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# A Study of Refusal Strategies by American and International Students at an American University

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A Study of Refusal Strategies by American and International Students at an American  
University

By

Hiroko Tsuiki Moaveni

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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In

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Minnesota State University, Mankato

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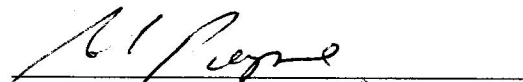
A Study of Refusal Strategies by American and International Students at an American University

Hiroko Tsuiki Moaveni

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.



Dr. Karen Lybeck, Advisor



Dr. Glen Poupore, Committee Member

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### **Abstract**

Refusals are delicate speech acts for non-native speakers to negotiate because they require negative responses to an interlocutor's invitation or request. In addition to cultural variation, variables such as gender and modes of communication (e.g., emails) add dimensions to the complexity when performing refusals. The main objective of this study is to investigate the difference in refusal strategies between American and international college students as well as gender variation. Using a written Discourse Completion Task, six situations were developed and grouped in two stimulus types eliciting refusals to an invitation and a request. Each stimulus type involved an email refusal to professors, friends, and a staff member of an academic department. The refusals of sixteen undergraduate American students and thirty-two international students were analyzed in terms of frequency, order, and content of semantic formulas. The results of this study suggest that when using email, all groups demonstrated preference for direct refusal. American females preferred expressions of gratitude and stating positive opinions, whereas American male provided reasons and alternatives. The international students used a greater variety of semantic formulas; however, they lacked positive opinions and providing alternatives. Additionally, the international students tended to use more regret than the American students. The international students (both male and female) also tended to use more specific excuses as compared to more general excuses used by the Americans.

Keywords: pragmatics, speech acts, refusals, politeness, cross-cultural pragmatics, gender

## Chapter I: Introduction

Every day, as human beings we communicate with each other to convey information, share our thoughts and feelings, and maintain relationships. Depending on the nature of a situation we may use linguistic or non-linguistic (e.g. facial expression, body language) modes of communication. Good communication requires not only linguistic knowledge, but also an understanding of social and cultural factors in a situation. The evolution of human communication has taken shape over a period of thousands of years, and both men and women all over the world have contributed to the way we communicate today. Therefore, it is natural to expect that the way we communicate is influenced by our cultural norms and gender differences. For example, according to Coates (1993), women tend to be more polite than men, and contrary to common belief, men talk more than women do. Jones (1980, as cited in Coates, 1993), indicates that "men pursue a style of interaction based on power, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support" (p. 136).

The advent of new technologies such as the Internet also has changed the way we interact. This technology has brought people of different cultures closer to each other, and globalization has made it necessary to learn other languages, especially English. In addition, new modes of communication such as emails and texting have introduced other variables in the study of pragmatics. Electronic mail has become a popular mode of communication in many settings such as academic, business and personal, as it offers a quick means through which we can exchange information. However, email communication has its own set of challenges that must be understood. For example, it is

difficult to establish rapport through email communication as you would be able to do through face to face interaction. In an email communication, you cannot see facial expressions or body language or hear intonations, which could provide clues for an appropriate interpretation of the message contained within the interaction. For these reasons, articulation of a message in an email must be well planned and expressed appropriately.

Pragmatic skills, the use of language in context, may be one of the most challenging tasks for nonnative speakers to master as they require both linguistic abilities and communicative competence that must fit in the target culture. For example, Japanese are well known for finding indirect ways of refusing requests that they believe they cannot or do not want to realize. In response to a request, a Japanese person may say "ちよっと難しいですね..." (chotto muzukashii desu ne. . .), which in English literally means *it is a little difficult (for me)*. However, this response has the illocutionary force of refusing the request: *I cannot do it*. Japanese normally do not use direct refusal unless the request comes from a family member or a close friend. Therefore, when an American asks a Japanese English speaker to do something, and the Japanese person replies *it is a little difficult (for me)*, it is very likely that the reply would be misinterpreted. The American might think that even though the request (or the task) is a little difficult, it still could be done. This miscommunication could cause problems: the requester may feel that the responder did not keep her/his word, or may judge the responder as an untrustworthy person. Therefore, when Japanese people communicate with American people, they need

to know how they can refuse a request or an invitation in English that will be appropriate for the given circumstance.

As demonstrated by the example above, refusals present a major challenge for nonnative speakers because they require both the mastery of the target language and the culture. Because of the importance of pragmatic competence in second-language use, many researchers have conducted cross-cultural pragmatic studies with the focus on refusal strategies that cover a broad range of languages and cultures. As eloquently stated by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990), a refusal is "a major cross-cultural 'sticking point' for many nonnative speakers" (p. 56). Refusals are also complex in nature because they depend on variables such as social status, gender, and level of education (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; Beebe et al., 1990; García, 1999), as well as when transmitted through electronic modes of communication that limit extra linguistic cues.

From this perspective, many cross-cultural refusal studies have a methodological problem, in that they are focused mainly on oral interactions, even though data were often collected via written surveys. Little attention has been given to these data as written refusal strategies. Due to the lack of non-linguistic cues, we would likely refuse a situation differently in writing than we would in speaking. In addition, no attention, as far as I can find, has been given to refusals within e-communication. As discussed previously, when we write emails, we need to plan how best to communicate effectively with our interlocutor(s). Therefore, it is important to investigate refusal patterns when writing emails as well.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the way we communicate is influenced by our cultural norms, which includes how each gender executes various speech acts, in this case refusals. A preliminary study that I conducted as a part of a class assignment also suggested a possibility of gender differences in refusals in terms of directness and the choice of semantic formulas. The assignment investigated the way Japanese and Americans refuse an invitation to a social gathering. The study focused on the preferred mode of refusal strategies by gender and according to type of situation, and examined whether the participants used the direct or the indirect approach. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) instrument was designed and used to measure participants' responses. Nineteen students from a mid-western university participated in the study. Eleven were native American English speakers (eight females, and three males). Eight were non-native speakers, all of whom were Japanese (four females and four males). The study found that for all three situations, American female and Japanese male respondents demonstrated similar patterns in their use of directness and variety of refusal strategies. Moreover, the American male participants used the most limited variety of strategies.

The main objective of the present study is to investigate the difference in refusal strategies used by male and female American (all native speakers of English) and international college students in an electronic mail setting. Forty-eight students, all in their teens and 20s, from a mid-western university, provided refusal responses for this study. Using a written DCT, six situations were developed and grouped in two stimulus types eliciting refusals to an invitation and to a request. Each stimulus type involved a refusal to a professor, a friend, and a university staff member, all by means of email.

Professors, friends, and the staff of academic departments were chosen because they represent different statuses in terms of power and distance.

To better understand the current state of research in refusals, a comprehensive review of literature was conducted. The review of research dealing with refusals is presented in Chapter II. For this study, the participant profile, the instrument used, and procedure and data analysis are all discussed in detail in Chapter III. The results of this investigation are presented in Chapter IV. The discussion of results, comparison of significant findings to other studies along with conclusions and recommendation for future studies are provided in Chapter V. The entire survey form is shown in Appendix A.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

In this chapter, the current state of research regarding refusal acts is reviewed. Important topics such as speech acts and politeness, of which refusals are a part, are also discussed. In recent decades, researchers have been investigating different areas of pragmatics in order to better understand how a language is used. Refusals, as a special case of speech act, present a major challenge for nonnative speakers because they require both the mastery of the target language and the culture. Refusal acts also vary by social factors such as gender, social status, and solidarity. To better understand refusals one must begin with a review of speech act theory.

### Speech Acts

The concept of speech acts was first developed by Austin (1962), and defined as a set of utterances by which people perform a specific function such as apologizing, complaining, requesting, refusing, complimenting, or thanking. Austin (1962) identified three different features of speech acts: (i) *locutionary*, (ii) *illocutionary*, and (iii) *perlocutionary* acts. Locutionary act refers to a literal meaning of an utterance; illocutionary act refers to an intended meaning of an utterance; and perlocutionary act is the actual effect by saying something. For example, one performs a locutionary act when s/he describes the thermal condition of a room by saying *it is hot here*. In this description, the thermal condition of the room is given by the word *hot* and the room itself is referred to by the word *here*. However, if one says the same thing expecting some actions to be taken such as opening a window or turning on an air-conditioning unit to lower the room temperature, then s/he is performing an illocutionary act. The opening of the window or



turning on the air-conditioning then is the effect of the utterance, which is a perlocutionary act.

Since the intended meaning of speech acts or illocutionary acts is a vital component of speech acts, Austin (1962) further presented a classification of illocutionary acts based on the function of the verbs used. However, because of "the ungrounded nature, unclarity, and overlap of these classes" several researchers have proposed different taxonomies of illocutionary acts (Horn & Ward, 2004, p. 64). For example, Searle (1976) proposed five classifications for illocutionary acts, which are defined in the following manner.

- *Representatives (or Assertives)* are speech acts in which a speaker commits to the truth of the expressed statements (e.g., describing something).
- *Commissives* are speech acts in which a speaker commits some future actions (e.g., promising, guaranteeing, and swearing).
- *Directives* are speech acts in which a speaker requests the hearer to perform a particular action (e.g., commanding, requesting).
- *Expressives* are speech acts in which a speaker expresses his/her feelings (e.g., thanking, apologizing, welcoming).
- *Declarations* are speech acts that change the reality in accord with the proposition of the declaration (e.g., nominating, resigning).

Speech acts can also be realized directly or indirectly, but they are frequently carried out indirectly in our everyday lives to soften the force of the act (LoCastro, 2012). When a speech act is performed indirectly and thus the linguistic form does not explicitly

represent the speaker's actual intention, an addressee needs to infer the intended meaning of the speaker's utterance. Understanding of the speaker's actual intention requires the addressee to consider the meaning of the utterance in a particular context. Furthermore, in order to appropriately respond, the addressee also needs to know the appropriate practices of speech acts in a given speech community.

Next, studies dealing with the speech act of refusals are reviewed.

### **Speech Act of Refusal**

Refusals are speech acts that occur as negative responses to other acts such as requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions (Gass & Houck, 1999). While some researchers view refusals as commissive speech acts (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2004; García, 2007), refusals may not always fall into this category as they are not always rejections and sometimes involve negotiation in which the participants do not even know what the final outcome will be. According to Gass and Houck (1999), when one decides not to accept an initiated act, s/he can generally take three possible refusal approaches: rejection, postponement, or proposal of alternative. For example, in response to a friend's request for borrowing a car tomorrow, one could say *sorry, I can't*, which is a direct refusal or rejection. The respondent could also say *I will have to see my daughter's schedule*, which is a postponement. Another response could be *Does next week work for you?*, which is offering an alternative. Not only the direct refusals, but also postponements and proposals of alternatives are refusals because a respondent does not agree with the initial request. These responses, however, are not necessarily equal to the final outcome of an interaction. Even though a respondent directly refuses, the requester could come back proposing an

alternative (e.g., *how about if I borrow it for only one hour, tomorrow?*). In the case of postponement, the requester may wait for the later confirmation of the respondent or may rush to obtain a concrete response. When the requester receives an alternative offer, s/he may be able to modify her/his initial request in some way or may not be able to do so. As described, in the case that the initiator of an act does not accept the initial response, several steps of negotiation would occur until they settle the matter (see Table 1). Moreover, as Gass and Houck (1999) note, "the final outcome may or may not be mutually satisfactory" (p. 5).

Table 1

*Possible Responses and Outcomes from Gass and Houck (1999)*

Initiating Act (Initiator = I)	Initial Responses (Respondent = R)	Responses to R's Nonaccept (I)	Final Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request</li> <li>• Invitation</li> <li>• Offer</li> <li>• Suggestion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sincere Accept</li> <li>• Nonaccept               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Refuse</li> <li>- Postpone (Sincere)</li> <li>- Propose Alternative</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Not available)</li> <li>• Acceptance of R's Nonaccept</li> <li>• Nonacceptance of R's Nonaccept → Negotiation</li> <li>• (Abandon Process)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance</li> <li>• Refusal</li> <li>• Postponement</li> <li>• Compromise (on an Alternative Action/Nonaction)</li> </ul>

Refusals are also delicate speech acts to perform since positive responses such as acceptance and agreement are usually preferred. For this reason, refusals often involve various indirect strategies to be polite and avoid a failure in interpersonal relationships,

which requires a high level of pragmatic competence (Salazar-Campillo, 2009).

Therefore, it is important to examine the concept of politeness in greater detail in order to see how it may influence refusals.

### **Politeness**

In probably the most influential politeness theory, Brown and Levinson (1987) consider that an individual's *face needs* motivate us to apply politeness strategies. Here, *face* refers to the individual's self-esteem, and according to Brown and Levinson, all individuals wish to maintain both positive face and negative face. In this context, *positive face* means one's desire to be liked and accepted by a certain group to which one wishes to belong, while *negative face* refers to one's desire to be autonomous and have freedom of action. Like refusals, acts that may damage the face need of the speaker, the addressee, or both are, therefore, defined as face-threatening acts. In essence, politeness strategies are used to mitigate face threats and save the face of participants.

Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework of politeness, Scollon, Scollon, and Jones (2012) proposed three kinds of politeness systems: 1) *difference*, 2) *solidarity*, and 3) *hierarchical*. Two contextual variables, a) *power* and b) *distance* between participants, are involved in determining the politeness system. The first two systems, difference and solidarity are symmetrical, whereas the hierarchical politeness system is asymmetrical. In the difference politeness system, participants see themselves as being at an equal social level (-Power) with a distant relationship (+Distance). In this politeness system, participants use independence strategies respecting each other's negative face. A good example of this system is the relationship of two professionals with nearly the same

status who do not know each other very well. In a solidarity politeness system, participants see themselves as being of an equal social position (-Power) and having a close relationship (-Distance). In this system, participants use involvement strategies valuing each other's positive face. A clear example of this system is the relationship of two intimate friends. In a hierarchical politeness system, participants see themselves as being at different social levels (+Power): one participant is at higher social level, and the other is at a lower level. In this system, the relationship could be either close or distant, and the participant in the higher-status position uses solidarity (or involvement) strategies, whereas the participant in the lower-status position uses independence strategies. The academic relationship between a professor and her/his student is an example of the hierarchical politeness system.

Importantly, as Scollon et al. (2012) note, the degree of power and distance are determined by many different factors such as differences in society, culture, age, gender, education, and so forth. This claim has been supported by studies such as García (2007), in which gender differences were found in Argentinean refusals to an invitation from a friend. Using a role-play, oral data were collected from 22 Argentinean Spanish speaking females and males (11 each). Their average age was 23 years old and their professions varied, including some college students and professors. García first classified the data as (i) head acts (main refusals) or (ii) supporting moves. Then, employing Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework and Scollon and Scollon's (1983) terminology, she further categorized head acts in two politeness strategies: (i) deference and (ii) solidarity. Deference politeness strategies are "those that imply formality and respect and

include negative politeness and off-record strategies" (p. 553) and include providing reasons and expressing negative ability. Solidarity strategies are "those that imply camaraderie and in-group membership between speakers; they include bald on-record and positive politeness" (p.553). More specifically, they are strategies such as offering an alternative or a suggestion, expressing a willingness to comply, or stating a direct refusal.

Refusal strategies were also examined from the face threatening perspective. It was found that the Argentinians, both male and female, preferred deference politeness strategies in initially refusing a request, and they used strategies that threatened their own face needs more than those that threatened the inviter's face. However, a gender difference was seen in follow-up refusals when the participants responded to the inviter's insistence: the female participants used significantly more solidarity politeness strategies than deference politeness strategies, whereas the male participants balanced their use of strategies. In the present study, this classification of politeness systems was also used to examine pragmatic competence of native and nonnative speakers of English.

In the previous sections, studies dealing with speech acts, speech acts of refusal, and politeness, and how these concepts may be related were reviewed. It has become clear that the illocutionary act is a vital component of speech acts and refusals. Furthermore, politeness strategies are the means by which participants mitigate face threats and save face. Also, studies suggest that the degree of power and distance of the interlocutor play an important role in the realization of refusals. It is worth noting here that since the gender effect is embedded in many studies, it would be more appropriate to

devote a section to the gender influence after studies dealing with other factors are discussed.

Next, attention is turned to the study of cross-cultural refusals and how people from non-American cultures commit illocutionary acts and use politeness strategies when refusing. These studies cover a broad range of languages and cultures including the comparison of American English refusals with Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Spanish (Mexican and Argentinean), Persian, and Egyptian. The results of these studies are discussed next.

### **Cross-Cultural Refusal Studies**

Without exception, in every culture, the act of refusal exists. However, the strategies used could be different from one culture to another. The cross-cultural studies reveal the difference between the same acts in a variety of cultures. These studies allow for identifying potential pragmatic failures committed by non-native speakers and finding ways to teach pragmatics that would prevent these failures. Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz's (1990) groundbreaking work in cross-cultural studies of refusals has contributed to the development of the methodology and the taxonomy that are frequently utilized in other studies. This taxonomy was also adopted for the present study (see Chapter III).

In their taxonomy, refusal strategies fall into two broad categories: *Semantic formulas* and *Adjuncts*. A semantic formula, or a strategy, is a set of expressions, which could be a word(s), a phrase(s) or a sentence(s), and can function as a refusal. An adjunct is a set of expressions that supplement a refusal, but by itself cannot function as a refusal. Semantic formulas are further divided into *Direct* and *Indirect* realization of refusals.

The direct category includes *Performative* semantic formulas in which a refusal act is explicitly expressed such as *I refuse* and *Non-performative* semantic formulas in which *No* or negative willingness or ability are expressed such as *I can't* and *I don't think so*.

The indirect category includes semantic formulas that are used to mitigate or avoid the direct refusal by expressing regrets (e.g., *I'm sorry*), wishing (e.g., *I wish I could help you*), providing a reason for the non-acceptance, negotiating alternatives and so forth. As mentioned earlier, adjuncts accompany the semantic formula, but by themselves cannot perform a refusal act. They may appear before or after the semantic formulas in the form of *Statement of positive opinion* (e.g., *That's a good idea*), *Statement of empathy* (e.g., *I realize you are in a difficult situation*), *Pause fillers* (e.g., *well*), or expression of *Gratitude/Appreciation* (e.g., *Thank you for*). The classification of refusals by Beebe et al. is shown in Table 2, along with linguistic realization examples. In research studies, the refusal responses are coded according to the frequency, order, and content of the semantic formulas and the adjuncts. The frequency represents the number of occurrences, and the order is determined by the position of the semantic formulas and the adjuncts. For example, if in a study a respondent says: *Thank you for the invitation, but I cannot attend the party. I have prior engagements*. This response would be coded as *gratitude* (adjunct) in the first order, *non-performative* (direct refusal) in the second order, and a *reason* (indirect) in the third order.



Table 2  
*Classification of Refusals by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990)*

---

**Semantic formulas**

**Direct**

- A. Performative (e.g., “I refuse.”)
- B. Nonperformative
  - 1. “No”
  - 2. Negative willingness/ability (e.g., “I can’t” “I don’t think so”)

**Indirect**

- A. Statement of regret (e.g., “I’m sorry. . .”; “I feel terrible. . .”)
- B. Wish (e.g., “I wish I could help you. . .”)
- C. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., “My children will be home that night.”; “I have a headache.”)
- D. Statement of alternative
  - 1. I can do X instead of Y (e.g., “I’d rather. . .” “I’d prefer. . .”)
  - 2. Why don’t you do X instead of Y (e.g., “Why don’t you ask someone else?”)
- E. Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., “If you had asked me earlier, I would have. . .”)
- F. Promise of future acceptance (e.g., “I’ll do it next time”; “I promise I’ll. . .” or “Next time I’ll. . .” — using “will” of promise or “promise”)
- G. Statement of principle (e.g., “I never do business with friends.”)
- H. Statement of philosophy (e.g., “One can’t be too careful.”)
- I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor
  - 1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (e.g., “I won’t be any fun tonight” to reuse an invitation)
  - 2. Guilt trip (e.g., waitress to customers who want to sit a while: “I can’t make living off people who just order coffee.”)
  - 3. Criticize the request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or opinion); insult/attack (e.g., “Who do you think you are?”; “That’s a terrible idea!”)
  - 4. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request.
  - 5. Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g., “Don’t worry about it.” “That’s okay.” “You don’t have to.”)
  - 6. Self-defense (e.g., “I ‘m trying my best.” “I’m doing all I can do.”)
- J. Acceptance that functions as a refusal
  - 1. Unspecific or indefinite reply
  - 2. Lack of enthusiasm
- K. Avoidance
  - 1. Nonverbal
    - a. Silence
    - b. Hesitation
    - c. Do nothing
    - d. Physical departure
  - 2. Verbal
    - a. Topic switch
    - b. Joke
    - c. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., “Monday?”)
    - d. Postponement (e.g., “I’ll think about it.”)
    - e. Hedging (e.g., “Gee, I don’t know.” “I’m not sure.”)

**Adjuncts**

- A. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement (“That’s a good idea. . .” “I’d love to. . .”)
  - B. Statement of empathy (e.g., “I realize you are in a difficult situation.”)
  - C. Pause fillers (e.g., “uhh”; “well”; “oh”; “uhm”)
  - D. Gratitude/Appreciation
-

**American vs. Japanese** During the past three decades, Japanese refusal strategies have been studied extensively. The purpose of the Beebe et al. study was to investigate whether pragmatic transfer was seen in refusals of Japanese learners of English. The participants were 20 native speakers of Japanese, 20 Japanese learners of English, and 20 native speakers of American English. Each group consisted of both females and males with the average age of each group being in their late twenties. Some of the Japanese learners of English were college students and others had at least a college level education. In order to collect the data, a written discourse completion test (DCT) was conducted in which the participants were asked to read 12 situations and fill in their responses in the same way as they would respond orally in each situation. The twelve situations were developed in combination with four types of stimulus acts eliciting a refusal (request, invitation, offer, and suggestion) and three types of interlocutors (higher, equal, and lower status persons). The data were coded and analyzed in terms of the order, frequency, and content of the semantic formulas and adjuncts.

It was found that the American subjects used direct refusals (e.g. I can't) more frequently than the Japanese, particularly when refusing offers. They also found that excuses made by Japanese tended to be vague (e.g., "I have previous engagement", p. 66), whereas Americans used more specific excuses providing information such as time, place, or event. Moreover, Japanese refusals sometimes sounded more formal. For example, to refuse a diet suggestion from a friend, a Japanese learner of English replied, "I make it a rule to be temperate in eating", (p. 67) whereas American respondents preferred reactions such as "I don't really like diets", (p. 67). In Beebe et al.'s (1990) study, Japanese native

speakers and Japanese learners of English were similar in the way they refused differently depending on the relative status of the interlocutor - higher, equal, or lower status. The American participants, however, refused differently based on only two categories, whether the interlocutor was a status-equal (e.g., a friend) or a status unequal (higher and lower).

In another study, Kanemoto (1993) examined refusals of Americans and Japanese considering the underlying values of refusals in the two countries. Her study was based on the primary data and findings in a survey of the literature. Three prominent features of Japanese refusals identified are: (i) avoiding a clear refusal, (ii) mentioning a third party as a reason for the refusal, and (iii) creating a fictitious reason not to offend the interlocutor, if necessary. Kanemoto considers that the underlying value of Japanese refusal is that refusals can imperil a personal relationship. For this reason, these strategies are applied in order not to hurt the other person's feelings. In contrast to Japanese, Americans believe that refusing is an individual right and an honest refusal can enhance a relationship. Therefore, in the American society, it is recommended that a refuser state her/his perspective on the situation, her/his feeling about the situation, and what s/he wants (to do) in the situation. The three characteristics of American refusals that were identified are: (i) stating a clear refusal, (ii) being constructive, and (iii) being honest. These salient aspects of American refusals have often been reported as problematic for nonnative speakers of English in a number of other cross-cultural studies of refusals where the value and relationship between face and honesty differ.

In a different study, using open role-plays, Gass and Houck (1999) examined the refusal interaction sequences of Americans and Japanese English learners. Similar to Beebe et al. (1990), they investigated four stimulus types eliciting a refusal (request, invitation, offer, and suggestion) with each type having two situations. The setting for each situation was the home of an American host family who asked a guest, who was a nonnative speaker of English (NNS, Japanese), to do something uncomfortable such as giving a speech at church. Each role-play consisted of an interaction between a native speaker of English (NS) and a young adult NNS at a low to intermediate level of proficiency. The NNSs were not instructed on how to respond to the requests, or other acts that were initiated by the NSs. Additionally, the NSs were instructed not to give up too easily when the NNSs refused a situation. For each of the eight situations, data were collected from three NNSs, and all sessions were video recorded. Similar to Beebe et al.'s (1990) findings, the results showed that the Japanese NNSs utilized a number of indirect refusal strategies. While most of the refusal strategies used by the NNSs were similar to those described in Beebe et al. (1990), the NNSs' linguistic responses of confirmations, requests for clarification and/or information, and agreement were additionally found by Gass and Houck's (1999) study. They note that the NNSs not only transferred refusal patterns from their native language, but they also tried various semantic formulas and different content to search for proper refusal solutions within the new context. Moreover, their study showed that the lower proficient NNSs had more difficulty in coordinating nonverbal and verbal messages (e.g., coordinating head movement or other gestures with verbal messages).

More recently, Ebsworth and Kodama (2011) also pointed out a possibility of pragmatic failure caused by the difference in directness of refusals between American English and Japanese. The data were collected using role-plays and interviews from 8 pairs of Japanese females and 8 pairs of American females, whose age ranged from 20 to 40 years old. Four situations were set to investigate refusal interactions: two refusals to an invitation from a superior, and two refusals to a request from a friend. The results showed that both American and Japanese groups tried to be considerate to others in order to avoid conflict; however, they took different approaches. For the American female group, truthfulness appeared to be very important when they refused. For this reason, their refusals were straightforward. However, to move closer to agreement, they often offered alternative plans. Contrary to Americans, Japanese preferred to use indirect refusals, and their refusals tended to be fragmented (e.g., utterances ending with conjunctions such as *but* and *and* or verb). Japanese use indirect strategies to avoid offending her/his interlocutor, which is necessary to maintain a good relationship in Japanese society. However, Ebsworth and Kodama point out that using these indirect strategies toward Americans may cause pragmatic failure because Americans would feel that their interlocutor did not tell the truth, when they knew that refusal was unavoidable. They also showed that their American female participants more frequently provided alternative plans than did the Japanese female group. For the American group, 11 refusers and 4 requesters (15 out of 16 cases) offered alternative ideas, 7 of which contributed to achieving satisfactory resolutions, whereas for the Japanese group, 6 refusers and 3 requesters (9 of 16) suggested alternatives and only 3 were accepted.

The above mentioned studies (Beebe et al, 1990; Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011; Gass & Houck, 1999; Kanemoto, 1993) suggest that there exists a clear difference between American and Japanese refusals in terms of the degree of directness, sensitivity to status, constructiveness, and the clarity of excuses used in refusals. Overall, Japanese tend to use indirect semantic formulas whereas Americans prefer direct refusal statements (Beebe et al.,1990; Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011; Gass & Houck, 1999; Kanemoto, 1993). Furthermore, reasons provided by Japanese tend to be unclear, while those given by Americans are generally clear and honest (Beebe et al., 1990; Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011; Kanemoto, 1993). Americans prefer to offer alternatives to mitigate the refusal and seek for a mutual agreement. In contrast, Japanese refusals tend to lack alternatives. Japanese also have a higher sensitivity to status in that they use different strategies for those of higher, similar, and lower status, while Americans appear to change refusal strategies only according to same or different status (Beebe et al.,1990). As mentioned in Kanemoto's (1993) study, these differences may be most likely attributed to the different values of the two cultures.

Studies on other Asian cultures, as we will see, also show differences in their refusals from Americans in ways that also relate to perceptions of honesty and face.

**American vs. Korean.** Adopting the written DCT model developed by Beebe et al. (1990), Kwon (2004) compared Korean refusals with American refusals and reported the apparent differences in directness between the two languages. Forty native-Korean speaking college students in Korea (19 females and 21 males) and 37 American native-English speaking college students in the U.S. participated in this study. Kwon (2004)

discovered that the Korean group preferred indirect refusals and employed more avoidance strategies (e.g., hesitation and postponement), while the American students preferred more direct refusals. Furthermore, the Korean participants often used negative politeness strategies such as apologizing at the beginning of the refusals and used fillers to indicate reluctance toward the situation, while the American participants consistently demonstrated positive attitudes. For example, when they refused an invitation from a higher status person, the American participants more often expressed gratitude (22%) and positive opinions (22%) than did the Korean speakers (5%, 5% respectively). Some participants in both groups offered alternative plans when declining an invitation; however, they used this strategy with different interlocutors. Notably, the American participants offered it only to a friend of equal status (11%), whereas the Korean participants offered it across all statuses of interlocutor, though mainly to a person of lower status (13%). In regard to higher status interlocutors, Kwon found that the Korean students used strategies such as expressing positive opinions, apologies, and elaborated reasons to mitigate their refusals. However, the American group did not change their approach significantly according to the status of their interlocutors.

Like Japanese, Koreans tend to employ indirect strategies when refusing. This result could be expected as Japanese and Korean cultures share similar politeness norms. However, unlike Beebe et al., Kwon did not find sensitivity toward status of interlocutors by Americans.

**American vs. Chinese.** Several studies reported that Chinese refusals also tend to be indirect when compared to American refusals. Using a slightly modified version of

Beebe et al.'s (1990) written DCT, Chang (2009) investigated pragmatic transfer comparing refusals of Chinese learners of English with those of native speakers of American English. The participants were 156 college students consisting of four groups: 35 American college students (native speakers of English), 41 English major seniors, 40 English-major freshmen, and 40 Chinese-major sophomores. Chinese students were all native speakers of Mandarin. Chang found that the Americans preferred direct refusal strategies (e.g., more frequent use of direct formulas, providing more direct excuses), while the Chinese learners of English tended to use indirect refusal strategies such as wishing, which showed influence from the learners' native language.

Contrary to studies of Japanese refusals, Chang (2009) reported that the American group provided less specific reasons (e.g., refusal to their boss's request to stay late at the office: *I have other things to do*) compared to the Chinese participants who used more specific reasons (e.g., refusal to their boss's request to stay late at the office: *grandmother's 90th birthday celebration*). Chang attributes this difference to the cultures of the two countries in that Americans tend to show a greater need for privacy than the Chinese, and Chinese tend to use excuses that they find convincing. Finally, this study did not find a relationship between pragmatic transfer and proficiency level.

In a second study, Chang (2011) further examined refusals of Chinese speaking English. Again, adopting the model from Beebe et al. (1990), the study this time collected data using an oral DCT and questionnaires. The oral data were first collected from female college students: 45 native speakers of American English in the U.S. and 45 Chinese



learners of English at a college in Taiwan. The participants were given five situations (two requests, two invitations, and one offer) and asked to perform a closed role-play for each situation. The results were consistent with Chang (2009); the American females used significantly more direct refusal strategies than did the Chinese females. In the same study, Chang (2011) also compared the contents of the excuses and reasons given by the two groups of participants. Examples of the excuses were chosen from the oral DCT data, and the participants were asked to rate the appropriateness of the excuses and provide reasons for their ratings. The perception data were collected from 50 different American college female students and 45 different Chinese female EFL learners. She found that the American participants rated honest reasons more highly, whereas the Chinese students tended to give more specific and detailed reasons by attributing their refusals to an irrepressible matter.

While Chang (2009) and Chang (2011) contrasted Chinese learners of English with native speakers of English, Hong (2011) examined the refusal strategies of Americans who were learners of Chinese. Hong conducted a written DCT in which participants were asked to respond to an invitation from their professor to a Chinese New Year party. The participants were 60 college students living in the U.S., thirty of whom were native speakers of Mandarin and 30 American students who were learners of Chinese at advanced-low level proficiency. The refusal strategies were identified by the semantic formulas used, and their functions were considered in relation to their placement, either in head acts (main refusal) or in supportive moves. The study found that the American students used excuses/reasons as supportive moves to mitigate their direct

refusals, whereas native speakers of Chinese often provided excuses/reasons to refuse indirectly. Hong (2011) reported that the Chinese native speakers provided detailed excuses to convince the interlocutors that the refusal acts were due to circumstances beyond their control. Some Americans perceived those detailed excuses made by Chinese learners of English as inappropriate because they lacked honesty (Chang, 2011), but, from the Chinese point of view, the excuses provided by the American learners of Chinese were not very convincing (Hong, 2011) and thus not effective in Chinese culture.

Like Japanese and Koreans, Chinese also tend to use a more indirect approach when refusing. Furthermore, as compared to American reasons that are often honest or general, Chinese excuses are specific and artificial. Not giving an honest reason for the refusal is similar to Japanese and Korean tendencies.

**American vs. Iranian.** Allami and Naeimi (2011) investigated the refusal strategies of Iranian EFL learners and compared them with the American refusals. The study adopted the written DCT from Beebe et al. (1990) with a slight modification. The data were collected from 30 Iranian English learners and 31 native speakers of Farsi. They were all male undergraduate students aged between 16 to 29 years. The data for the American group were borrowed from Kwon (2004). This study found that while both native speakers of Farsi and Iranian learners of English used a higher variety of indirect strategies and provided more excuses and reasons than the Americans, their excuses and reasons were less clear or less concrete (e.g., *Sorry I am busy* or *I have to go outside for work*) than those of the Americans (e.g., *I have to attend a wedding on that day*). Allami and Naeimi (2011) also found that like Americans, both the Farsi speakers and the

Iranian learners of English frequently expressed positive opinions, but unlike the Americans, they did not offer any alternative plans. Moreover, condition-setting statements (e.g., *if you had told me earlier*) were often used especially by English learners at the upper-intermediate level, while those were never used by the Americans. They also determined that both Iranian groups chose strategies based on the interlocutor's relative social status. For example, when refusing requests, the Iranian groups provided reasons and excuses more frequently to higher or equal status persons, while their refusals became more straightforward to lower status interlocutors. Finally, they reported that as the English learners became more proficient, the more pragmatic transfer occurred.

Even though the Iranian participants used a variety of tactics, in some ways, their refusal strategies were similar to Japanese in that their strategies depended on the interlocutor's relative social status, and made use of formal and vague reasons.

**American vs. Egyptian.** Nelson, Al Batalb and El Bakary (2002) compared the refusals of Egyptian Arabic and American English focusing on the effects of status and gender. Using a questionnaire similar to Beebe et al. (1990), they collected oral data from 30 native speakers of American English living in the U.S. and 25 native speakers of Egyptian Arabic living in Cairo. In both groups, the participants varied by profession, and nearly half of the participants were female. The refusal data of the two languages were analyzed based on the classification system developed by Beebe et al. (1990) with a little modification. Their results showed that the American and the Egyptian participants used similar strategies. Providing reasons and expressing negative willingness (e.g., *I can't*) were the two most frequently used refusal strategies by all groups. The frequency of the

direct and indirect semantic formulas used by the Egyptian and the American participants were also similar. Moreover, they found that the Egyptian males differed from the other three groups in terms of directness. The Egyptian males refused more directly to higher or lower status persons than did the Americans and the Egyptian females, whose directness levels were consistent among all statuses. Compared to the Iranian study, the Egyptian participants did not use as many indirect semantic formulas in a refusal. Egyptians' refusals seemed to be different from the Japanese, Korean, and Chinese in that they demonstrated more frequent use of direct refusal statements.

**American vs. Mexican.** The difference in status sensitivity between American English speakers and other language speakers also has been shown in studies that examined American learners of other languages. One last example of a specific language is Félix-Brasdefer's (2004) investigation of refusals of American college students learning Spanish as a foreign language in the U.S. The data were collected through role-plays and verbal reports. For role-plays, ten scenarios were created including six refusal situations (refusal to two invitations, two suggestions and two requests). Power and social distance were considered as culturally sensitive variables and employed in the situations. The participants were 64 university students: 20 male native speakers of Mexican Spanish with an average age of 22.3 years, 20 male native speakers of American English with an average age of 20.9 years, and 24 (21 males, 3 females) advanced EFL learners of Spanish whose native language was American English with an average age of 23.8 years. The participants in each group were first asked to act in role-plays that were tape-recorded. The perception data were collected immediately after each role-play in order to

examine the participants' awareness of the social norm of refusal negotiation in the target culture while performing the task. The refusal strategies used by the participants were classified based on the taxonomy developed by Beebe et al. (1990) and politeness strategies were examined according to three functions: (i) pre-refusals, (ii) head act (main refusals), and (iii) post-refusals. The results showed that contrary to the Spanish cultural norms where people tend to employ a wider range of refusal strategies when refusing a person of higher status (+Power, +Distance), the American learners of Spanish and the native speakers of English used a wider range of strategies to a friend (−Power, −Distance). Félix-Brasdefer explains this strategic difference as cultural, citing Wolfson (1988) who says that for middle-class Americans, "equality of status favors negotiation and that inequality of status discourages attempts at negotiation" (p.630). In this study, Félix-Brasdefer also investigated the effect of length of residency on development of pragmatic competence. She found that the learners who spent 9 months or more in the target community demonstrated native-like refusals, such as showing solidarity, employing indirect manner, and negotiating with the interlocutors. On the other hand, the learners who had spent less than 5 months abroad often refused directly and briefly. Thus, Félix-Brasdefer concluded that the length of residency in the target community had affected the participants' development of pragmatic competency in refusals.

Similar to Iranians and Koreans, the Mexicans also used a wider range of refusal strategies, especially toward the higher status persons. The result of the above study is also consistent with Beebe et al. (1990) findings that American refusal strategies depends on whether the status of the interlocutor is equal or not equal.

**American vs. Multiple L1s.** Several researchers have also studied other factors such as L1 transfer and L2 proficiency levels in English that may affect development of second language learners' pragmatic competence in the US. Analyzing 39 audio-recorded interactions, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1991) investigated refusals of college students during academic advisory sessions. The participants were 7 faculty members (4 males and 3 females) who were native speakers of English, and 39 graduate students (18 native speakers of English and 21 nonnative speakers of English). The nonnative speakers were proficient in English and their native languages were Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Malay and Spanish. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford found that when native speakers refused their advisors' suggestions, they provided convincing explanations for why not, which were often accompanied with alternative ideas. While the nonnative speakers also provided explanations, those were often found to be inappropriate (e.g., providing conflicting reasons, making reference to opinions from one's friend). They also lacked alternative plans, and instead appeared to avoid refusals by postponing (e.g., *I want to think a little bit more*), asking for the repetition of the information (e.g., *What was that last course?*), and requesting additional information (e.g., *Do you have any idea what the syllabus is like?*). Despite the fact that the nonnative English speakers were all proficient, they demonstrated a weak ability of maintaining status balance between the advisor and themselves due to their inappropriate choice of linguistic form, strategies, and content of explanations. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford also noted that for nonnative English speakers there was no particular L1 that promoted more successful refusals in English.

In another study, Bardovi-Harlig, Rose, and Nickels (2008) examined whether English learners' native languages (L1s) affect development of pragmatic competence. For this purpose, their study focused on English learners' usage of conventional expressions in three speech acts, namely gratitude, apology, and refusal. A computer-delivered aural DCT was used to collect data. Participants were English learners of four different L1s (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) with different levels of proficiency and native English speakers. They were asked to read and listen to six scenarios and orally respond to each scenario. Their responses were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Moreover, the scenarios were selected based on the native speakers' frequently used conventional expressions. In terms of refusal, two scenarios were provided: *More Food (Would you like some more?)* and *Help at Store (Can I help you?)*. The conventional expression, *no thanks/no thank you*, was determined as the direct refusal for both More Food and Help at the Store. *I'm full* and *I'm (/I am) just looking* were determined as the conventional expressions of explanation for More Food and Help at the Store respectively. The results showed that there was no significant difference in the use of conventional expressions among learners with different L1s; rather the use of conventional expressions was found to increase as learners became more proficient. However, this result is contradicted by Allami and Naeimi's (2011) findings that the more proficiency learners demonstrated, the more frequent pragmatic transfer occurred.

**Cross-cultural summary.** Cross-cultural refusal studies clearly have shown that there are differences between the American and the non-American refusals in terms of the order, frequency, and the content of the semantic formulas and adjuncts.

These studies suggest that in general, Americans tend to be direct as they see directness as being honest and as an individual right to refuse (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Chang, 2009; Chang, 2011; Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011; Hong, 2011; Kanemoto, 1993; Kwon 2004). A direct refusal such as *I can't* is often expressed and a reason or excuse for the refusal is generally clear and honest. In order to mitigate the refusal and/or to be constructive, an alternative plan and a positive opinion often accompany their refusals. In regard to Americans' sensitivity to relative social status, the studies show mixed results. Beebe et al. (1990) found that Americans refused differently based on whether the interlocutor was of equal or unequal status, whereas, Kwon (2004) reported that American participants did not change their approach significantly according to the distance and power of the interlocutors. However, the mixed results may be interpreted in the following manner. Beebe et al. findings could be explained in terms of solidarity and independence, whereas, Kwon's findings could be attributed to the American value of equality.

Non-Americans' refusal strategies differ considerably from the American approach. In general, the cross-cultural studies suggest that refusals in other cultures are less direct than the American's, as a direct refusal is seen as harmful to relationships (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Chang, 2009; Chang, 2011; Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011; Kanemoto, 1993, Kwon, 2004). Therefore, a direct refusal statement is often avoided, and instead a variety of other strategies (indirect and adjunct) are employed to maintain politeness.

Furthermore, differences in clarity and content of reasons and excuses were shown to exist between the Americans and non-Americans. Reasons and excuses given



for the refusal are often inappropriate from an American viewpoint because they are unclear or untrue (Allami and Naeimi, 2011; Beebe et al., 1990; Chang, 2009; Chang, 2011; Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011; Kanemoto, 1993; Kwon 2004). Lack of providing alternatives by non-Americans is cited as well (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991). The value and relationship between face and honesty could be the reason for these differences. In American culture, if one lies or makes up a reason, one would lose face, but one does not lose face even if one refuses honestly as long as the interlocutor's feeling is taken into account and refusal is mitigated or negotiated for an acceptable alternative.

In terms of non-American's sensitivity to relative social status, several patterns were reported. In some cultures such as Japanese and Iranian, it appears that different refusal strategies are used depending on whether the social status of the interlocutor is high, equal, or low (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Beebe et al., 1990). In other cultures such as Korean and Mexican, it is reported that they are highly sensitive to a higher status person when refusing (Félix-Brasdefer, 2004; Kwon 2004). In comparison, as mentioned earlier, in regard to American sensitivity toward power and distance, the studies showed mixed results.

As discussed previously, several studies suggest that English learners' L2 pragmatic competency is clearly affected by their L1 pragmatic strategy use and they appear to find the characteristics of American refusals problematic; for example, by not giving clear refusal statements and by providing reasons that could be interpreted as dishonest (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Beebe et al., 1990;

Chang, 2009; Chang, 2011; Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011; Kwon 2004). Other factors that may affect L2 pragmatics include proficiency level, the length of residency in the target community, and the learner's first language (L1). There is mixed evidence that the higher proficiency-level of English learners will transform to a higher pragmatic competency in the L2 (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2008; Chang, 2009; Gass & Houck, 1999). A single study by Félix-Brasdefer (2004) suggests that the length of residency in the target community affects the development of refusal strategies that are appropriate in the target language. According to Félix-Brasdefer, learners who spent less than 5 months abroad tended to refuse directly and briefly, while the learners who spent 9 months or more in the target community demonstrated refusal strategies that were similar to the patterns of the native speakers. Finally, the results of several studies (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2008; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991) suggest that there is no correlation between a particular native language and L2 pragmatic competency in English.

***Gender Influence Summary.*** Gender was an additional variable in some of the studies reviewed above (Chang, 2011; Ebsworth and Kodama, 2011; García, 2007; Nelson et al., 2002). The American females in these studies tended to use more direct refusal strategies than females in other cultures such as Japanese and Chinese. In their same-gender cross-cultural study, Ebsworth and Kodama (2011) pointed out that American female refusals frequently included direct refusal statements, honest reasons, and alternatives. Contrary to Americans, Japanese females preferred to use indirect semantic formulas including postponement strategy, and their refusals tended to be fragmented. This result indicates that the American females valued honesty, and thus

gave direct refusals as well as frank reasons. Alternatives were provided to mitigate the direct refusals and try to save both their own face and the face of their interlocutor. This strategy shows the value of solidarity. The Japanese women on the other hand, were indirect and evasive in their strategy use, which is valued as a way of saving face among the Japanese participants.

Similarly, in another same-gender cross-cultural study, Chang (2011) also showed that the American females used significantly more direct refusal statements than did the Chinese females. However, she found that the Chinese females used different indirect refusal formulas than did the Japanese. While the Japanese tended to give vague excuses, the Chinese participants tended to give more specific and detailed reasons but they were still artificial in nature. As with Ebsworth and Kodama (2011), Chang (2011) also found that the American female participants rated clearer reasons for a refusal as more preferable.

In a cross-gender and same-culture study, García (2007) found that in their refusal negotiations, the Argentinean female participants significantly used solidarity politeness strategies such as expressing willingness to comply more often than did their male counterparts. In a cross-gender, cross-cultural study, Nelson et al. (2002) compared the refusals of Egyptian Arabic and American English focusing on the effects of status and gender. Their results showed that providing reasons and expressing negative willingness (e.g., *I can't*) were the two most frequently used refusal strategies by all groups regardless of culture or gender. However, they found that the Egyptian males differed from the other three groups in terms of the frequent use of direct refusal formulas. The

Egyptian males refused more directly to higher or lower status persons than did the Americans, while the Egyptian females directness levels were consistent among all statuses.

These studies, although limited, suggest that directness, politeness strategies, content of reasons for the refusals, and the status sensitivity of refusals vary not only by culture but also gender. The present study builds on previous studies (e.g., García, 2007; Nelson et al., 2002) by investigating refusals of English learners focusing on gender differences.

As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this study is to investigate the differences in refusal strategies used by native and nonnative English speakers who are college students in the U.S. The role of gender is also examined. The hypothesis is based on the previous studies that there are differences in terms of directness, politeness strategy, content of reasons, and sensitivity to social status. The specific research questions are: Do refusals differ between American and non-American students, and between females and males in terms of:

- the frequency of semantic formulas?
- the order of semantic formulas?
- the content of semantic formulas?

The taxonomy of refusals formulated by Beebe et al. (1990) was mainly used as a guide for the data analysis (see Chapter III).

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

In this chapter, the methodology used in this study is discussed. Detailed information about the subjects, the instrument, the procedure, and data analysis are provided.

#### **Subjects**

Seventy-four 1<sup>st</sup> year college students participated in this study: 21 native speakers of American English (8 females and 13 males) and 53 nonnative speakers of English who were international students (17 females and 36 males). For the reasons of convenience and reliability of the responses, the subjects were recruited at a mid-sized mid-western university through their English composition and ESL classes.

After eliminating the incomplete data and balancing the gender, the data used for analysis consisted of 16 American students (8 females and 8 males) and 32 nonnative speakers of English (16 females and 16 males) as shown in Figure 1. The age of the American students ranged from 18 to 20 years old with an average of 19 years for both female and male participants. The international students' age varied from 19 to 29 years with an average of 21.4 years. The age of the female international students ranged from 19 to 27 years with an average of 21.1 years, while the male international students' age ranged from 19 to 29 with an average of 21.8 years. The native languages of international students varied widely as shown in Table 3.

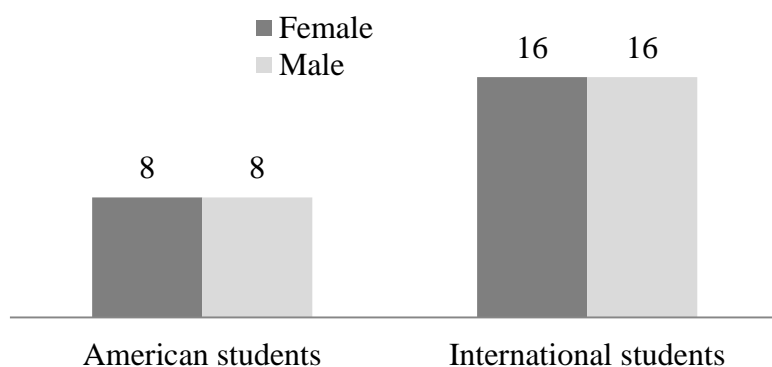


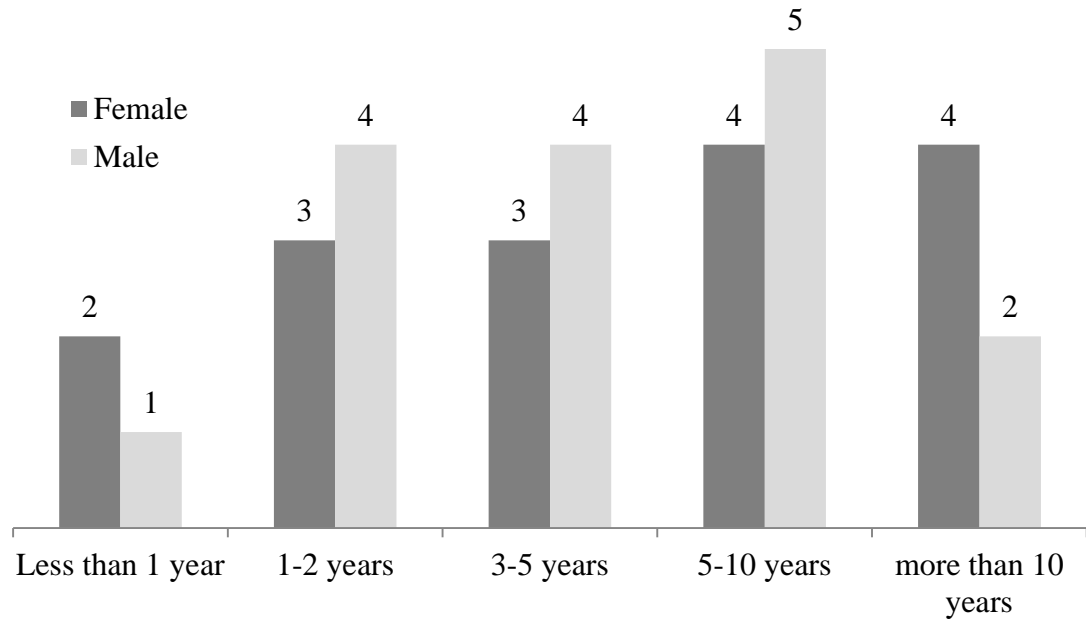
Figure 1. The participants

Table 3

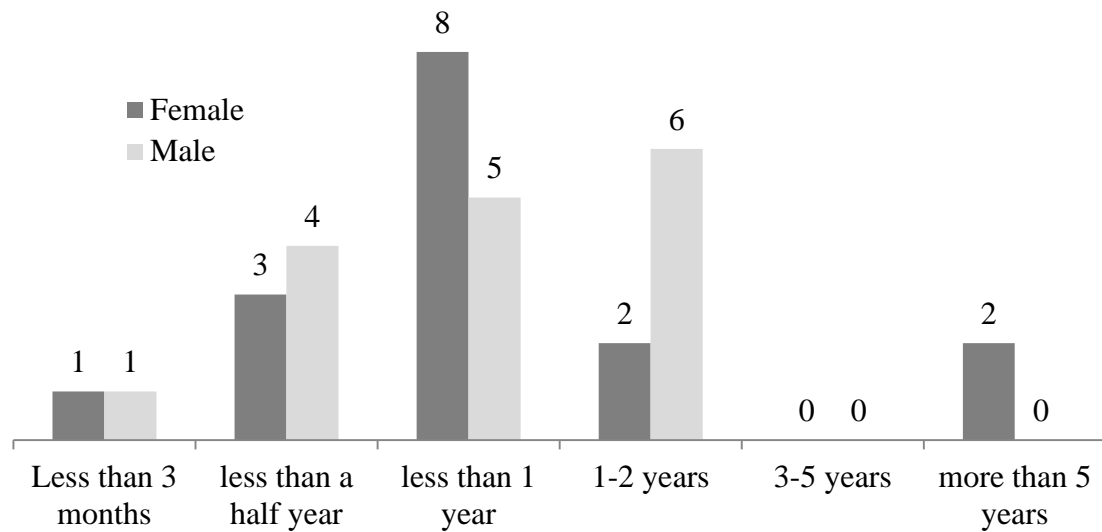
*The Native Languages of International Participants*

Native languages	Female	Male	Total	
French (African)	3	3	6	19%
Korean	3	3	6	19%
Arabic	2	3	5	16%
Chinese	3	1	4	13%
Bangla	-	2	2	6%
Nepali	1	1	2	6%
Vietnamese	1	1	2	6%
Amharic (Ethiopia)	-	1	1	3%
Cameroon	1	-	1	3%
Hmong	1	-	1	3%
Romanian	1	-	1	3%
Spanish	-	1	1	3%
Total	16	16	32	100%

As shown in Figure 2, the international students' experiences of learning English also varied. Their English proficiency level ranged from beginning to intermediate level. The majority of them have lived in the U.S. less than 3 years (with 9 students with less than 6 months of residency) as shown in Figure 3.



*Figure 2.* The number of years that the international student participants have been studying English



*Figure 3.* The number of years that international student participants have lived in U.S.

## **Instrument**

Data were collected using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) (see Appendix A), a popular instrument used to collect linguistic data and to analyze particular speech acts. It is a written questionnaire in which a situation is first briefly presented and then a subject is asked to write her or his response in a blank space that is provided on the questionnaire. The major advantages of using a DCT are its efficiency and consistency. A DCT allows for collecting the data in a short period of time and from a large number of participants. It also allows analyzing responses in a consistent manner because the role of the subjects and contextual factors are controlled (Gass & Houck, 1999). Despite these advantages, some researchers have questioned the validity of the data collected with a DCT. For example, Sasaki (1998) and Turnbull (1994) compared DCT data to role-play data and found that those two instruments produced different results. Furthermore, they suggested that the DCT data might differ from naturally occurring speech (as cited by Gass and Houck, 1999).

In order to solve this issue, but to retain the advantage that a DCT provides in terms of controlling the role of the subjects and contextual factors, the DCT used in this study requires the participants to mimic a task they would normally do in their real life (i.e. writing emails). By focusing on email correspondences, it is felt that the use of the DCT would be less likely to have a negative impact on the results than if participants were asked to write what they would say. Therefore, the use of the DCT instrument in this study was deemed appropriate.



The survey was conducted using an online survey tool, Qualtrics, or in a paper form when a computer lab was not available during the class. Each participant answered a background questionnaire at the beginning of the survey. The students were then asked to read six scenarios displayed on a computer screen (or written out on a piece of paper) and type (or write) their responses to each scenario in English in the text boxes provided. The six scenarios consisted of three invitations and three requests. Each group required a reply to professors (+Power, +Distance), to friends (-Power, -Distance) and to a department administrator (-Power, +Distance). To remove any gender bias, the invitation and request came jointly from a female and a male professor and jointly from a female and a male friend while the gender of the department administrator was not specified. All scenarios were created to particularly fit in a college-life context and to elicit refusals. It should be noted, however, that the word *refuse* was not used in order to avoid biasing the respondents' decision of response and therefore, it was possible for a participant to accept an invitation or a request. The six situations involved were:

- Situation 1: You and your classmates receive an email from your professors, inviting you to a party to celebrate students who are graduating this year. However, you are only in your first year and really don't know the graduates, so you don't want to go. How would you respond to your professors' invitation? In the space provided below, write a reply to the professors' email.
- Situation 2: Two of your good friends send you and other friends an email to invite you to see a movie premiere. However, you are not interested in the movie

and don't want to go. How would you respond to your friends' invitation to the movie premiere? In the space provided below, write a reply to your friends' email.

- Situation 3: You receive an email from the department you are majoring in at your university inviting you to their alumni event. In order to know how many people are attending the event, your department asks you to respond to the email. You don't want to go. How would you respond to the email? In the space provided below, write a reply to the coordinator's email.
- Situation 4: You receive an email from your professors, asking you to mentor an incoming international student next semester. However, you don't want to do it. How would you respond to your professors' request? In the space provided below, write a reply to the professors' email.
- Situation 5: You receive an email from two of your friends, asking you to read their paper and provide feedback. However, you don't want to do it. How would you respond to your friends? In the space provided below, write a reply to the friends' email.
- Situation 6: You receive an email from the department you are majoring in at your university asking you to attend a teaching demonstration by a candidate for a position in the department. However, you don't want to attend the demonstration. How would you respond to the email? In the space provided below, write a reply to the coordinator's email.

## Procedure and Data Analysis

The collected data was classified according to the refusal strategies shown in Table 4. The subjects' refusal strategies were analyzed by matching word(s), phrase(s), or sentence(s) that met a particular semantic criterion or strategy. Data analysis of this study was guided mainly by the framework set by Beebe et al. (1990) with some modification. Specifically, the modified taxonomy did not differentiate between performative (e.g., *I refuse*) and nonperformative (e.g., *I can't*) direct refusal statements because the occurrence of performative refusals were few (only four cases, by two people among 48 participants). Moreover, the *promise of future acceptance* was changed to *future possibility* because the majority of statements made by the participants in this study were not promises, but rather possibilities for the future (e.g., *maybe next time*), which is likely related to the scenarios utilized in the DCT. The *statement of philosophy*, *attempt to dissuade interlocutor*, and *acceptance that functions as refusal* also were omitted since they did not occur in the respondents' data. Furthermore, *avoidance* was replaced by *hedge* as only hedging was found under the avoidance category. Finally, the *request for empathy*, *greetings*, and *acknowledgement of receipts* were added to the adjunct to refusal category, as those semantic formulas supplemented refusals, but by themselves cannot function as refusals.

After all of the refusal strategies were classified, their order and frequency were determined. For example, in a situation in which a participant refused an invitation from professors by stating [*I am sorry*] *to say that* [*I will be out of town at a family member's wedding the weekend of the 20<sup>th</sup>*], this response was coded as [*Statement of regret*] plus

[*Reason/excuse/explanation*], with the statement of regret occurring in the first order and reason occurring in the second order. The frequency was calculated as the number of respondents who used a particular formula. All the frequency and order results obtained from the participants were converted to percentages. To derive at the percentage, the number of responses was then divided by the total number of the participants in each group. This procedure will be explained in greater detail in Chapter IV.

Next, the contents of reasons for refusal, positive opinions and alternatives were further examined in more detail. Finally, for each situation, the frequency, order, and content of refusal strategies used by participants were compared between native and nonnative speakers of English, and by gender. The detailed data analysis and results are discussed in Chapter IV.

Table 4  
*The semantic formulas used in the analysis of data (modified from Beebe et al., 1990)*

Semantic formulas	Examples from the collected data
<i>Direct</i>	
Negative willingness/capability	I can't/I won't
<i>Indirect</i>	
1. Statement of regret	I'm sorry/I apologize/Unfortunately
2. Wish	I wish I could/I would like to but
3. Reason/excuse/explanation	I have a lot going on right now
4. Statement of alternative	Someone else would do a much better job
5. Set condition for past or future acceptance	If I (will) have extra time, I will definitely help you
* 6. Future possibility	Maybe next time
7. Statement of principle	I can't ignore if you ask to me for something
* 8. Hedge	I'm not sure/ I will inform you if there is any possibility
<i>Adjuncts to refusal</i>	
1. Gratitude	Thank you for your invitation/I appreciate . . .
2. Statement of positive opinion	Hope you enjoy
* 3. Request for empathy	I think you can understand my situation.
* 4. Greetings	How are you doing these days?
* 5. Acknowledgement of receipt	I got your email

\* differ from Beebe et al., 1990

## **Chapter IV: Data Analysis and Results**

In this chapter, the participants' responses to the six situations that were discussed in Chapter 3 are presented. The results are organized in the order of power and distance of the interlocutor (+Power, +Distance), (-Power, +Distance), (-Power, -Distance) and by stimulus types (invitation and request). In each section, the American group results are presented first followed by the international students' results. For each group, the frequencies, the order, and the content of semantic formulas are examined. At the end of this chapter a summary of results is presented.

### **Refusals to an Invitation from Professors (+Power, +Distance)**

#### **American Students.**

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The results of the frequency of semantic formulas used for situation 1, which involves an invitation from professors to a graduation celebration, are shown in Table 5. This may be a good place to say a few words about what the numbers in Table 5 represent. As an example, in Table 5, the percentage value in the *Male* column and the *Direct* row shows 87.5%. This value indicates that 7 of 8 American male students or 87.5 % of them used a direct refusal semantic formula in situation 1.

The majority of the American students expressed gratitude (87.5%), most commonly in the form of *Thank you for* and *I appreciate*, and stated a direct refusal (75.0%) such as *I will not be able to attend*. Another commonly used strategy was to give a reason or excuse as to why they would not be attending (50.0%). As also shown in

Table 5, the direct refusal followed by a reason formula was stated more frequently by the male students (87.5%, 62.5%, respectively) than the females (62.5%, 37.5%).

Table 5

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 1 by American Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=16)	Female (n=8)	Male (n=8)
Direct	75.0%	62.5%	87.5%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	31.3%	25.0%	37.5%
Reason	50.0%	37.5%	62.5%
Future possibility	6.3%	12.5%	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	87.5%	87.5%	87.5%
Positive opinion	31.3%	37.5%	25.0%

***Order of semantic formulas.*** The orders of semantic formulas used by all American students to situation 1 are summarized in Tables 6 and 7. Table 6 shows the orders of the semantic formulas by all students, whereas Table 7 shows the responses by gender. Again, this may be a good place to explain what the percentage values in Table 6 and 7 represent. As an example, in Table 7, in the *Male* section, the percentage shown in the "1" column and the *Direct* row shows 12.5%. This value indicates that 1 of 8 male participants placed a direct refusal statement in the first order of the refusal response. Moreover, under the *Semantic formulas*, and the *Direct* row, the American male participants' order of refusal was as follows: 12.5% (in Order 1), 50% (in Order 2), 12.5% (in Order 3), 12.5% (in Order 4), 12.5% (in Order 5). If we were to consider the

total percentage for this row, it would be 100%, which could imply that all of the eight American males used a direct refusal formula. However, the actual result is that one respondent used the direct refusal formula twice in different positions (orders), and one respondent did not use the direct refusal. There were also data sets under which all participants used a certain strategy and some more than once. For this case, the total percentage for the row would exceed 100. For these reasons, the total percentage values of the rows are not shown in the tables that show the order of semantic formulas results.

As shown in Table 6, the American students typically expressed gratitude in the first order (62.5%), followed by a direct refusal in the second order (50.0%). The reason for the refusal was given in the second order or later. Further examination of Table 7 reveals that these patterns were demonstrated equally by both female and male students.

***Content of semantic formulas.*** In terms of the content of a reason or excuse for the refusal, 5 of 8 (62.5%) American students who provided a reason appeared to answer honestly, most often stating that they did not know the graduates personally. Two students (1 female and 1 male) provided the general excuse of having a prior appointment, and one male student provided the specific excuse of attending a wedding party.

Regarding positive opinions, 6 participants (4 females, 2 males) stated two different kinds of positive statements: one mentioning the party as a good opportunity which was placed at the beginning of the refusal (e.g., *It does sound like a good opportunity to congratulate the graduates*), and another kind wishing for a good time which was stated at the end of the refusal (e.g., *have a wonderful time.*) No difference between genders was found.



Table 6

*Order of Refusal to Situation 1 by All American Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All American students (n=16)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Direct	6.3%	50.0%	6.3%	12.5%	6.3%
<i>Indirect</i>					
Regret	18.8%	-	12.5%	-	-
Reason	-	25.0%	12.5%	6.3%	6.3%
Future possibility	-	-	6.3%	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>					
Gratitude	62.5%	6.3%	12.5%	18.8%	12.5%
Positive opinion	6.3%	12.5%	6.3%	12.5%	-
Total	93.8%	93.8%	56.3%	50.0%	25.0%

Note: One American female student accepted the invitation.

Table 7

*Order of Refusal to Situation 1 by American Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=8)					Male (n=8)				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Direct	-	50.0%	-	12.5%	-	12.5%	50.0%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%
<i>Indirect</i>										
Regret	12.5%	-	12.5%	-	-	25.0%	-	12.5%	-	-
Reason	-	25.0%	12.5%	-	-	-	25.0%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%
Future possibility	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>										
Gratitude	62.5%	-	12.5%	12.5%	25.0%	62.5%	12.5%	12.5%	25.0%	-
Positive opinion	12.5%	12.5%	-	25.0%	-	-	12.5%	12.5%	-	-
Total	87.5%	87.5%	50.0%	50.0%	25.0%	100.0%	100.0%	62.5%	50.0%	25.0%

Note: One female American student accepted the invitation.

### **International Students.**

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The results of the frequency of semantic formulas used for situation 1 are shown in Table 8. The international students used a wider variety of strategies than did the Americans. Similar to the American students, a

direct refusal statement was frequently used (78.1%), often accompanied with an expression of gratitude (84.4%) in a variety of forms such as *Thank you, Thanks, I appreciate, I am honored, I am grateful, I am happy*. All of the international students provided a reason or excuse for their refusals, while only half of the American students did so. Moreover, in addition to gratitude, regret (e.g., *I am sorry*) was also frequently expressed by the international students (56.3%), in comparison only 31.3% of the American students did so. Finally, indirect refusal strategies such as wishing (e.g., *I wish I could*), hedging (e.g., *I'm not really sure*), and adjunct to refusal strategies such as requests for empathy (e.g., *I hope you will understand*), greetings (e.g., *I hope you are doing well*), and acknowledgements of receipt (e.g., *I got your email*) were used by the international students but never by the American students.

The results also showed some differences between the female and male students. The male international students used direct refusal formulas slightly more often (81.3%) than did the female international students (75.0%). This tendency is consistent with the American refusals. Nearly a half of the international male students stated positive opinions (43.8%), whereas only 25.0% of the female students did so.

Table 8

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 1 by International Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=32)	Female (n=16)	Male (n=16)
Direct	78.1%	75.0%	81.3%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	56.3%	62.5%	50.0%
Wish	31.3%	37.5%	25.0%
Reason	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Future possibility	21.9%	31.3%	12.5%
Hedge	3.1%	6.3%	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	84.4%	81.3%	87.5%
Positive opinion	34.4%	25.0%	43.8%
Request for empathy	15.6%	12.5%	25.0%
Greetings	6.3%	-	12.5%
Acknowledgement of receipt	9.4%	6.3%	12.5%

***Order of semantic formulas.*** The orders of semantic formulas used by the international students to situation 1 are summarized in Tables 9 and 10. Table 9 shows the orders of the semantic formulas by all students, whereas Table 10 shows the responses by gender. As shown in Table 9, similar to the American students, expressions of gratitude were most frequently stated in the first order (56.3%), but they were most often followed by reasons or excuses in the second order (37.5%). While the American students most frequently stated a direct refusal statement in the second order, the international students placed it half as often in the first or second order compared to the Americans, and varied unpredictably by placing it in all possible orders, though most often later in the formula than did the Americans. Moreover, their choice of semantic

formulas in the second order position varied widely as indicated by smaller percentage values. The results also showed that the female international students preferred to start with gratitude (62.5%) more so than did the male international students (50.0%).

Table 9

*Order of Refusal to Situation 1 by All International Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All international students (n=32)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Direct	3.1%	21.9%	21.9%	21.9%	9.4%	3.1%	-
<i>Indirect</i>							
Regret	9.4%	9.4%	18.8%	12.5%	9.4%	-	-
Wish	12.5%	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	-	-
Reason	-	37.5%	34.4%	18.8%	15.6%	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	3.1%	9.4%	-	6.3%	-
Hedge	-	3.1%	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>							
Gratitude	56.3%	6.3%	6.3%	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%	3.1%
Positive opinion	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	-	3.1%	15.6%	3.1%
Request for empathy	-	-	3.1%	3.1%	3.1%	6.3%	6.3%
Greetings	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	6.3%	3.1%	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	84.4%	53.1%	37.5%	12.5%

Table 10

*Order of Refusal to Situation 1 by International Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=16)						Male (n=16)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Direct	6.3%	25.0%	12.5%	25.0%	12.5%	-	-	18.8%	31.3%	18.8%	6.3%	6.3%	-
<i>Indirect</i>													
Regret	6.3%	6.3%	31.3%	18.8%	-	-	12.5%	12.5%	6.3%	6.3%	18.8%	-	-
Wish	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	-	6.3%	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	-	-
Reason	-	43.8%	43.8%	6.3%	6.3%	-	-	31.3%	25.0%	31.3%	25.0%	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	6.3%	18.8%	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-
Hedge	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>													
Gratitude	62.5%	-	-	12.5%	25.0%	-	50.0%	12.5%	12.5%	25.0%	-	12.5%	6.3%
Positive opinion	-	6.3%	-	-	6.3%	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%	12.5%	-	-	12.5%	6.3%
Request for empathy	-	-	-	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	-	-	6.3%	-	-	6.3%	12.5%
Greetings	-	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	87.5%	56.3%	31.3%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	81.3%	50.0%	43.8%	25.0%

*Content of semantic formulas.* Among the thirty-two reasons provided by the international students, more than half of them (17 of 32, 53.1%) were the honest reason of not knowing the graduates or of having no interest, while 21.8% provided a general excuse such as having a prior appointment. Unlike the American students, eight of the thirty-two (25.0%) reasons provided by international students were specific such as going back to their own county and having an exam. One international male student whose native language is Korean, provided a cultural difference to justify his non-attendance, stating: *but in my country, graduation is celebrating those who are graduating not just meeting them, which means I have no reason for going there.* Another male international student, whose native language is French, stated: *because I do not see in what way this graduation party can be beneficial to me.* Other than these two rather unique, speaker-centered reasons given by males, there appeared to be no other particular differences found by gender.

### **Refusals to a Request from Professors (+Power, +Distance)**

#### **American Students**

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The results for situation 4, which is a request from a professor to mentor an incoming international student, are presented in Table 11. Similar to refusing the invitation from their professors, the majority of American students stated a direct refusal statement (81.3%) and gratitude (81.3%). In addition to these two strategies, a reason for the refusal was also frequently provided (68.8%).

These three strategies were similarly used by both the male and female students. However, some differences were found in the frequency of semantic formulas used by

gender. Half of the female students also stated a positive opinion such as *this does seem like a great opportunity*; however, none of the male students did so. Instead, half of the male students offered alternatives such as *if there is anything else I can do to help please don't hesitate to ask!* and *someone else would do a much better job* compared to only one female (12.5%) who did so.

Table 11

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 4 by American Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=16)	Female (n=8)	Male (n=8)
Direct	81.3%	75.0%	87.5%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	37.5%	37.5%	37.5%
Wish	6.3%	12.5%	-
Reason	68.8%	75.0%	62.5%
Alternative	31.3%	12.5%	50.0%
Future possibility	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	81.3%	87.5%	75.0%
Positive opinion	25.0%	50.0%	-

***Order of semantic formulas.*** The respondents' refusals to situation 4 are summarized in Tables 12 and 13. Similar to the refusals to the invitation (situation 1), the American students most frequently expressed gratitude at the beginning of their responses (62.5%). However, the semantic formula in the second order varied: approximately one-third (37.5%) of the American students provided reasons and one-fourth (25.0%) of the students stated direct refusal statements while one-fourth (25.0%)

of them expressed their regrets. In the third order position, one-fourth (25.0%) of the students stated direct refusals and another one-fourth (25.0%) provided reasons for the refusals.

These patterns were similarly demonstrated by both the female and the male American students. The difference found between genders was that no female started with a direct refusal formula at the beginning of their responses, whereas two male students (25%) directly refused at the beginning. Directly following the greeting, the two male participants stated: *i [I] will not be able to tutor...* or slightly less directly, *I do not think that I will be able to mentor...*

Table 12

*Order of Refusal to Situation 4 by All American Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All American students (n=16)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Direct	12.5%	25.0%	25.0%	12.5%	-	6.3%	-
<i>Indirect</i>							
Regret	6.3%	25.0%	6.3%	-	6.3%	-	-
Wish	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reason	-	37.5%	25.0%	6.3%	6.3%	-	-
Alternative	6.3%	-	-	25.0%	-	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	-	6.3%	-	6.3%	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>							
Gratitude	62.5%	6.3%	12.5%	12.5%	6.3%	-	6.3%
Positive opinion	6.3%	6.3%	12.5%	-	6.3%	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	81.3%	62.5%	25.0%	12.5%	6.3%

Table 13

*Order of Refusal to Situation 4 by American Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=8)							Male (n=8)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6
Direct	-	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	-	-	-	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	-	-	12.5%
<i>Indirect</i>													
Regret	12.5%	25.0%	-	-	-	-	-	-	25.0%	12.5%	-	12.5%	-
Wish	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reason	-	37.5%	25.0%	12.5%	12.5%	-	-	-	37.5%	25.0%	-	-	-
Alternative	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-	37.5%	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>													
Gratitude	62.5%		12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	-	12.5%	62.5%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	-	-
Positive opinion	12.5%	12.5%	25.0%	-	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	87.5%	62.5%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%	100.0%	75.0%	62.5%	12.5%	12.5%

**Content of semantic formulas.** The trend shows that the American students tend to refuse due to their own demanding study schedule (8 of 11 reasons provided, 66.7%), which would be considered both an honest and valid excuse in the American context. This result is similar to the reasons given when they refused an invitation from the professors (situation 1). One male American student stated a frank reason: *it is something that I am not very interested in*, while two male American students risked face by indicating that they were incapable of mentoring as an excuse strategy. The positive opinions provided by the female students were of two types: one type showed a positive attitude such as *I think that it would be a great opportunity for me* and another type was to wish the interlocutor well, by stating, *I hope everything works out*, despite their refusal. These two types of positive opinions are also similar to those found in situation 1. Most of the alternatives, which were mainly provided by males, suggested that other people could mentor the international student, or in one case, that the respondent could help with something else. As with situation 1, noticeable differences between genders were found.



### **International Students.**

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The results for situation 4 for this group are presented in Table 14. Similar to their refusals to the invitation from their professors, the international students' refusals commonly included reasons for the refusals (81.3%), direct refusal statements (75.0%), expressions of gratitude (62.5%), and statements of regret (59.4%). Again, for this situation as well, the international students used a wider variety of strategies as compared to the American students, who never used hedges, requests for empathy, greetings, or acknowledgements of receipt.

In terms of the gender differences, expressions of gratitude were used equally by both female and male international students (62.5%). However, similar to the refusals to an invitation from the professors, direct refusal statements were more frequently used by males (87.5%) than females (62.5%). As seen in the refusals to the invitation where the females expressed gratitude more than did the males, in this context they expressed regrets more often (68.8%) than did the males (50.0%). The shift from expressions of gratitude to regrets may be attributed to the difference of the two eliciting acts: an invitation from which the receivers could potentially benefit, and a request which could become a cost to the receivers.

Table 14

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 4 by International Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=32)	Female (n=16)	Male (n=16)
Direct	75.0%	62.5%	87.5%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	59.4%	68.8%	50.0%
Wish	12.5%	18.8%	6.3%
Reason	81.3%	87.5%	75.0%
Alternative	18.8%	18.8%	18.8%
Future possibility	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	62.5%	62.5%	62.5%
Positive opinion	25.0%	18.8%	31.3%
Request for empathy	12.5%	18.8%	6.3%
Greetings	6.3%	-	12.5%
Acknowledgement of receipt	3.1%	6.3%	-

Note: One male international student accepted the request.

***Order of semantic formulas.*** The results of the international students' responses are shown in Table 15 and Table 16. As shown in Table 15, similar to the American students, an expression of gratitude (40.6%) was most frequently used at the beginning of their refusals. The international students placed direct refusal formulas most frequently in the second (34.4%) or third (31.3%) order position and provided reasons or excuses in the second (28.1%) or in the third order (25.0%). However, as the smaller percentage values suggest, the semantic formulas used in the first order varied more as compared to the Americans.

As shown in Table 16, more than 70% of the female students placed either direct refusal formulas (37.5%) or reasons for the refusals (37.5%) in the second order location.

Nearly one-third of the international male students placed direct refusal formulas in the second order position (31.3%), but close to half of them (43.7%) stated a direct refusal in the third order position. This result is similar to the results of situation 1 where the participants refused the invitation from their professors. It appears that the male international students employed more strategies before they stated direct refusals to the higher-power interlocutor than did the females.

***Content of semantic formulas.*** Nearly half of the excuses (11 of 26, 42.3%) given by the international students were general, as with the Americans, commonly indicating that their course load did not permit them to mentor. However, 8 of 26 (30.8%) reasons were more specific excuses such as going for a vacation and travelling. Seven international students (3 males, 4 females) mentioned lack of confidence risking face as an excuse strategy, for example, *It is beyond my ability*. This type of excuse that risks the refusers' own faces was not seen in the refusals to the invitation (situation1).

As for giving positive opinions, similar to the Americans, the international students also cited positive attitudes and wished the professors luck, such as *I am happy to hear that because I will be able to know new different cultures*, referencing the fact that there will be new international students in the coming year. Regarding the content of alternatives provided by the international students, like the Americans, most of the international students also mentioned another person could help, and one male student whose native language is Korean stated: *But, if you cannot find anyone who wants to do that I will do that!* These patterns are similar to the results to the invitation. Moreover, no recognizable preference by gender was detected.

Table 15

*Order of Refusal to Situation 4 by All International Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All international students (n=32)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Direct	6.3%	34.4%	31.3%	3.1%	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>						
Regret	6.3%	18.8%	18.8%	12.5%	3.1%	3.1%
Wish	6.3%	3.1%	3.1%	-	-	-
Reason	9.4%	28.1%	25.0%	21.9%	-	-
Alternative	-	3.1%	3.1%	6.3%	3.1%	3.1%
Future Possibility	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>						
Gratitude	40.6%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	3.1%	-
Positive Opinion	18.8%	3.1%	-	-	3.1%	3.1%
Request for empathy	-	-	3.1%	6.3%	3.1%	-
Greetings	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	3.1%	-	-	-	-	-
Total	96.9%	96.9%	90.6%	62.5%	15.6%	9.4%

Note: One male international student accepted the request.

Table 16

*Order of Refusal to Situation 4 by International Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=16)						Male (n=16)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Direct	6.3%	37.5%	18.8%	-	-	-	6.3%	31.3%	43.8%	6.3%	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>												
Regret	6.3%	12.5%	31.3%	12.5%	6.3%	-	6.3%	25.0%	6.3%	12.5%	-	6.3%
Wish	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-
Reason	6.3%	37.5%	31.3%	18.8%	-	-	12.5%	18.8%	18.8%	25.0%	-	-
Alternative	-	6.3%	-	6.3%	-	6.3%	-	-	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	-
Future possibility	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>												
Gratitude	43.8%	-	6.3%	12.5%	-	-	37.5%	12.5%	6.3%	-	6.3%	-
Positive opinion	18.8%	-	-	-	-	-	18.8%	6.3%	-	-	6.3%	6.3%
Request for empathy	-	-	6.3%	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-
Greetings	-	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	93.8%	68.8%	6.3%	6.3%	93.8%	93.8%	87.5%	56.3%	25.0%	12.5%

Note: One male international student accepted the request.

### **Summary: Refusals to Professors (+Power, +Distance)**

#### **American Students.**

The typical American refusals to the interlocutors of higher status (+Power, +Distance) included both an expression of gratitude (81.3% to 87.5%), and a direct statement of refusal (75.0% to 81.3%). When refusing the invitation, gratitude was most frequently expressed in the first order (62.5%) followed by the direct refusals (50.0%). Also when refusing the request, expressions of gratitude in the first order were followed by the reason. These patterns were commonly used by both female and male students. Therefore, gratitude and directness may be necessary formulas to maintain politeness when refusing to the interlocutor of higher status (+Power) and low-solidarity (+Distance).

Most of the reasons provided by the American participants were honest reasons in which the participants stated their own needs or conventional excuses such as having a prior plan. When refusing the invitation, only one American male student gave a specific excuse, and when refusing the request, two males risked face by indicating that they were incapable of mentoring as an excuse strategy. Positive opinions were categorized into two types: showing a positive attitude toward the situations and wishing for luck, success and so forth.

*Cross-gender American.* The males tended to mitigate their refusals with reasons more than the females did in both scenarios of the invitation and the request, while the females provided the reasons only when refusing the request. Moreover, the males more frequently used the direct refusals than did the females. In terms of the content of reasons,

positive opinions, and alternatives given, there was no noticeable difference between genders.

### **International Students**

The typical international students' refusals to the interlocutors of higher status (+Power, +Distance) included an expression of gratitude (62.5% to 84.4%), a direct statement of refusal (75.0% to 78.1%), and reasons (81.3% to 100%). When refusing the invitation, the reasons were provided by all international students. When refusing the invitation, the most frequent gratitude was expressed in the first order (56.3%) followed by a reason (37.5%). When refusing the request, expressions of gratitude was expressed first (40.6%) followed by a reason or a direct refusal statement (34.4%).

More than half of the reasons given by the international students were honest reasons or general excuses, and therefore valid in the American culture, and 25% to 30.8% of the excuses were more specific. When refusing the request, seven international students (3 males, 4 females) mentioned their lack of confidence risking face as an excuse strategy.

Positive opinions were categorized into two types: showing a positive attitude toward the situations and wishing for luck, success and so forth.

***Cross-gender international.*** The females tended to mitigate the direct refusal by using statements of regrets more frequently than did the male students. The males used the direct refusals more often than did the females.

### Refusals to an Invitation from a Staff Member (-Power, +Distance)

#### American Students.

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The American students' frequency of semantic formula used in situation 3 is shown in Table 17. As shown in Table 17, when the American students were invited to an alumni event, all of them used direct refusal statements (100%). Expressing gratitude was commonly seen (62.5%) and statements of regret were used by half of the American students (50.0%). As compared to the professors (+Power/+Distance) situation (the invitation from the professors), statements of direct refusals and regrets were provided more frequently (from 75.0% to 100%, 31.3 % to 50.0% respectively), but reasons were provided far less frequently (from 50.0% to 18.8%). These patterns were demonstrated by both the female and the male students; however, the female students used more gratitude (87.5%) than did the male students (37.5%).

Table 17

#### *Frequency of refusal strategies used in Situation 3 by American students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=16)	Female (n=8)	Male (n=8)
Direct	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%
Reason	18.8%	25.0%	12.5%
Future possibility	6.3%	-	12.5%
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	62.5%	87.5%	37.5%
Positive opinion	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%

*Order of semantic formulas.* The orders of semantic formula used in their refusals are presented in Tables 18 and 19. These tables show the orders of the semantic formulas used by all American students, and by gender, respectively. As shown in Table 18, the American students used either statements of regret (37.5%) or expressions of gratitude (37.5%) in the first order of the refusals. This pattern was followed by direct refusals in the second order (68.8%).

Examination of Table 19 shows that the American females typically expressed gratitude first (62.5%), and then stated a direct refusal statement in the second (75.0%). On the other hand, half of the male students used a statement of regret such as *I'm sorry* and *Unfortunately* first (50.0%), and then stated a direct refusal in the second order (62.5%). As the interlocutors changed from the professors (+Power, +Distance) to the staff member (-Power, +Distance), the most frequently used semantic formula by the males in the second order changed to statement of regret from expressions of gratitude. This result may suggest a positive relationship between the male's power sensitivity and the politeness strategy.



Table 18

*Order of Refusal to Situation 3 by All American Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All American students (n=16)			
	1	2	3	4
Direct	18.8%	68.8%	6.3%	6.3%
<i>Indirect</i>				
Regret	37.5%	12.5%	-	-
Reason	-	-	6.3%	12.5%
Future possibility	-	-	-	6.3%
<i>Adjuncts</i>				
Gratitude	37.5%	-	25.0%	-
Positive opinion	6.3%	-	6.3%	-
Total	100.0%	81.3%	43.8%	25.0%

Table 19

*Order of Refusal to Situation 3 by American Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=8)				Male (n=8)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Direct	-	75.0%	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	62.5%	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>								
Regret	25.0%	25.0%	-	-	50.0%	-	-	-
Reason	-	-	12.5%	12.5%	-	-	-	12.5%
Alternative								
Future Possibility	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%
<i>Adjuncts</i>								
Gratitude	62.5%	-	25.0%	-	12.5%	-	25.0%	-
Positive Opinion	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	50.0%	25.0%	100.0%	62.5%	37.5%	25.0%

***Content of semantic formulas.*** Only three American students (2 females, 1 male) provided reasons for the refusals to an invitation to an alumni event. Each of them chose a different reason: The male individual stated that he simply did not want to attend, one female student refused the invitation due to a prior plan, and another mentioned a specific plan. Two American students stated positive opinions: one female stated *sounds like a fun week*, and one male stated *I hope the party turns out well for everyone*.

### **International Students.**

***Frequency of semantic formulas.*** The international students' responses to situation 3 are summarized in Table 20. As shown in Table 20, again the international students used a wider variety of strategies as compared to the Americans. Not all, but the majority of the international students stated direct refusal statements (84.4%). Moreover, more than 60% of the students provided reasons for their refusals (62.5%), and more than half of them expressed gratitude (56.3%) and/or regrets (53.1%). The results showed a similar trend as the Americans; as compared to their refusals to the higher power interlocutors (professors), statements of direct refusals and regrets were provided more frequently (from 75.0% to 81.3%) and reasons were provided far less frequently (from 100% to 62.5%).

There were similarities and differences between the males' and the females' refusals. The frequency of direct refusal statements and expressions of gratitude used by the female and the male international students were similar. However, the female students expressed regrets (68.8%) and provided reasons (75.0%), more than did the male students (37.5%, 50.0%, respectively). The females' preference in stating regrets were also seen in

the refusals to the request from the professors. The males demonstrated a wider variety of strategies than did the female students similar to the case of refusals to professors.

Table 20

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 3 by International Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=32)	Female (n=16)	Male (n=16)
Direct	84.4%	81.3%	87.5%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	53.1%	68.8%	37.5%
Wish	12.5%	18.8%	6.3%
Reason	62.5%	75.0%	50.0%
Alternative	3.1%	-	6.3%
Future possibility	9.4%	12.5%	6.3%
Hedge	6.3%	-	12.5%
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	56.3%	56.3%	56.3%
Positive opinion	21.9%	18.8%	25.0%
Request for empathy	9.4%	12.5%	6.3%
Greetings	6.3%	-	12.5%
Acknowledgement of receipt	3.1%	-	6.3%

***Order of semantic formulas.*** The results are summarized in Tables 21 and 22. As shown in Table 21, the international students either expressed gratitude (37.5%) or stated direct refusals (31.3%) in the first order position. A variety of semantic formulas were used in the second order position. The order of placement of the reasons or excuses for the refusals and the statements of regret varied.

As shown in Table 22, nearly half of the female participants (43.8%) and nearly one-third (31.3%) of the males expressed gratitude in their initial statements. In addition,

a higher number of females stated direct refusals at the beginning of their refusals (37.5%), than did the male students (25.0%), and then they provided reasons in the second order (37.5%). This result coincides with the refusals to professors in that the males delayed the statement of direct refusals as compared to the females (25% in the first order, 37.5% in the second order).

Table 21

*Order of Refusal to Situation 3 by All International Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All international students (n=32)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Direct	31.3%	21.9%	21.9%	9.4%	3.1%	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>							
Regret	6.3%	21.9%	18.8%	6.3%	-	-	3.1%
Wish	3.1%	6.3%	3.1%	-	-	-	-
Reason	-	25.0%	12.5%	18.8%	6.3%	-	-
Alternative	-	-	-	-	-	3.1%	-
Future possibility	-	3.1%	3.1%	-	3.1%	-	-
Hedge	-	3.1%	-	3.1%	3.1%	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>							
Gratitude	37.5%	9.4%	3.1%	3.1%	6.3%	12.5%	-
Positive opinion	12.5%	6.3%	3.1%	3.1%	-	-	-
Request for empathy	-	-	6.3%	-	3.1%	-	-
Greetings	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	3.1%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	96.9%	71.9%	43.8%	25.0%	15.6%	3.1%

Table 22

*Order of Refusal to Situation 3 by International Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=16)							Male (n=16)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Direct	37.5%	6.3%	25.0%	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	25.0%	37.5%	18.8%	6.3%	-	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>														
Regret	-	31.3%	25.0%	12.5%	-	-	-	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	-	-	-	6.3%
Wish	6.3%	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-
Reason	-	37.5%	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	-	12.5%	6.3%	25.0%	6.3%	-	-
Alternative	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-
Future possibility	-	-	6.3%	-	6.3%	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-
Hedge	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	6.3%	6.3%	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>														
Gratitude	43.8%	-	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	18.8%	-	31.3%	18.8%	-	-	6.3%	6.3%	-
Positive opinion	12.5%	6.3%	-	6.3%	-	-	-	12.5%	6.3%	6.3%	-	-	-	-
Request for empathy	-	-	6.3%	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-
Greetings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	93.8%	87.5%	50.0%	31.3%	18.8%	-	100.0%	100.0%	56.3%	37.5%	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%

**Content of semantic formulas.** Among the twenty reasons provided by the international students, eleven (55.0%) were general excuses, such as having other plans. One male student answered honestly, saying that he was not interested in the event. The rest (40.0%) used specific excuses. For example, one female participant, whose native language is Arabic, declined the invitation due to her mother being sick. Another participant (male, Bangla) also refused due to a doctor's appointment. Two female participants, whose native languages are Korean and Nepali, provided reasons of spending time with their family. Other male participants, whose native languages are Korean and Bangla, declined the invitation due to work on projects and having a friend over. Seven students (4 males, 3 females) stated positive opinions. Valuing the opportunity (e.g., *That's a great event*) was most frequently stated. Like the reasons provided by the professors, more than half of the students provided general and valid reasons in the American context, but some students tended to give too much detail or too many excuses that could possibly be interpreted as made-up excuses.

### **Refusals to a Request from a Staff Member (–Power, +Distance)**

#### **American Students.**

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The results of the American students' responses to situation 6, which was a request to attend a teaching demonstration, are shown in Table 23. For this situation, a direct refusal (81.3%) and expression of gratitude (81.3%) were typically used, followed by a statement of regret (43.8%). This pattern is similar to the results found for situation 3; however, the frequency of direct refusals was slightly decreased (100% vs. 81.3%), because 3 students (2 females and 1 male) did not use a direct refusal statement in this situation. On the other hand, the frequency of expression of gratitude was increased (from 62.5% to 81.3%) because 3 more male students used this strategy. In this context again, the direct refusals increased and reasons were provided less frequently as compared to the refusals to the professors (+Power, +Distance).

Comparison of results by gender shows that reasons for the refusals were provided more frequently (50.0%) by the males students than did the females, which is similar to the result of the refusals to the request from the professor (+Power, +Distance). Moreover, the male students used a wider variety of strategies such as providing alternative ideas and positive opinions. One male stated a future possibility, saying that he had no time right now, but *Maybe later*.

Table 23

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 6 by American Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=16)	Female (n=8)	Male (n=8)
Direct	81.3%	87.5%	75.0%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	43.8%	37.5%	50.0%
Reason	37.5%	25.0%	50.0%
Alternative	12.5%	-	25.0%
Future possibility	6.3%	-	12.5%
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	81.3%	87.5%	75.0%
Positive opinion	6.3%	-	12.5%

***Order of semantic formulas.*** The results are given in Tables 24 and 25.

As shown in Table 24, the American students typically expressed gratitude in the first order (62.5%), and then stated a direct refusal in the second order (43.8%). This pattern was also clearly seen in the refusals to the invitation from the professors. The pattern was similarly shown by both the female and the male American participants.

In terms of the gender differences, as shown in Table 25, an expression of gratitude and a direct refusal statement were more clearly seen in the females' refusals (75.0%, 50.0%, respectively) than the males' (50.0%, 37.5%, respectively); this pattern was similar to the refusals to the invitations from the professors (+Power, +Distance) and the staff member (-Power, +Distance).

Table 24

*Order of Refusal to Situation 6 by All American Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All American students (n=16)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Direct	12.5%	43.8%	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%
<i>Indirect</i>					
Regret	18.8%	25.0%	-	-	-
Reason	6.3%	18.8%	12.5%	-	-
Alternative	-	-	12.5%	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	-	6.3%	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>					
Gratitude	62.5%	6.3%	18.8%	12.5%	-
Positive opinion	-	6.3%	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	62.5%	31.3%	6.3%

Table 25

*Order of Refusal to Situation 6 by American Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=8)				Male (n=8)				
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5
Direct	12.5%	50.0%	25.0%	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%
<i>Indirect</i>									
Regret	12.5%	25.0%	-	-	25.0%	25.0%	-	-	-
Reason	-	25.0%	-	-	12.5%	12.5%	25.0%	-	-
Alternative	-	-	-	-	-	-	25.0%	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>									
Gratitude	75.0%	-	25.0%	-	50.0%	12.5%	12.5%	25.0%	-
Positive opinion	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	50.0%	12.5%	100.0%	100.0%	75.0%	50.0%	12.5%

**Content of semantic formulas.** Six American participants provided reasons for the refusals. Three of them (1 female, 2 males) provided general excuses such as having another plan (e.g., *I have another event at that time*). The other half of the 6 students (1 female, 2 males) provided slightly more detail, but still general excuses for college



students such as having class, doing homework or working. Similar to the other scenarios, the American students generally provided honest reasons. As for positive opinion, only one American student expressed it, by stating *love to attend*. Alternatives were provided by two male students. One male mentioned that someone else could attend, and another suggested that another time may work for him, by stating: *if there is any rescheduling please let me know*. No gender differences were found here.

### **International students.**

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The results for situation 6 are shown in Table 26. As seen in the other scenarios, the international students' refusals typically included a direct refusal (75.0%), a reason (62.5%), and a statement of regret (59.4%). An expression of gratitude was also preferred by nearly half of the students (46.9%). Compared to the Americans, both female and male students again used a wider variety of strategies. Wishing, hedging, greetings and acknowledgement of receipt were never seen in the American refusals. Also, as seen in the American refusals, the male international students used a more variety of strategies than the females. However, unlike their American counterpart, none of the male students provided alternatives.

Comparison by gender further showed that, in this scenario again, the male students used a direct refusal more frequently (87.5%) than did the females (62.5%). On the other hand, as shown in Table 26, the females more frequently provided a reason (68.8%) and showed their regrets (68.8%) than did the male students (56.3%, 50.0%, respectively). These two patterns (more regrets and reasons by the females than the males) were also found in the other previously discussed cases (situation 1, 4, 3).

Table 26

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 6 by International Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=32)	Female (n=16)	Male (n=16)
Direct	75.0%	62.5%	87.5%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	59.4%	68.8%	50.0%
Wish	15.6%	6.3%	25.0%
Reason	62.5%	68.8%	56.3%
Future possibility	15.6%	18.8%	12.5%
Hedge	3.1%	-	6.3%
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	46.9%	50.0%	43.8%
Positive opinion	15.6%	12.5%	18.8%
Greetings	6.3%	-	12.5%
Acknowledgement of receipt	3.1%	-	6.3%

***Order of semantic formulas.*** The international students' responses to situation 6 are summarized in Tables 27 and 28. As shown in Table 27, again, the international students used a variety of strategies at the beginning of their refusals. Similar to the Americans' refusals and the refusals to the request from the professors, direct refusal statements were most frequently placed in the second order (40.6%). In terms of gender, as shown in Table 28, the female international students used regret most frequently at the beginning of their refusals, whereas their male counterpart used a variety of strategies at the beginning. In the second order position, the most preferred strategy used by both female and male international students was a direct refusal statement.

Table 27

*Order of Refusal to Situation 6 by All International Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All international students (n=32)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Direct	9.4%	40.6%	15.6%	6.3%	6.3%	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>							
Regret	21.9%	6.3%	15.6%	15.6%	3.1%	-	3.1%
Wish	12.5%	3.1%	-	-	-	-	-
Reason	12.5%	31.3%	18.8%	3.1%	-	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	9.4%	3.1%	3.1%	-	-
Hedge	-	-	-	-	3.1%	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>							
Gratitude	21.9%	9.4%	9.4%	9.4%	-	3.1%	-
Positive opinion	15.6%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Request for empathy							
Greetings	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	-	3.1%	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	93.8%	68.8%	37.5%	15.6%	3.1%	3.1%

Table 28

*Order of Refusal to Situation 6 by International Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=16)					Male (n=16)						
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Direct	6.3%	43.8%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	12.5%	37.5%	25.0%	6.3%	6.3%	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>												
Regret	37.5%	6.3%	12.5%	12.5%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	18.8%	18.8%	-	-	6.3%
Wish	6.3%	-	-	-	-	18.8%	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-
Reason	12.5%	37.5%	25.0%	-	-	12.5%	25.0%	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	18.8%	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	6.3%	-	-
Hedge	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>												
Gratitude	25.0%	6.3%	12.5%	12.5%	-	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%	6.3%	-	6.3%	-
Positive opinion	12.5%	-	-	-	-	18.8%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Greetings	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	93.8%	75.0%	31.3%	12.5%	100.0%	93.8%	62.5%	43.8%	18.8%	6.3%	6.3%

**Content of semantic formulas.** Twenty reasons were provided by the international students, of which thirteen excuses given (65.0%) were general in nature and most frequently citing being busy or having no time. Two students provided the

slightly more specific excuse of having homework or class. Three international students (2 females, 1 male) mentioned lack of confidence as an excuse for not attending the teaching demonstration, which was not seen in the American refusal results. For example, one female student provided two different reasons, saying *I am still not confident to attend in a teaching demonstration* (reason 1) *and I also have another appointment this weekend* (reason 2). Two male students made up an excuse. One student whose native language is Bangla, stated, *Actually i [I] will shift my apartment and I will be very tired then*, and another student whose native language is Korean stated, *I have to go library for my study group*. Here again, the detailed excuses were more often provided by the international students.

As for positive opinion, five international students (2 females, 3 males) used this strategy, while only one American male student did. One male student whose native language is Arabic, acknowledged the benefit of attending the teaching demonstration, stating *I believe it is a good chance to see different type of teaching*. Other students more generally stated a positive opinion of being a good opportunity. No international students gave alternatives, but two male American students provided alternatives. Moreover, there was no noticeable gender difference was found in the content of these semantic formulas.

### **Summary: Refusals to a Staff Member (–Power, +Distance)**

#### **American Students**

The typical American refusals to the staff member (–Power, +Distance) included a direct statement of refusal (81.3% to 100%), followed by an expression of gratitude

(62.5% to 81.3%). Most frequently, the gratitude was expressed first (37.5% to 62.5%), followed by a direct statement (43.8% to 68.8%) in the second order. As compared to the refusals to the professors (+Power), the frequency of the direct refusals was higher, and the reasons for the request were provided far less.

Most of the reasons provided by the American participants were honest or conventional general excuses such as having a prior plan, having class and so on. As with the refusals to the professors (+Power), positive opinions were categorized into two types: showing a positive attitude toward the situations and wishing for luck, success and so forth. Alternatives were provided by two male students (refusals to the request).

*Cross-gender American.* The frequency of the use of direct refusals between the females and the males was similar. The females expressed gratitude constantly to the interlocutor, whereas the males omitted it when refusing the invitation. Similar to the refusals to the request from the professors (+Power), when refusing the request, the males tended to mitigate their refusals with reasons more than did the females. There was no noticeable difference in terms of the content of reasons and positive opinions.

### **International Students**

The typical international students' refusals to the staff member (–Power, +Distance) included a direct refusal statement (75.0% to 84.4%) and a reason (62.5%). When refusing the invitation, most frequently the gratitude was expressed in the first order (37.5%), whereas when refusing the request, different semantic formulas were used in the first order. Similar to the Americans, as compared to the refusals to the professors

(+Power), the frequency of the direct refusals was higher, and the reasons for the request were provided less frequently.

More than half of the reasons (55.0% to 65.0%) given by the international students were honest reasons or general excuses which are valid in the American culture, and 10.0% to 40.0% of the excuses were more specific. When refusing the request, three students risked face, providing the reason of lacking confidence. Positive opinions were mostly the ones that showed a positive attitude toward the situations.

*Cross-Gender International.* Similar to the refusal to the professors (+Power), the females tended to mitigate the direct refusal by using statements of regrets more frequently than did the male students and use more reasons; and the males used the direct refusals more often than did the females. In terms of the content of reasons and positive opinions, there was no noticeable difference between genders.

### **Refusal to an Invitation from Friends (–Power, –Distance)**

#### **American Students.**

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The results for situation 2 are summarized in Table 29. Situation 2 involves an invitation from friends to see a movie. Two adjunct strategies were most frequently used: expression of gratitude (68.8%), and positive opinions (68.8%). It is important to note here that positive opinions (adjunct) were more frequently used in the refusals to their friends than to other interlocutors (+Distance). A direct refusal statement was also used frequently (62.5%), but less frequently in response to their friend than to other interlocutors (+Distance). Reasons for the refusals were

provided for the friends (–Power, –Distance) as frequently (43.8%) as those to the professors (+Power, +Distance).

As shown in all of the cases discussed previously, the American females most frequently used expressions of gratitude and direct refusal statements, each showing 75.0% of the frequency. When refusing the invitation from friends, positive opinions were also frequently stated by the females. However, only two females (25.0%) provided reasons for the refusals, and only one female used a statement of regret (12.5%). On the other hand, reasons (62.5%) and statements of regret (50.0%) were often included in the American males' refusals, as with the refusals to the invitation and the request from the professors (+Power, +Distance).

Table 29

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 2 by American Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=16)	Female (n=8)	Male (n=8)
Direct	62.5%	75.0%	50.0%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	31.3%	12.5%	50.0%
Reason	43.8%	25.0%	62.5%
Alternative	31.3%	37.5%	25.0%
Future possibility	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	68.8%	75.0%	62.5%
Positive opinion	68.8%	75.0%	62.5%

*Order of semantic formulas.* The orders of responses given by the American students to situation 2 are summarized in Tables 30 and 31. Similar to previous presentations, Table 30 shows the order of the refusal by both male and female students, whereas Table 31 shows the responses by gender. As shown in Table 30, expressions of gratitude were the most preferred formula at the beginning of their refusal, but the frequency was only 37.5%. Overall, when refusing the invitation from friends, the placement of semantic formulas varied.

Table 30

*Order of Refusal to Situation 2 by All American Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All American students (n=16)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Direct	12.5%	31.3%	18.8%	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>					
Regret	12.5%	12.5%	6.3%	-	6.3%
Reason	6.3%	25.0%	6.3%	6.3%	-
Alternative	-	18.8%	12.5%	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	6.3%	6.3%	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>					
Gratitude	37.5%	12.5%	18.8%	6.3%	6.3%
Positive opinion	31.3%	-	18.8%	25.0%	6.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	87.5%	43.8%	18.8%



Table 31

*Order of Refusal to Situation 2 by American Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=8)					Male (n=8)				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Direct	25.0%	37.5%	12.5%	-	-	-	25.0%	25.0%	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>										
Regret	12.5%	-	-	-	-	12.5%	25.0%	12.5%	-	12.5%
Reason	-	25.0%	-	-	-	12.5%	25.0%	12.5%	12.5%	-
Alternative	-	12.5%	25.0%	-	-	-	25.0%	-	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>										
Gratitude	37.5%	25.0%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	-	25.0%	-	-
Positive opinion	25.0%	-	25.0%	25.0%	-	37.5%	-	12.5%	25.0%	12.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	75.0%	50.0%	12.5%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	37.5%	25.0%

***Content of semantic formulas.*** Seven students provided a reason for the refusal to an invitation from their friends. Of seven, two females and three male students (71.4%) appeared to respond honestly, stating that they were not interested in the movie. One American male stated that he had a prior appointment and another American male provided the specific reason of baby-sitting. Similar to those in the other scenarios, most of the reasons provided to the friends were honest.

Eleven students provided positive opinions (6 females and 5 males). The results showed two different categories of the positive opinions: one was a positive opinion about watching the movie (e.g., *sounds fun!*), which typically stated at the beginning of their refusals. Another category was a wish for a great time (e.g., *have a great time, Have fun and let me know how it is!*), which typically was placed at the end of the refusal responses.

Five American students (3 female and 2 males) offered alternatives. Three of them mentioned that someone else could join the movie, for example, stating *You should*

*try to find someone else* and *Have you thought about asking Cathy?* One female stated doing something else sometime soon, and another female wrote that she would join to watch a different movie later. These two alternatives provided by the female students are different from the other three alternatives in that they do not provide solutions, and rather they seemed to be used in order to affirm solidarity with the friends.

### **International Students.**

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The international students' frequency of refusal strategies is shown in Table 32. As shown in Table 32, in this scenario as well, they used a wider variety of strategies than did the American students. The frequently used strategies were providing a reason for the refusal (87.5%), followed by a statement of regret (65.6%) and a positive opinion (62.5%). A direct refusal statement was stated by approximately 60% of the international students (59.4%), but less frequently included as compared to the refusals to other interlocutors (+Distance). An expression of gratitude was also used by nearly half of the students (46.9%). These semantic formulas were the same as those frequently included in the refusals to the professors' invitation (+Power, +Distance), except for positive opinions. The frequency of positive opinions increased considerably.

In terms of gender differences, direct refusal statements were more frequently used by the male international students than the female students (81.3% vs. 37.5%) when refusing the invitation from friends. The male international students also provided reasons (93.8%) and positive opinions (75.0%) more often than did the females (81.3%,

50.0% respectively). On the other hand, the female international students stated future possibility (43.8%) more frequently than did the males (12.5%).

Table 32

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 2 by the International Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=32)	Female (n=16)	Male (n=16)
Direct	59.4%	37.5%	81.3%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	65.6%	68.8%	62.5%
Wish	9.4%	12.5%	6.3%
Reason	87.5%	81.3%	93.8%
Alternative	15.6%	12.5%	18.8%
Set condition	3.1%	-	6.3%
Future possibility	28.1%	43.8%	12.5%
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	46.9%	43.8%	50.0%
Positive opinion	62.5%	50.0%	75.0%
Request for empathy	6.3%	12.5%	-
Greetings	9.4%	6.3%	12.5%
Acknowledgement of receipt	6.3%	12.5%	-

***Order of the semantic formulas.*** The orders of semantic formulas given by the international students to situation 2 are summarized in Tables 33 and 34. Similar to the American participants' results, in terms of the order of semantic formulas, no specific pattern was detected.

Table 33

*Order of Refusal to Situation 2 by All International Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All international students (n=32)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Direct	3.1%	25.0%	25.0%	6.3%	-	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>							
Regret	15.6%	21.9%	21.9%	3.1%	6.3%	3.1%	-
Wish	6.3%	3.1%	-	-	-	-	-
Reason	12.5%	34.4%	28.1%	12.5%	-	-	-
Alternative	-	3.1%	6.3%	-	6.3%	-	-
Set condition	-	-	-	3.1%	-	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	-	15.6%	6.3%	3.1%	3.1%
<i>Adjuncts</i>							
Gratitude	28.1%	3.1%	9.4%	6.3%	6.3%	3.1%	-
Positive opinion	18.8%	9.4%	6.3%	25.0%	6.3%	3.1%	3.1%
Request for empathy	-	-	3.1%	-	3.1%	-	-
Greetings	9.4%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	71.9%	34.4%	12.5%	6.3%

Table 34

*Order of Refusal to Situation 2 by International Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=16)						Male (n=16)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Direct	-	12.5%	18.8%	6.3%	-	-	6.3%	37.5%	31.3%	6.3%	-	-	-
<i>Indirect</i>													
Regret	12.5%	31.3%	31.3%	-	6.3%	-	18.8%	12.5%	12.5%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	-
Wish	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-
Reason	6.3%	43.8%	18.8%	12.5%	-	-	18.8%	25.0%	37.5%	12.5%	-	-	-
Alternative	-	6.3%	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	12.5%	-	-
Set condition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	-	31.3%	6.3%	6.3%	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	6.3%
<i>Adjuncts</i>													
Gratitude	31.3%	-	12.5%	-	12.5%	-	25.0%	6.3%	6.3%	12.5%	-	6.3%	-
Positive opinion	18.8%	6.3%	6.3%	18.8%	6.3%	6.3%	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%	31.3%	6.3%	-	6.3%
Request for empathy	-	-	6.3%	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Greetings	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	68.8%	37.5%	12.5%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	75.0%	31.3%	12.5%	12.5%

*Content of semantic formulas.* To refuse a movie invitation from their friends, twenty-eight international students (13 females, 15 males) provided a reason for refusal,

of which 12 students (6 females, 6 males, 42.8%) provided general excuses such as being busy or having prior plans. Nine students (5 females, 4 males, 32.1%) appeared to respond honestly, stating that they were not interested in the movie. The rest were specific excuses such as having a meeting with her professor (female, whose native language is Korean), having watched the movie already (female, Hmong), attending a financing club meeting (male, French), meeting a doctor at 5 p.m. (male, Korean), being sick (male, Bangla) and so forth. One reason provided by a male international student, whose native language is Spanish, criticized the movie, saying: *I am not interested on watching this movie, it looks lame for me and I heard that it has a bad plot.*

Twenty students (8 females, 12 males) stated positive opinions. Similar to the American students' responses, two different kinds of positive opinions were used: one was a positive opinion about watching the movie (e.g., *It sounds great to watch the Future x with you guys, i [I] heard that future x is a really good movie!*), which typically was stated at the beginning of their refusals. Another type was a hope for a great time (e.g., *Enjoy the movie, Have fun, and don't forget to tell me how it was!*), which was typically placed at the end of the refusal response.

Five international students (2 female and 3 males) offered alternatives. Three of them suggested to their friends to find someone else, for example, a female, whose native language is Chinese stated *Maybe you can ask someone else.* Another female, whose native language is Korean offered watching another movie, stating *let's go to watch other movie on next Wednesday if you don't mind,* and one male whose native language is also Korean stated, *you guys can watch without me this time and let's watch another movie*

*later together!* As seen in the Americans' alternatives, the international students also provided alternatives that serve to highlight one's solidarity with the friends. No noticeable difference was found in the content of reasons, positive opinions and alternatives.

### **Refusal to a Request from Friends (–Power, –Distance)**

#### **American Students.**

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The results for situation 5 are summarized in Table 35. In response to a peer review request from their friends, reasons for the refusals were included in nearly all (except one female) refusals (93.8%). Other commonly used semantic formulas were statements of regret (68.8%) such as *Sorry* and *I'm sorry*, and direct refusal statements (50.0%) such as *I don't think I can* and *I will not be able to*. However, similar to the refusals to the invitation from friends (–Power, –Distance), the use of direct refusal statements became less frequent as compared to the other +Distance interlocutors.

Only 37.5% of female students used a direct refusal, as compared to 62.5% of the male students. Among all six scenarios provided in this study, this is the only scenario where indirect refusal strategies, specifically statements of regret and reasons, became dominant in the female American refusals. All male students provided reasons. In addition, half of them provided alternative ideas, whereas only two female students (25.0%) did so.

*Order of semantic formulas.* The results for situation 5 are given in Tables 36 and 37. In response to a request from friends regarding a peer review of an essay,

statements of regret or reasons were most frequently placed in the first order (43.8% each), followed by direct refusals or reasons in the second order position (31.3% each).

This pattern was similarly seen in both the American female and the male refusals.

Regarding the refusals by gender, this is the only scenario in which expressions of gratitude was not dominant in the first order. Moreover, half of the females provided reasons, but not direct refusals. This pattern was also found in the refusals to the request from the professors. As for the males refusals, half of the males provided reasons in the first order, followed by direct refusals or alternatives in the second order (37.5% each).

Table 35

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 5 by American Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=16)	Female (n=8)	Male (n=8)
Direct	50.0%	37.5%	62.5%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	68.8%	75.0%	62.5%
Wish	6.3%	12.5%	-
Reason	93.8%	87.5%	100.0%
Alternative	37.5%	25.0%	50.0%
Future possibility	31.3%	37.5%	25.0%
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	6.3%	-	12.5%
Positive opinion	25.0%	37.5%	12.5%

Table 36

*Order of Refusal to Situation 5 by All American Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All American students (n=16)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Direct	-	31.3%	6.3%	6.3%	-	6.3%
<i>Indirect</i>						
Regret	43.8%	6.3%	18.8%	6.3%	12.5%	-
Wish	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-
Reason	43.8%	31.3%	18.8%	-	-	-
Alternative	-	18.8%	12.5%	6.3%	-	-
Future possibility	-	12.5%	12.5%	6.3%	-	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>						
Gratitude	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-
Positive opinion	6.3%	-	-	18.8%	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	68.8%	43.8%	18.8%	6.3%

Table 37

*Order of Refusal to Situation 5 by American Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=8)						Male (n=8)				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5
Direct	-	25.0%	-	-	-	12.5%	-	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%	-
<i>Indirect</i>											
Regret	50.0%	12.5%	12.5%	-	12.5%	-	37.5%	-	25.0%	12.5%	12.5%
Wish	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reason	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	-	-	-	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	-	-
Alternative	-	-	25.0%	-	-	-	-	37.5%	-	12.5%	-
Future possibility	-	25.0%	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%	12.5%	-
<i>Adjuncts</i>											
Gratitude	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12.5%
Positive opinion	-	-	-	37.5%	-	-	12.5%	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	62.5%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%	100.0%	75.0%	50.0%	25.0%

***Content of semantic formulas.*** Fifteen students (7 females, 8 males) provided a reason or an excuse for the refusal, of which all 7 females and 4 males (68.8%) gave a general excuse of having no time. One male student stated an honest reason: *I'm sorry to*



*say that I am not interested in peer reviewing.* Three American students risked face and provided the reasons of lacking confidence and one male student made up an excuse, stating: *My e-mail has not been working for the past two weeks. I believe it may be too late to help.*

Four students (3 females, 1 male) provided positive opinions. All 3 females hoped for a successful outcome, for example stating *I hope everything works out*, and one male stated a positive opinion on the peer review. Alternatives were offered by 6 students, of which 3 males and one female mentioned perhaps someone else could help. One female suggested a library's assistance, and one male offered his help for something else. There was no recognizable difference found between genders.

#### **International Students.**

*Frequency of semantic formulas.* The results for situation 5 are shown in Table 38. Similar to the other situations, the international students used a wider variety of strategies as compared to the American students. For this situation, similar to the American students' responses, reasons for the refusals (90.6%) were most frequently given. Expressions of regret (81.3%) and direct refusal statements (65.6 %) were also commonly used. However, similar to the refusals to the invitation from friends, the use of direct refusal statements became less frequent as compared to the other +Distance interlocutors.

In terms of gender differences, when refusing the request from friends, the frequency of the direct refusal statements used by the females did not change much as compared to when they refused the requests from other interlocutors of +Distance. On the

contrary, the males used the direct refusals less frequently when they refused to the request from the friends. In addition, when refusing to the request from friends, the frequency of the indirect strategies used, by both the females and the males, such as regretting and providing reasons increased.

Table 38

*Frequency of Refusal Strategies Used in Situation 5 by International Students*

Semantic formulas	All (n=32)	Female (n=16)	Male (n=16)
Direct	65.6%	62.5%	68.8%
<i>Indirect</i>			
Regret	81.3%	87.5%	75.0%
Wish	18.8%	18.8%	18.8%
Reason	90.6%	93.8%	87.5%
Alternative	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%
Set condition	3.1%	6.3%	-
Future possibility	9.4%	6.3%	12.5%
Principle	3.1%	-	6.3%
Hedge	3.1%	-	6.3%
<i>Adjuncts</i>			
Gratitude	18.8%	25.0%	12.5%
Positive opinion	21.9%	31.3%	12.5%
Request for empathy	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%
Greetings	12.5%	6.3%	18.8%
Acknowledgement of receipt	9.4%	12.5%	6.3%

*Order of semantic formulas.* The results are shown in Table 39 and Table 40. As shown in Table 39, a variety of strategies were used in the first order (with regret at 31.3%), followed by reasons in the second order (50.0%), and direct refusal formulas (43.8 %) in the third order. Thus, the direct refusals were placed in the later position as

compared to the refusals to other interlocutors of +Distance. These patterns were similarly demonstrated by both female and male international students.

Table 39

*Order of Refusal to Situation 5 by All International Students (both female and male)*

Semantic formulas	All international students (n=32)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Direct	3.1%	15.6%	43.8%	3.1%	3.1%	-
<i>Indirect</i>						
Regret	31.3%	15.6%	9.4%	21.9%	18.8%	-
Wish	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	-	-
Reason	15.6%	50.0%	21.9%	12.5%	-	-
Alternative	-	3.1%	12.5%	6.3%	3.1%	-
Set condition	-	-	-	3.1%	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	-	3.1%	3.1%	3.1%
Principle	-	3.1%	-	-	-	-
Hedge	-	-	-	-	-	3.1%
<i>Adjuncts</i>						
Gratitude	12.5%	-	3.1%	3.1%	-	-
Positive opinion	6.3%	-	-	3.1%	9.4%	3.1%
Request for empathy	-	-	-	3.1%	3.1%	-
Greetings	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	6.3%	3.1%	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	96.9%	90.6%	59.4%	40.6%	9.4%

Table 40

*Order of Refusal to Situation 5 by International Students by Gender*

Semantic formulas	Female (n=16)					Male (n=16)					
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Direct	-	18.8%	43.8%	-	6.3%	6.3%	12.5%	43.8%	6.3%	-	-
Indirect											
Regret	31.3%	12.5%	12.5%	31.3%	-	31.3%	18.8%	6.3%	12.5%	37.5%	-
Wish	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	-	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	-	-
Reason	12.5%	56.3%	31.3%	-	-	18.8%	43.8%	12.5%	25.0%	-	-
Alternative	-	6.3%	12.5%	6.3%	-	-	-	12.5%	6.3%	6.3%	-
Set condition	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Future possibility	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	6.3%	-	6.3%
Principle	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-
Hedge	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%
Adjuncts											
Gratitude	18.8%	-	-	6.3%	-	6.3%	-	6.3%	-	-	-
Positive opinion	6.3%	-	-	6.3%	18.8%	6.3%	-	-	-	-	6.3%
Request for empathy	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-
Greetings	6.3%	-	-	-	-	18.8%	-	-	-	-	-
Acknowledgement of receipt	12.5%	-	-	-	-	-	6.3%	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	62.5%	31.3%	100.0%	93.8%	81.3%	56.3%	50.0%	18.8%

**Content of semantic formula.** Thirty-two excuses for the refusal were provided by twenty-nine international students (15 females, 14 males); one female and two males provided two different excuses. Approximately 60% (18 of 32) of reasons provided were the general excuses such as being busy or having lots of homework to do. One female stated the honest reason that she was too tired. As compared to the American students, more international students refused by threatening their own face: 9 students (3 females and 6 males, 28.1%) refused the peer reviewing request due to lack of confidence or unfamiliarity with the topic. For example, a male student whose native language is Arabic, stated: *im [I'm] not really good with giving a feedback, its[its] better for u to stay away from me.* Four students (2 females, 2 males) made up excuses. One female student whose native language is French gave an excuse, stating: *I will not be able to review the essay because I will be in my village, and I do not have connection there.* One male student whose native language is Bangla stated: *Actually I am facing illness for several*

*days*. The honest reasons, the general excuses including the ones of threatening the refuser's own face, and specific reasons were all seen in the reasons provided in the refusals to the request from other interlocutors of +Distance.

Seven students (5 females, 2 males) provided positive opinions. As seen in the other situations, they most frequently wished for a positive outcome (*e.g., I hope you guys find a good peer reviewer.*) One female whose native language is Vietnamese stated that peer reviewing was an interesting work for her. One male whose native language is Arabic stated that he was happy that his friends were finally working on the essay.

Eight students (4 females, 4 males) offered alternatives to the refusals, most commonly suggesting someone else. This pattern was also seen in the refusals to other interlocutors. For example, one female whose native language is Hmong stated: *I hope you can find someone else to review*. Similarly, one male student (Nepali) stated: *I suggest you to find someone else*. Another female (Chinese) offered her help by stating, *I can recommend someone else to do this. If you want, let me know!* One female and one male (Cameroon, Korean) recommended one of their friends. One male (French) suggested a writing center for their assistance. No recognizable difference was found between genders.

### **Summary: Refusals to Friends (–Power, –Distance)**

#### **American Students**

The typical American refusals to friends (–Power, –Distance) included a wider variety of semantic formulas (or strategies) as compared to the other interlocutors (+Distance), and they differed depending on the eliciting acts (invitations and requests).

For the refusals to the invitation, the most frequently used strategies were a positive opinion (68.8%), an expression of gratitude (68.8%), and a direct refusal statement (62.5%). Gratitude was most frequently expressed first (37.5%) followed by a variety of semantic formulas or adjuncts. For the refusals to the request, two indirect strategies, namely a reason (93.8%) and a statement of regret (68.8%) were dominant. A statement of regret or a reason was most frequently expressed first (43.8% each), followed by a reason or a direct refusal (31.3% each) in the second order. As compared to the refusals to other interlocutors (+Distance), the direct refusals were used less frequently, and instead indirect strategies such as regretting and providing a reason were employed more often.

As with the refusals to other interlocutors (+Distance), most of the reasons provided by the American participants were honest (in case of the invitation, 71.4%) or general excuses such as no time (in case of the request, 68.8%). Giving the reason that risked face – lack of confidence was seen in the refusals to the request (20.0%). As with the other scenarios, positive opinions were categorized into two types: showing a positive attitude toward the situations and wishing for luck, success and so forth. Alternatives included either suggestions or invitations for other activities.

***Cross-gender American.*** The frequency of the use of direct refusals between the females and the males was different depending on the eliciting acts. When refusing the invitation, the females were more direct (75.0%) than the males (50.0%), whereas when refusing the request, the females were less direct (37.5%) than the males (62.5%). When refusing the invitation, the female group also preferred to use adjuncts (gratitude and

positive opinion) more often than the male group (75.0% vs. 62.5%). On the other hand, similar to the refusals to the professors (+Power), the male group provided the reasons much more frequently (62.5 % to 100%) than the female group (25.0% to 87.5%). Consequently, the order of semantic formulas showed the different patterns by gender. In terms of the content of reasons, positive opinions, and alternatives given, there was no noticeable difference between genders.

### **International Students**

Similar to the other scenarios, the international students' refusals included a wider variety of semantic formulas and adjuncts as compared to the Americans. The typical refusals in this context most frequently included a reason (87.5% to 90.6%), a statement of regret (65.6% to 81.3%), and a direct refusal (59.4% to 65.6%).

For the refusals to the invitation, two adjuncts, positive opinions (62.5%) and expressions of gratitude (46.9%) were additionally used to the above three strategies. The most frequently used semantic formulas and adjuncts used in the first order and second order were the same as the refusals to the staff member (-Power). For the refusals to the request, the above mentioned two adjuncts were omitted. Most frequently, their refusals started with regrets (31.3%) followed by the reason (50.0%). In this scenario, one half of the American males (50.0%) offered alternatives, but the international males lacked them (25.0%).

The reasons provided by the international students in this context were honest (in case of the invitation, 32.1%) or general excuses such as no time (42.8% to 56.3%). As seen in the American refusals, giving the reason that risked face – lack of confidence was

also found in the refusals to the request (28.1%) at a slightly higher frequency than the Americans (20.0%). As with the other scenarios, positive opinions were categorized into two types: showing a positive attitude toward the situations and wishing for luck, success and so forth. Alternatives included either suggestions or invitations for other activities.

*Cross-gender international.* The frequency of the use of direct refusals between the females and the males was different depending on the eliciting acts. When refusing the invitation, the females were far less direct (37.5%) than the males (81.3%); and when refusing the request, the females were almost as direct (62.5%) as the males (68.8%). Positive opinions were provided more frequently by the males (75.0%) than the females (50.0%). In terms of the content of reasons, positive opinions, and alternatives given, there was no noticeable difference between genders.

### **Summary of Results**

The results of the preceding sections for all six situations are summarized here.

#### **American Students.**

Table 41 shows the comparison of the most frequently used semantic formulas by the American students. Table 42 shows their first and second order placement in the refusal. For all of the +Distance situations, the majority of American students in this study started with an adjunct statement of gratitude (62.5% to 87.5%) followed by a direct statement of refusal (75% to 100%). In these contexts, gratitude and directness may be forms of negative politeness in that they show respect for the low solidarity interlocutor. However, during refusals to friends (-Distance/+Solidarity), only 50% to 62.5% of the participants used a direct statement of refusal, showing more positive



politeness/face-saving concern towards the high-solidarity interlocutor. In terms of expressing gratitude toward friends, there was a highly significant difference between the refusals to invitations and the refusals to requests. While 68.8% of the American participants expressed gratitude for invitations from friends (refusal mitigation), only one person (6.3%) expressed gratitude in response to a request from a friend (as opposed to the 62.5% to 87.5% in all other scenarios). Therefore, it appears that when receiving an invitation, which could potentially benefit the receiver, gratitude is required whether the receiver is interested in that benefit or not. However when receiving a request, an act in which there is a potential cost for the receiver, gratitude is still required for distant interlocutors, but is not required when the interlocutors share a high level of solidarity.

As stated above, the order of the refusals (Table 42) was typically that of gratitude + direct refusal. However, the variables +Power and –Distance seemed to have an effect on the refusals to requests, for scenarios where there is potential cost to the receiver. It seemed that both those who had high solidarity with the refuser, and those who had more power than the refuser were more likely to receive or be due a reason for the refusal early on in the speech act (order 1 or 2). When coupled with directness, this order of strategies seems to show respect for the higher status interlocutor's negative face by giving priority to honesty and speed of response. When coupled with indirectness in high solidarity situations, the speaker may be showing more empathy towards their friend by trying to save positive face.

In terms of gender, Table 41 shows that indirect strategies, specifically reasons and alternatives, were employed more frequently by the American males than females. In

this study, regardless of the eliciting acts (the invitation and the request) when responding to the professors, the males employed gratitude + direct + reason. It seemed that these strategies were used as negative politeness to pay due respect to the interlocutors who had higher power. When responding to the friends' invitation, the reasons were coupled with less directness and two adjuncts – gratitude and positive opinion, and when responding to the friends' request, they offered alternatives instead. It seemed that the males provided reasons to save negative face (i.e., desire to be independent), but at the same time, they expressed a positive opinion for the invitation, or offered alternatives for the request to contribute in any way for the interlocutors who had high-solidarity with the refuser, which showed a sense of solidarity.

On the other hand, the females included gratitude + direct refusals across all interlocutors when refusing the invitations. Thus, it seemed that the females were showing their sense of equality or in other words, solidarity. The reasons were provided, but in the limited situations, only when refusing the request from the professors or the friends. In these contexts, the requests given in this study were more personal in nature. Thus, they may have responded sensitively, which could also explain the females' orientation toward solidarity.

Table 41

*Frequently Used Semantic Formulas by the American Students*

Semantic formulas	Professor (+P, +D)		Staff (-P, +D)		Friend (-P, -D)	
	Situation 1 Invitation	Situation 4 Request	Situation 3 Invitation	Situation 6 Request	Situation 2 Invitation	Situation 5 Request
<i>American students - All (n=16)</i>						
Direct	75.0%	81.3%	100.0%	81.3%	62.5%	50.0%
<i>Indirect</i>						
Regret	31.3%	37.5%	50.0%	43.8%	31.3%	68.8%
Reason	50.0%	68.8%	18.8%	37.5%	43.8%	93.8%
Alternative	-	31.3%	-	12.5%	31.3%	37.5%
<i>Adjuncts</i>						
Gratitude	87.5%	81.3%	62.5%	81.3%	68.8%	6.3%
Positive opinion	31.3%	25.0%	12.5%	6.3%	68.8%	25.0%
<i>American students - Female (n=8)</i>						
Direct	62.5%	75.0%	100.0%	87.5%	75.0%	37.5%
<i>Indirect</i>						
Regret	25.0%	37.5%	50.0%	37.5%	12.5%	75.0%
Reason	37.5%	75.0%	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	87.5%
Alternative	-	12.5%	-	-	37.5%	25.0%
<i>Adjuncts</i>						
Gratitude	87.5%	87.5%	87.5%	87.5%	75.0%	-
Positive opinion	37.5%	50.0%	12.5%	-	75.0%	37.5%
<i>American students - Male (n=8)</i>						
Direct	87.5%	87.5%	100.0%	75.0%	50.0%	62.5%
<i>Indirect</i>						
Regret	37.5%	37.5%	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%	62.5%
Reason	62.5%	62.5%	12.5%	50.0%	62.5%	100.0%
Alternative	-	50.0%	-	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%
<i>Adjuncts</i>						
Gratitude	87.5%	75.0%	37.5%	75.0%	62.5%	12.5%
Positive opinion	25.0%	-	12.5%	12.5%	62.5%	12.5%

Note: P = Power, D = Distance

Table 42

*The Most Frequently Used Semantic Formulas in the First and Second Orders by the American Students*

Order	Professor (+P, +D)				Staff (-P, +D)				Friend (-P, -D)			
	Situation 1 Invitation		Situation 4 Request		Situation 3 Invitation		Situation 6 Request		Situation 2 Invitation		Situation 5 Request	
<i>American students - All (n=16)</i>												
1st Order	Gratitude	62.5%	Gratitude	62.5%	Regret	37.5%	Gratitude	62.5%	Gratitude	37.5%	Regret	43.8%
					Gratitude	37.5%					Reason	43.8%
2nd Order	Direct	50.0%	Reason	37.5%	Direct	68.8%	Direct	43.8%	Direct	31.3%	Direct	31.3%
											Reason	31.3%
<i>American students - Female (n=8)</i>												
1st Order	Gratitude	62.5%	Gratitude	62.5%	Gratitude	62.5%	Gratitude	75.0%	Gratitude	37.5%	Regret	50.0%
2nd Order	Direct	50.0%	Reason	37.5%	Direct	75.0%	Direct	50.0%	Direct	37.5%	Reason	37.5%
<i>American students - Male (n=8)</i>												
1st Order	Gratitude	62.5%	Gratitude	62.5%	Regret	50.0%	Gratitude	50.0%	Gratitude	37.5%	Reason	50.0%
									P.O.	37.5%		
2nd Order	Direct	50.0%	Reason	37.5%	Direct	62.5%	Direct	37.5%	Direct	25.0%	Direct	37.5%
									Regret	25.0%	Alternative	37.5%
									Reason	25.0%		
									Alternative	25.0%		

Note: P.O. = Positive opinion

### **International students.**

Table 43 shows the comparison of the most frequently used semantic formulas by the international students. Table 44 shows their first and second order placement in the refusal. Across all the situations in this study, the majority of international students included a direct statement of refusal and a reason for the refusal.

For the +power situations, the international students in this study most often started the refusals with an adjunct statement of gratitude first, followed by a direct refusal or a reason. Gratitude (62.5% to 84.4%), directness (75.0% to 78.1%) and reason

(81.3% to 100%) may be forms of negative politeness in that they show respect to the higher-power interlocutors' negative face.

However, during the refusals to the staff members (-power, +distance), direct refusals slightly increased, but only 46.9% to 56.3% of them expressed gratitude and only 62.5% of them provided reasons, showing perhaps less respect toward the interlocutors of the neutral-power status.

During the refusals to the friends (equal-power, high-solidarity), as compared to during the refusals to interlocutors of +distance, the international students became less direct (59.4% to 65.6%) and more frequently provided reasons (87.5% to 90.6%) and statements of regret (65.6% to 81.3%). The statements of regret were used at the highest frequency when refusing the request from friends. Thus, similar to the Americans, it seemed that they expressed regrets to save positive face by showing empathy or solidarity with the interlocutors of high-solidarity, but at the same time, they may be also providing reasons to save negative face in that they basically maintain the freedom to act. As with the reasons to other interlocutors, the content of the reasons were sometimes specific and if not honest, they may be most likely invalid in the American culture. Considering that the reasons were accompanied with other indirect strategies and/or adjuncts, it appears that detailed reasons were provided as a means of politeness strategy in order to save the refusers' negative face. In case of the invitation from the friends, their refusals more frequently included positive opinion to show solidarity with their friends.

In terms of gender, Table 44 shows that across all situations, the male international students used direct refusals more frequently (68.8% to 87.5%) than did the

female students (37.5% to 81.3%). However, during the refusals to the interlocutors of +distance, their direct refusals were placed in the later order than did the females. Thus, it seemed that the males used an extra indirect refusal strategy or adjunct to mitigate the directness.

The typical components of the females' refusals may be regret, directness, and reason, as these strategies were used across the all situations, except the directness toward friends' invitations. On the other hand, the main components of the males' refusals that were common across all situations were a direct refusal only. For the refusals toward the +Distance interlocutors, a reason was added it. It seemed that expressing regrets was a typical strategy for the females to show empathy and thereby promoting solidarities with all of the interlocutors regardless of the difference in power and distance. At the same time, they also provided the reason for the refusals, by which they may be saving negative face toward the interlocutors.

Table 43

*Frequently Used Semantic Formulas by the International Students*

Semantic formulas	Professor (+P, +D)		Staff (-P, +D)		Friend (-P, -D)	
	Situation 1 Invitation	Situation 4 Request	Situation 3 Invitation	Situation 6 Request	Situation 2 Invitation	Situation 5 Request
<b>International students - All (n=32)</b>						
Direct	78.1%	75.0%	84.4%	75.0%	59.4%	65.6%
<i>Indirect</i>						
Regret	56.3%	59.4%	53.1%	59.4%	65.6%	81.3%
Reason	100.0%	81.3%	62.5%	62.5%	87.5%	90.6%
Alternative	-	18.8%	3.1%	-	15.6%	25.0%
<i>Adjuncts</i>						
Gratitude	84.4%	62.5%	56.3%	46.9%	46.9%	18.8%
Positive opinion	34.4%	25.0%	21.9%	15.6%	62.5%	21.9%
<b>International students - Female (n=16)</b>						
Direct	75.0%	62.5%	81.3%	62.5%	37.5%	62.5%
<i>Indirect</i>						
Regret	62.5%	68.8%	68.8%	68.8%	68.8%	87.5%
Reason	100.0%	87.5%	75.0%	68.8%	81.3%	93.8%
Alternative	-	18.8%	-	-	12.5%	25.0%
<i>Adjuncts</i>						
Gratitude	81.3%	62.5%	56.3%	50.0%	43.8%	25.0%
Positive opinion	25.0%	18.8%	18.8%	12.5%	50.0%	31.3%
<b>International students - Male (n=16)</b>						
Direct	81.3%	87.5%	87.5%	87.5%	81.3%	68.8%
<i>Indirect</i>						
Regret	50.0%	50.0%	37.5%	50.0%	62.5%	75.0%
Reason	100.0%	75.0%	50.0%	56.3%	93.8%	87.5%
Alternative	-	18.8%	6.3%	-	18.8%	25.0%
<i>Adjuncts</i>						
Gratitude	87.5%	62.5%	56.3%	43.8%	50.0%	12.5%
Positive opinion	43.8%	31.3%	25.0%	18.8%	75.0%	12.5%

Note: P = Power, D = Distance

Table 44

*The Most Frequently Used Semantic Formulas in the First and Second Orders by the International Students*

Order	Professor (+P, +D)		Staff (-P, +D)		Friend (-P, -D)	
	Situation 1 Invitation	Situation 4 Request	Situation 3 Invitation	Situation 6 Request	Situation 2 Invitation	Situation 5 Request
<b>International students - All (n=32)</b>						
1st Order	Gratitude 56.3%	Gratitude 40.6%	Gratitude 37.5%	Regret 21.9%	Gratitude 28.1%	Regret 31.3%
				Gratitude 21.9%		
2nd Order	Reason 37.5%	Direct 34.4%	Reason 25.0%	Direct 40.6%	Reason 34.4%	Reason 50.0%
<b>International students - Female (n=16)</b>						
1st Order	Gratitude 62.5%	Gratitude 43.8%	Gratitude 43.8%	Regret 37.5%	Gratitude 31.3%	Regret 31.3%
2nd Order	Reason 43.8%	Direct 37.5%	Reason 37.5%	Direct 43.8%	Reason 43.8%	Reason 56.3%
		Reason 37.5%				
<b>International students - Male (n=16)</b>						
1st Order	Gratitude 50.0%	Gratitude 37.5%	Gratitude 31.3%	Wish 18.8%	Gratitude 25.0%	Regret 31.3%
				Gratitude 18.8%		
				P.O. 18.8%		
2nd Order	Reason 31.3%	Direct 31.3%	Direct 37.5%	Direct 37.5%	Direct 37.5%	Reason 43.8%

Note: P.O. = Positive opinion



## **Chapter V: Discussion of Results and Conclusions**

For this study, written responses from American and international college students to an invitation and a request were collected and examined. The invitations and requests came from three types of interlocutors with two contextual variables of power and distance, specifically professors (+Power, +Distance), a staff member (-Power, +Distance), and friends (-Power, -Distance). The specific research questions were: When responding by email, do refusals differ between American and international college students, and between females and males in terms of:

- the frequency of semantic formulas?
- the order of semantic formulas?
- the content of semantic formulas?

In this chapter, the answers to these questions are reviewed and the results of the present study are discussed in relationship to previous research studies outlined in Chapter II. Conclusions and recommendations for future studies are also made.

### **The Frequency of Semantic Formulas**

Regarding the first research question, American refusals commonly included a direct refusal statement accompanied with an expression of gratitude. In general, direct strategies were equally used by the American female and male participants. This was generally true, regardless of the interlocutor's power and distance, with one exception. The use of direct strategy toward a request made by friends became less frequent by the American females and their approach changed toward the use of indirect strategies. The American males also demonstrated less frequent use of direct refusal when responding to

friends as compared to other interlocutors. Their responses were augmented with regrets, reasons, positive opinions, and alternatives. Also, when declining an invitation from their friends, the male and female American students used positive opinions. However, positive opinions were provided more by the American females than the American males. Reasons and alternatives were more often provided by the American male students, and at a much lower frequency by the females.

The international students' refusals commonly included both a direct refusal statement and indirect strategies such as regret and reason. Generally, across all situations, the male international students used direct refusals more than did the international female students. The frequency of the use of a direct refusal statement, by the males, did not change as much across all situations, whereas, the international female participants used an indirect approach in response to an invitation from friends. Moreover, the female students provided a reason and expressed regret across all situations, while male used regret more frequently towards friends. Similar to the Americans, positive opinions were expressed when responding to an invitation from friends. The international female students also frequently expressed regret, whereas the male students used this strategy at a much higher frequency toward friends.

Regret and reason were more frequently used by the international students than the American participants. The international male students in comparison to the American male lacked offering alternatives. The international male students often demonstrated the highest frequency use of direct refusal statements among all groups, and they combined a variety of semantic formulas in a variety of orders.

The use of a wider range of semantic formulas by American participants toward friends (-Power, -Distance) have been reported by many investigators including Beebe, et al. (1990) and Félix-Brasdefer (2004). Overall, the results of this study also showed that in response to their friends' invitation and request, the American participants tended to increase the number of semantic formulas, including both indirect strategies such as regrets and reasons and adjunct to refusals such as positive opinions and alternatives.

Several cross-cultural studies have reported that refusals of nonnative speakers of English tended to be indirect or less direct than those of native speakers of American English (e.g. Beebe et al., 1990; Chang, 2009; Chang 2011; Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011; Hong, 2011; Kwon, 2004). The international student participants in the present study also exhibited the frequent use of indirect strategies. However, at the same time, they also included a direct refusal statement in their refusals as frequently as the Americans.

Studies conducted by Allami and Naeimi (2011), Bardovi-Harling and Hartford (1991), and Kwon (2004) showed lack of positive opinions and alternatives, and the result of the present study is consistent with the findings of the above studies.

Examination of the frequency of semantic formulas for the present study shows that the international students, both female and male, used more variety of refusal strategies including ones that were never used by the Americans such as a request for empathy. Nevertheless, they lacked positive opinions and alternatives.

Choice of expression of regret or gratitude may be an aspect with which nonnative speakers of American English have trouble. Kwon's (2004) study showed that Koreans were found to express regret more often, whereas American participants

preferred expression of gratitude. In addition, Beebe et al.'s (1990) study also reported that Japanese participants frequently expressed regret. Although there were no Japanese participants in the present study, the results are consistent with these findings. Similar to the American students, the international student also expressed gratitude; however, they favored expression of regret more than gratitude. Most importantly, the international students provided a wider variety of reasons and more often than did the Americans.

There is also a difference in the way American females and males use semantic formulas. García (2007) reported that females emphasize solidarity politeness, whereas males balance difference and solidarity politeness. In this study, American female students expressed gratitude toward all interlocutors when refusing an invitation, and provided reasons when receiving more personal requests. On the other hand, the males provided honest reasons for the refusals by saving negative face, but at the same time they offered alternatives to help the requester in other ways even though they refused the request. Thus, this result appears to be similar to the findings of García (2007).

The international students lacked positive opinions and alternatives. They typically overused expression of regret and provided more specific reasons. As Chang (2009) pointed out this could be the influence of the L1 culture norms.

### **Order of the Semantic Formulas**

Regarding the second question in this study, in general, with some exceptions, the American students' refusal started with an expression of gratitude first. The exception is that this pattern is not clearly shown when refusing friends. A statement of direct refusal or providing a reason was commonly placed in the second position. While the American

female participants expressed gratitude first in their refusal to professors and staff, the American male only placed gratitude first toward professors.

The international students placed gratitude in the first order less frequently than did the Americans. Giving a reason or making a direct refusal statement was also placed in the second order. Only two situations showed more than half of the participants – international female students in this case – expressing gratitude in the first order in response to an invitation by professors and providing a reason in the second order to a request made by friends. No other particular pattern was detected.

Beebe et al. (1990) reported that American participants shifted the order of a semantic formula based on the interlocutor's status (equal or not equal). For example, in their study, the American participants used regret first and then excuse in the second order when responding to a request from a friend (equal status). However, in responding to a request from a person of unequal status, the participants' responses changed to positive opinion in the first position, followed by regret in the second position and excuse in the third position. This type of pattern change was not detected in the results of the present study.

### **Content of Semantic Formulas**

Regarding the third question of this study, the tendency of nonnative speakers of English to provide specific reasons that could be fictitious as well as involving a third party has been reported in cross-cultural refusal studies, especially between Asians and Americans (e.g., Chang, 2009; Chang, 2011; Hong, 2011; Kanemoto, 1993; Kwon, 2004). In this study, the international students provided a wider variety of reasons and more

often than did the Americans. The majority of the American students consistently provided honest or general reasons, whereas less than half of international students provided reasons that were specific. These results are consistent with the findings of the investigations cited above. In the present study, however, such specific reasons were provided by the participants with various L1s.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Studies**

The present study examined the difference in refusal strategies used by the American and international college students at a mid-western university in the United States. Before generalizing the key findings of this study, it is important to note that as is the case with other similar studies, due to the relatively small sample size, statistically meaningful generalization cannot be made. Moreover, the subjects were limited to college students and the age spectrum of the participants presented a narrow slice of the general population. The data also should be considered as preliminary, as other important factors such as English proficiency level, the place and method of English acquisition, and the U.S. residency period of the participants should be carefully controlled. In spite of the rationale for the use of a written DCT in this study, artificially collected data and the order of questions in the survey may also have affected the results.

Notwithstanding these limitations, there are some patterns that are worth stating. First, contrary to previous studies, both the American and the international students demonstrated direct refusals in this study. This difference could be attributed to the email mode of communication and or the fact that all participants are of the Google generation and have been influenced by the exposure to the American culture through the use of the

Internet. This would be an interesting area to explore further. For example, in a follow-up study one may investigate the level of exposure of nonnative speakers to American culture through social media and entertainment, and see if there is a correlation between the level of exposure and directness of refusals.

Second, a difference was found in the content of reasons for refusals. Providing a reason was one of the most frequently used refusal strategies by the international students. While the American students generally provided honest reasons, nearly half of the international students provided reasons that were specific. In a refusal, a reason is provided to soften the face threatening act of the refusal. However, if the reason is too specific and appears to be untrue, pragmatic failure could result. This failure could harm the relationship between the refuser and the interlocutor. In American culture, the right and the independence of an individual are valued. When refusing, one does not lose face by being honest, as long as the interlocutor's feeling is taken into account. Therefore, in order to save face, it is not necessary (as might be the case in other cultures) to make up an excuse that is not true. To avoid this type of problem, the cross-cultural differences could be explicitly taught to international students to prevent misunderstandings when communicating with Americans.

Third, the findings of the present study suggest that politeness is realized differently by gender. The American females prefer to show positive face by expressing gratitude and positive opinions, whereas the American males try to balance positive and negative face by giving alternatives and reasons for their refusals. The international females tend to use direct refusals less frequently than do the international males. Since

these findings are based on a limited number of participants, further investigation of the gender difference is highly recommended.

In closing, it should be noted again that the advent of new technologies such as the Internet has brought people of different cultures closer to each other, and globalization has made it essential to learn other languages, especially English. New modes of communication such as emails, although efficient, have made it difficult to establish rapport. In an email communication, you cannot see facial expressions or body language or hear intonations. For these reasons, articulation of a message in an email must be well planned and expressed appropriately. Because of the technological changes of the past few decades it is even more imperative today to conduct pragmatic studies that examine not only the role of culture and gender, but also the role of technology in the way we communicate. This study was an attempt in this area.



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**Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire**

1. Your gender:

- Male
- Female

2. Your age:

3. Your native language (first language):

- English
- Other

(The following questions (Q4-Q9) were asked from those who answered "other" in question 3.)

4. If your native language is not English, please fill in your native language:

5. If you are an international student, which English class are you currently attending?

- ESL 112
- ESL 135
- ENG 101

6. Which of the following tests did you take?

- TOEFL iBT
- IELTS

Please answer either 7-1 or 7-2

7-1. What is your TOEFL iBT test score?

7-2. What is your IELTS test score?

8. How long have you been studying English? (Please mark one.)

- (a) less than 1 year
- (b) 1-2 years
- (c) 3-5 years
- (d) 5-10 years
- (e) more than 10 years

9. How long have you lived in the U.S.? (Please mark one.)

- (a) less than 3 months
- (b) less than a half year
- (c) less than 1 year

- (d) 1-2 years
- (e) 3-5 years
- (f) more than 5 years

**Situation 1**

You and your classmates receive an email from your professors, inviting you to a party to celebrate students who are graduating this year. However, you are only in your first year and really don't know the graduates, so you don't want to go. How would you respond to your professors' invitation? In the space provided below, write a reply to the professors' email.

Date: May 10, 2015

Re: Graduation party

Dear students:

We are going to have a graduation party at the Student Union on May 20 (Sat), and would like to invite you too. We think this party will be a good networking opportunity for you. It will start at about 5 p.m. and we are expecting 15 graduates. Please let me know if you can come.

*Drs. Susan Johnson and John Smith*



Your reply:

### **Situation 2**

Two of your good friends send you and other friends an email to invite you to see a movie premiere. However, you are not interested in the movie and don't want to go. How would you respond to your friends' invitation to the movie premiere? In the space provided below, write a reply to your friends' email.

Date: June 10 (Mon), 2015

Re: Future X

Hi, we got 4 premiere tickets of "Future X". Would you like to join us this Saturday at 5 pm at Cinemark? If you need a ride, we can pick you up at around 4:30 pm.

*Jennifer and John.*

Your reply:

### **Situation 3**

You receive an email from the department you are majoring in at your university inviting you to their alumni event. In order to know how many people are attending the event, your department asks you to respond to the email. You don't want to go. How would you respond to the email? In the space provided below, write a reply to the coordinator's email.

Date: September 1, 2015

Re: R.S.V.P. invitation: Upcoming Alumni Event

Dear students:

This year, Homecoming (Alumni week) runs from September 23 through 28. This annual event is packed with activities and opportunities to have fun, meet friends, and participate

in seasonal campus events. We hope you can join us. Please confirm your participation (or absence) by September 7th, by replying to this mail. Thank you.

*Program coordinator*

Your reply:

#### **Situation 4**

You receive an email from your professors, asking you to mentor an incoming international student next semester. However, you don't want to do it. How would you respond to your professors' request? In the space provided below, write a reply to the professors' email.

Date: January 20, 2015

Re: Mentoring

Dear student,

We have two new international students enrolling in our program next semester. We have been looking for students who can be their mentors and your name first came to mind.

Would you be her/his mentor? Please let us know, thank you.

*Drs. Susan Johnson and John Smith*

Your reply:

### **Situation 5**

You receive an email from two of your friends, asking you to read their paper and provide feedback. However, you don't want to do it. How would you respond to your friends? In the space provided below, write a reply to the friends' email.

Date: January 31, 2015

Re: Peer review

Hi! We have been working on our project in one of our classes. Would you mind being a peer reviewer for our paper? Our paper is about multilingualism. The deadline of peer review is February 10th. Thanks!

*Jenifer and John*

Your reply:

### **Situation 6**

You receive an email from the department you are majoring in at your university asking you to attend a teaching demonstration by a candidate for a position in the department. However, you don't want to attend the demonstration. How would you respond to the email? In the space provided below, write a reply to the coordinator's email.

Date: March 10, 2015

Re: Teaching Demonstration

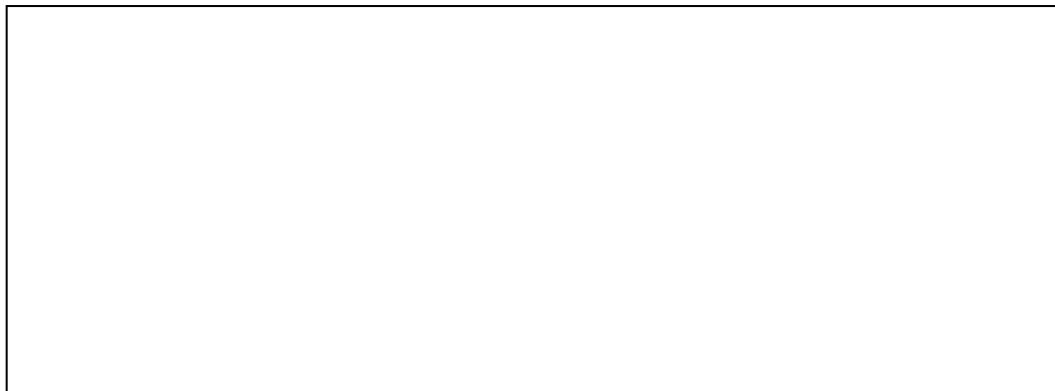
Dear student,

A candidate for assistant professor position in our department is going to give a teaching demonstration on March 30th (3-4 p.m., Monday), and we'd like to ask you to be one of the participants and provide feedback. Please let me know if you can attend.

Best,

*Coordinator for the Search Committee*

Your reply:



Thank you for your cooperation!