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ON WAYS OF EXPRESSING REFUSAL IN ENGLISH DISCOURSE

Refusing is a speech act. In order to accomplish their purposes in communication, people are said to perform intended actions while talking. J. Searle defines the speech act of refusal as follows: “The negative counterparts to acceptances are rejections and refusals. Just as one can accept offers, applications, and invitations, so each of these can be refused or rejected” /Searle, 1985: 195/.

Refusals, as all the other speech acts, occur in all languages. However, not all languages/ cultures refuse in the same way nor do they feel comfortable refusing the same invitation or suggestion. In many societies, how one says “no” may be more important than the answer itself. The interlocutor must know when to use the appropriate form and its function. The speech act and its social elements depend on each group and their cultural-linguistic values.

Therefore, sending and receiving a message of “no” is a task that needs special skills. Depending on ethnicity and cultural-linguistic values, the speaker must know the appropriate form, its function, and when to use it. The skill of refusing another’s offer, request, or invitation without hurting his or her feelings is very important since misbehavior in this domain can result in the interlocutor’s feeling of being shocked, or losing their face, being angry, or even seriously insulted.

According to E. Goffman one major condition that can help to achieve the desired goal of an utterance is the observance or maintenance of what researchers have called *Face*, which refers to one’s self-esteem which they want to protect. Face relates to how people interact with and perceive each other in their daily lives. E. Goffman claims that everyone

is concerned, to a large extent, with how others perceive him/her. Individuals act socially, striving to maintain or project their identity or public self-image. To lose face, therefore, is to publicly suffer a diminished self-image; maintaining face is accomplished by taking a line whilst interacting socially. E. Goffman suggests that there may be several reasons why people want to save their face. They may have become attached to the value on which this face has been built, they may be enjoying the results and the power that their face has created, or they may be nursing higher social aspirations for which they will need this face /Goffman, 1967/.

But sometimes, it happens that the face, the public self-image is put under a great risk by threatening acts.

In daily communication, people may give a threat to another individual's self-image, or create a "face-threatening act" (FTA). Requests potentially threaten the addressee's face because they may restrict the addressee's freedom to act according to his/her will. Refusals are face-threatening acts /Brown and Levinson, 1987/ and belong to the category of commissives because they commit the refuser to (not) performing an action.

In everyday interaction sometimes there are situations when there is no way out but to refuse. But in order to escape from putting someone's face under the risk, pragmatic breakdown, insulting the interlocutor's feelings, face loss by performing a speech act of refusal, there are strategies designed to help to soften and "oil" the conversation so that the interlocutor doesn't feel insulted and offended by the refusal.

Different classifications of refusal strategies have been proposed among which the most influential and well-known is the one elaborated by L.M. Beebe, T. Takahashi & R. Uliss-Weltz, which suggests a division of refusal strategies into direct and indirect. Thus, the speech act of refusal can be performed either by direct or indirect ways /Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990/.

Sociolinguistic research has shown that social variables such as sex, age, educational and socio-economic status affect *directness-indirectness* of utterances to a large extent.

We may note that a theory of speech acts, simply put, is a theory of what people set out to accomplish when they choose to speak. A

convenient way to think about such accomplishments is to think about the acts people perform when they utter a sentence. However, it is difficult to see how such acts can be described, yet a description of such acts seems necessary to model what occurs in natural language communication.

Now let us analyze refusal strategies used in J. D. Salinger's "*Nine Short Stories*", *taking into account* the pragma-linguistic and sociolinguistic factors.

By saying sociolinguistic aspect or analysis we mean social functions, which refer to the role language plays in the context of the society or the individual. For instance language is used (or functions in such a way as) to communicate ideas, express attitudes and so forth. It may also be used to identify specific sociolinguistic situations, such as informality, or varieties of language, such as science or law. The term situation is generally used to refer to extra-linguistic setting in which an utterance takes place. It refers to such notions as number of participants, level of formality, nature of the on-going activities and so. The focus of the present paper will be the analysis of direct and indirect refusal strategies.

Direct Refusal Strategies

With every utterance, a speaker performs a speech act. It can be a question ("Where is the car?"), a command ("Give me the sweater!"), a statement ("Something smells bad in here."), or a bunch of other speech acts, like promises, threats, or requests.

In terms of speech acts, directness could be explained as **matching the speech act with the grammatical structure it most naturally takes**. In the examples above the question, the command, and the statement are all easily recognizable, and can be interpreted at face value.

Now imagine a stranger walks up to you on the street and says those three things. You feel quite offended. **Politeness rules** dictate that increase in social distance requires more indirectness.

Then again, a mother would have no problem saying those things to her seven-year-old son, for two reasons. One, the two are **socially very close** to each other. Two, the mother is **higher in the social hierarchy** than the seven-year-old child.

Mother: "...And you don't want to come home?"

Muriel: "No, Mother."

(J. D. Salinger, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish", p. 5)

In the above-mentioned example we have an offer-refusal adjacency pair. There is a direct refusal with flat "No" answer. There is not performative verb, just simple non performative statement.

In the example given above the choice of direct refusal strategy is conditioned mostly by social distance, according to which those who have closer relations tend to talk in a more direct way. It is clear from the context that the interlocutors are socially close.

Another factor influencing the girl's choice for the direct strategy is the place factor. When at home people tend to use more directness than when they are elsewhere. Judging from the way she was behaving and talking, the girl was "feeling at home", though she was in a hotel room. There was nobody in the room; the communicative setting was informal so she expressed herself in a direct way.

Mother: "Your father said last night that he'd be more than willing to pay for it if you'd go away someplace by yourself and think things over. You could take a lovely cruise. We both thought --."

Muriel: "No, thanks."

(J. D. Salinger, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish", p. 5)

This example includes direct ways of refusing, but in this case we have gratitude as well. This happens when the participant gives refusal in the form of gratitude expression. This strategy is usually produced after the refusal.

Here there is an overlap during the interaction. As G. Yule notes, overlaps occur when both speakers attempt to initiate the talk /Yule, 1996/. The talk is taking place in the same communicative setting as the previous example. Thus the factors affecting directness and indirectness are the same. We may add the "topic" as the last factor affecting directness in this case. As their topic is an everyday discussion of simple

problems and issues rather than a conversation which is sensitive, the second speaker chose a direct way of refusing with gratitude expression.

Mary Jane: "Will you give me a little kiss, Ramona?"

Romana: "I don't like to kiss people."

(J. D. Salinger, "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut", p.12)

The second pair of the question-answer adjacency pair is a direct refusal, non-performative statement, with negative willingness. The choice of the direct strategy is determined by the second speaker's age. From the sociolinguistic aspect this example proves the statement that socio-cultural variable affect speech. The old tend to be more indirect than the young. In the given example the second interlocutor is a child, thus she may not be aware of polite ways of refusals, and she simply expresses her negative willingness. In the examples R. Lakoff's agreement maxim is violated, according to which one should minimize disagreement between self and other.

To conclude, directness requires good skills for the situation, however. Being too direct when stating your opinion might seem like an insult, especially if the hearer perceives you as being lower in the social hierarchy. Direct commands, of course, can easily sound like you're bossing people around. Asking direct questions from someone you're not that close with may make the hearer feel you're being nosy or intrusive. Furthermore, they might feel you're forcing them to be rude by asking a question they cannot skate over and must answer with a direct "I don't want to tell you."

Indirect Refusal Strategies

Indirectness is any communicative behavior, verbal or nonverbal that conveys something which is quite different from its literal meaning. In order to protect privacy, to minimize the imposition on the hearer and to avoid the risk of losing face, there is a preference for indirectness on the part of the speaker to smooth the conversational interaction. It's worth noting that indirectness is very useful in socially distant situations. People have varied levels of directness tolerance, and until you know where the limit is, it's wise to stay well on the polite side.

Mother: "He doesn't have any tattoo! Did he get one in the Army?"

Muriel: "No, Mother. No, dear. Listen, I'll call you tomorrow, maybe." (J. D. Salinger, "A Perfect Day for Banana fish", p. 6)

In the question-answer adjacency pair, the second speaker replied indefinitely, which is a refusal strategy showing indefinite replies in order to avoid refusing directly and making commitment.

Judging from context and the conversation, the girl is not pleased with the topic her mother was discussing and commenting on. She wanted to end that conversation as soon as possible.. If we interpret the second pair of question answer adjacency pair, it will have the following image: "Mother, hang up the phone, I don't want to continue to talk, this is not pleasant conversation for me. Let's end our conversation but I promise to call you tomorrow, maybe."

People are free to choose whether to refuse directly or indirectly. The choice is conditioned by several socio-cultural factors, but refusing directly doesn't mean to be extra-rude and to say anything you thought of that very moment. Within the context of politeness the above mentioned interpretation is invalid and it would violate P. Grice's maxim of quantity (avoid giving too much information), that is why the girl took the safe side, didn't spoil the public image of her mother wholly and refused indirectly promising to call her in the future. This is done to avoid crushes in conversation and spoiling public-image, i.e. "face" which needs to be accomplished, accepted and appreciated.

Ginnie: "What happened?"

Eric: "Oh. . . . It's too long a story. I never bore people I haven't known for at least a thousand years. But I shall never again consider myself even the remotest judge of human nature. You may quote me wildly on that."

Ginnie: "What happened?"

Eric: Oh, God. This person who's been sharing my apartment for months and months and months – I don't even want to talk about him.... This writer..."

Ginnie: “What'd he do?”

Eric: **“Frankly, I’d just as soon not go into details; I’ve made up my mind that I’m not even going to think about it. But I’m just so furious, I mean here’s this awful little person from Altoona, Pennsylvania – or one of those places. Apparently starving to death. I’m kind and decent enough – I’m the original Good Samaritan – to take him into my apartment, this absolutely microscopic little apartment that I can hardly move around in myself. I introduce him to all my friends. Let him clutter up the whole apartment with his horrible manuscript papers, and cigarette butts, and radishes, and whatnot. Introduce him to every theatrical producer in New York. Haul his filthy shirts back and forth from the laundry. And on top of it all – And the result of all my kindness and decency is that he walks out of the house at five or six in the morning – without so much as leaving a note behind – taking with him anything and everything he can lay his filthy, dirty hands on. I don’t want to talk about it. I really don’t. I love your coat.**

(J. D. Salinger, “Just before the War with the Eskimos”, p. 23)

There are several indirect refusal strategies used here in the dialogue.

It’s worth noting that refusals may be preceded by adjuncts, in this particular case by pause fillers. According to P. Brown and S. Levinson such pause fillers as “oh, well” are considered to be prefaces /Brown and Levinson, 1987/. According to G.Yule the overall effect of such delays (pauses), hesitations and prefaces in the answer is that the speaker is presenting himself as having difficulty and is unwilling to have to say what is being stated. These dispreferred markers also indicate that disagreement/refusal is coming after them /Yule, 1996/.

The second speaker’s statement in the above mentioned example is stated to refuse to start the story as “it is too long”. It is important to note that this refusal is preceded after the preface and indicates the refusal which is on the way to come. Moreover, another indirect refusal strategy is used in the form of statement of principle.

In the example the young man clearly states that in order to tell that long story and “bore” someone, he/she should be a friend of him for at

least a thousand years. This is an indirect refusal to the girl's question "what happened?" in order to indirectly tell the girl: "I refuse to tell you that story as you are not my friend". The young man's face threatening act which threatens the girl's expectations regarding self-image is not followed by any face-saving act to lessen the possible threat, it is just the opposite, the girl goes on by asking the same question again putting her self-image under threat, and further danger of face-loss.

Thus in order to somehow soften the conversation and not to put the girl's public-image under total loss the boy frankly confessed that he didn't even want to talk about Selena's brother, but still, to satisfy the girl's interest, and to respect her public self-image he chose the self-defense refusal strategy without going deep into details, spoke a little about him.

By using self-defense strategy he made attempts to dissuade his interlocutor. He confessed, as well, that he is kind and decent enough to take Selena's brother into his microscopic little apartment. This strategy also belongs to the sphere of indirectness.

He kept his promise, he was as short as he could while portraying the situation, staying loyal to his principle (never bore people, who were not his friends for at least thousand years) and refused with avoidance strategy, verbally with topic switch.

By switching the topic, their conversation was directed into the direction of the girl's coat. By just saying "I love your coat" the interlocutors started to talk about the coat and the conversation came to an end.

Those indirect ways of refusal (statement of principle, self-defense, and topic switch) are determined by the interlocutors' age, social distance and mood.

Judging from the context the young man was older than Ginnie, thus his indirectness is determined by his age. The factor of social distance plays an important role, as the two were not intimate enough to use more directness. The indirectness is also determined by the socio-cultural variable mood. In the examples the hero confessed himself that he is angry, saying "*But I am so furious*". Thus, his indirect ways of refusal were determined by his mood as well.

Young man: I offered her a piece of cinnamon toast.
Esme: "No, thank you, I eat like a bird, actually"
(J. D. Salinger, "For Esme: With Love and Squalor", p. 40)

Gratitude expressions can function in a number of ways in English. J. Searle considered thanking (for) as an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) which is specified by a set of rules (*Propositional content rule, Preparatory rule, Sincerity rule, Essential rule*) /Searle, 1969: 7/.

This is however not the only way to describe *thanking*. J. Searle's rules are sometimes broken, such as when *thank you* is used ironically, or has a function of closing a conversation and accepting/ rejecting an offer.

In the above-mentioned example we have a violation of J. Searle's rules for *thanking*. This expression of gratitude is expressed to reject the offer. G. Leech claims that thanking creates a friendly and warm atmosphere. In the aforementioned example we see that there really is a friendly atmosphere between the interlocutors, thus thanking softens the refusal/rejection of the offer made by the young man. After the refusal, the girl explains why she refused the offer using the indirect strategy of giving reasons and explanations for the refusal /Leech, 1989/.

If we come to speak about the socio-cultural factors influencing the choice of the indirect refusal strategy, we should note that in the examples mentioned above the variables are clearly seen, and we came to prove that females prefer indirect strategies. The communicative setting may be considered formal for the interlocutors are strangers, this was their first meeting and their speech patterns are predominantly formal, thus this communicative informality influenced the girl to choose indirectness. The next factor that influences the girl's language choice is the factor of social distance. The interlocutors are socially distant so their choice for indirectness is justified.

Esme: "Are you deeply in love with your wife? Or I am being too personal?"
Young man: I said that when she was I'd speak up.
(J. D. Salinger, "For Esme: With Love and Squalor", p. 41)

In the example mentioned above the young man uses an indirect strategy of refusal, namely postponement.

The speaker uses postponement as a refusal strategy when he is obliged to give an immediate response to a request and he tries to delay it till some other time. A delay shows that the refuser has a good reason by refusing and implies that the refuser would accept or agree if it were possible.

It is clear from the example that the young man doesn't want to comply with the speaker's request (to speak about his being in love with his wife) and he delays their talk till the girl is in love, instead of directly refusing her request.

We may conclude that socio-cultural factors, such as social power (status), social distance, sex, age and so on, are closely related to the strategy the speakers use. They also determine directness and indirectness.

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Կ. ԶՈՉՈՒՆՑ, Ա. ԱԼՈՅԱՆ – Մերժման միջոցները անգլերեն դիսկուրսում. – Հոդվածը նվիրված է մերժման արտահայտման միջոցներին խոսքային ակտերի հարացույցում: Հաղորդակցումը փոխըմբռնման, փոխհամաձայնեցման ամողջություն է, և բարեհաջող հաղորդակցումը հիմնականում կախված է խոսողի՝ խոսակցի նպատակները ճիշտ մեկնաբանելու կարողությունից: Հաղորդակցման որոշակի նպատակի հասնելու համար խոսողը անհրաժեշտաբար դիմում է մերժման միջոցներին, սակայն երբեմն մերժման ճիշտ միջոցների ընտրությունը և կիրառությունը բուն պատասխանից ավելի էական կարող է լինել:

К. КОЧУНЦ, А. АЛОЯН – О способах выражения отказа в английском дискурсе. – Данная статья посвящена изучению способов выражения отказа в свете теории речевых актов. Человеческая коммуникация – это сочетание понимания и сотрудничества. Успех коммуникации во многом зависит от способности говорящего правильно интерпретировать интенцию собеседника. Зачастую для достижения определенной коммуникативной цели говорящий прибегает к речевому акту отказа с учетом того, что правильный способ отказа может быть важнее самого ответа.