) *Apology* (distractor)
5) *Complaint* made to professor re: missing letter of recommendation
6) *Complaint* made to classmate re: missing copy shop jobAn example of

Item 1 is provided below:

You are working on a group project with three other students. Your group is having a discussion with your professor late Friday afternoon.It is 5:30pm. You are planning to pick up a friend at the airport immediately after the meeting and must leave the university within 15 minutes.

Professor: Hey, it's getting late. Why don't we all go down tothe cafeteria? We can finish up there while we eat dinner.

You: *(participant response)*

Subject

Subjects are Indonesian colleagues, who study at university across Malaysia. Ninety percent of them are female respondents, which researcher accidentally met at various places (campus, meeting, restaurant, and house). The overall males and females consist of 15 persons; 9 persons female and 6 persons male. They were individually filled the questionnaire.

Procedures

Subjects completed the DCT and responded by writing what their oral respons would be to each situation posed. They were encouraged to respond quickly, and it was requested that they not carefully analyze what they thought their response *should* be. Subjects were asked to write their responses to match as closely as possible what they might actually say. Responses were returned to the researcher personally. Some subjects responded immediately, taking about 25 minutes to complete the survey in the researcher's presence. Some others completed the survey outside of the researcher's presence and returned the survey one or more days after receiving it.

Result and Discussion

Complaints. The first complaint prompt, in which the speaker is addressing the professor, tended to produce the following speech act set: (1) excusing self for imposition, "Sorry to bother you;" (2) establishing context or support, "I was wondering about the letter of recommendation you offered to write for me;" and, (3) a request, "Did you get a chance to send it?" The final component, conveyance of a sense of urgency,did not appear in the data produced by native speakers for this speaker-listener relationship.

Table 1
Complaint 1 – made to professor re: missing letter of recommendation

Number	Production of complain	Gender	Percentage
1	Excusing self for imposition	Male	50%
		female	33%
2	Establishing context or support	Male	33%
		female	56%
3	A request	Male	17%
		female	11%

In the complaint scenario with the professor, 56% from overall females speakers tended to establish context or support when complaining the professor's recommendation letter, such as, "

Excuse me prof…I hope I'm not disturb you.

Last month I have asked you to send the recommendation letter for myapplication. Is that already sent, prof?

Some males were differently contradicting to female speakers, however 50% of them tended to excuse themselves such as;

Sorry prof…I want ask about letters that you send to Multinational company.Have you sent it? Because I've check that the letter is not arrived yet…

In the next case, four components were typically found in second complain prompt made by classmate. These components were: (1) excusing self for imposition,

such as, "Excuse me for interrupting;" (2) a request, such as, "Can you please look forit?" and, (3) conveyance of a sense of urgency, as in, "I need it right away."

Table 2

Complaint 2 – made to classmatere: missing copy shop job

Number	Production of complain	Gender	Percentage
1	Excusing self for imposition	Male	17%
		female	11%
2	A request	Male	50%
		female	33%
3	Conveyance of a sense of urgency	Male	33%
		female	66%

In the complaint scenario with the classmate at the copy shop, one of the moreobvious differences from the previous case, which they have to address their complaint to the person who is more superior, male speakers tended precisely requesting to theirclassmate, such as:

Sorry…could you check my thesis there?I need now to send it

Please…

Female speakers also tend to request and expressing their anger by uttering a simple word "what???" or "what did you say?" as they wanted to convey a sense ofurgency.

Refusals. The first refusal prompt required the speaker to decline an invitation to go to the cafeteria with the professor. These components are: (1) an expression of regret, "I'm sorry;" (2) an excuse, "I have to pick up a friend at the airport;" and, (3) anoffer of alternative, "Can we meet again tomorrow?"

Table 3
Refusal 1 – made to professor's invitation

Number	Production of complain	Gender	Percentage
1	An expression of regret	Male	50%
		female	11%
2	An excuse	Male	50%
		female	67%
3	An offer of alternative	Male	-
		female	22%

Nearly all of male and female speakers offered a specific excuse when refusing the invitation of the professor in the first refusal prompt, "I have to pick up a friend at the airport," or some variation of this. Only few of them offered other simple components of this speech act (expression of regret and offer the alternative).

In the second refusal prompt, the speaker declined an invitation to go to lunch with a classmate. These components are: (1) an expression of regret, "I'm sorry;" (2) an offer of alternative, "Can we have in other time?"

Table 4
Refusal 2 – made to classmate's invitation

Number	Production of complain	Gender	Percentage
1	An expression of regret	Male	83%
		female	78%
2	An offer of alternative	Male	17%
		female	22%

About 83% of male speakers and 78% of female speakers tended to use regret expression when they refused their friend's invitation. Most of them tend to produce "I should finish my work today", "sorry, I'm in hurry to the class now", "I want to leave school early today, because I must go to work".

Conclusion

The specific speech act instruction could lead to greater pragmatic competence for speakers. It suggests that teachers could use DCTs in the classroom to focus on social distance between speakers, and then use role play activities to mimic an authentic situation, beginning with the more semantically formula apologies and requests. These speech acts may be easier for students to acquire than refusals and complaints, which demand more social interaction as well as many face-saving moves. Future studies should investigate semantic formulae, or speech act sets, as potential materials for curriculum development, as well as classroom applications of the DCT.

REFERENCES:

Beebe *et al.* (1990). *Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals: Developing communicative competence in a second language,* New York: Newbury House Publishers.

Cameron, Deborah (2000) *Styling at the worker-gender and the commodification of language in the globalized service economy,* journal of sociolinguistics, 4 (3), 323 – 247.

Derskey, Ian & Wootton, Anthony, (2000) *Complaint Sequences within AntagonisticArgument*, Research on Language and Social Interaction, 33 (4), 375 – 406.

Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) *Language and Gender*, United Kingdom, Cambridgeuniversity press.

Guidetti, Michele, (2000) *Pragmatic Study of Agreement and Refusal Messages in Young French Children*, Journal of Pragmatic, 32, 569 – 582.

Holmes, Janet (1986) *Function of 'You know' in women's and men's speech,* Languagein Society 15: 1 – 22

Holmes, Janet (1995) *women, men and politeness*, London: Longman

Hudson, T. (2001). *Indicators for pragmatic instruction: Some quantitative tools,* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nakamura, Keiko (2001), *Gender and Language in Japanese Preschool Children*,Research on Language and Social Interaction, 34(1), 15 – 43.

Macaulay, Marcia, (2001) *Tough Talk: Indirectness and Gender in Requests for Information*, journal of Pragmatics, 33, 293 – 316.

Scollon, R. and Scollon, S.W. (2001). *Intercultural Communication: A DiscourseApproach,* Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd

Tanck, Sharyl (2006) *Speech Act Sets of Refusal and Complaint: A Comparison of Native and Non-Native English Speakers' Production*, Second Language Acquisition,

Wolfson, Nessa (1989) *Perspectives Sociolinguistics and TESOL*, New York: NewburyHouse Publishers.