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## Analysing the speech act of refusing in the TV show *Grey's Anatomy*

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## I. Abstract

Appropriate refusal interactions may be a difficult task for learners of English in a foreign context since they tend to apply the pragmatic rules of their native language to the target language. As a consequence, they may be seen as rude and impolite. An increasing number of scholars are focusing their efforts on the importance of pragmatics in the Foreign Language (FL) classroom. Recent studies have shown that video materials such as TV shows, news broadcasts or films provide students with authentic pragmatic input, by portraying plenty of instances of refusing situations in real settings. However, some researchers have questioned the validity of these situations considering that the language used in video materials is not real but 'fictitious', as it has been written in advance. Bearing in mind the results obtained by Fernández-Guerra in her 2008 and 2013 studies empirically proving the benefits of using TV series to teach the speech act of refusing, the present paper analyses the occurrences of all refusal situations appearing in three episodes from the first season of the TV show *Grey's Anatomy*, to determine its usefulness in the FL classroom.

**Key words:** refusals, teaching pragmatics, TV shows, films, English as a Foreign Language.

## II. Introduction

Bearing in mind the importance of developing learners' pragmatic competence in the target language, students of a foreign language classroom should be exposed to rich and contextually appropriate input. However, opportunities to face with the target language are close to non-existent when the language is learned in countries where it is not spoken. The main source of input in those cases is that presented in textbooks, which is considered artificial and decontextualised (Usó-Juan, 2007; Martínez-Flor, 2007; Fernández-Guerra, 2008). For that reason, «the use of video material in the classroom has become more and more popular in the foreign language (FL) classroom, since it enables educators and teachers to supplement what textbooks offer to their students» (Fernández-Guerra, 2013, p. 5). However, the use of video materials is considered a controversial issue as it is not pedagogically appropriate for some learners (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Burt, 1999), it is time-consuming for teachers, who need to prepare activities tailored to the level of their students (Burt, 1999), and it has been reported as non-authentic because dialogues are scripted (Fernández-Guerra, 2008).

Studies conducted by Fernández-Guerra in 2008 and 2013 comparing differences and similarities in the language used in TV shows and the language «naturally occurring» in ethnographic data have shown that particularly requests and refusals portray authentic and real speech representations of actual language use. Consequently, this paper attempts to determine the validity of the medical drama series *Grey's Anatomy* as a good instrument to provide English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners instances of the production of the speech act of refusals in realistic settings. We will first provide a definition of refusing as a speech act and review literature dealing with the instruction of refusals in a foreign language context, as well as why the use of audiovisual input may be considered a powerful tool in teaching English. Finally, we will classify verbal realisations of refusals appearing in the episodes analysed.

### III. Theoretical background

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#### 3.1. The speech act of refusals: definition and taxonomy

Broadly speaking, refusals may be defined as speech acts that occur when someone has to say 'no', in a direct or indirect way, to a request or suggestion. An early definition of refusals was provided by Chen et al (1995, p. 121), claiming that refusals function as a response to an initiating act and are considered a speech act by which a speaker «[fails] to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor».

In 2013, Usó-Juan defined it as «a speech act that functions as a response to an initiating act such as a request, invitation, offer or suggestion» (p. 66). Since a refusal contradicts the listener's expectations, it is considered as a dispreferred message (Levinson, 1983). Due to their complexity, refusals require negotiation and different responses conforming to the eliciting speech act because what is considered appropriate when refusing may vary across cultures (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990). For that reason, «this speech act has attracted researchers' attention due to the face-threatening nature it entails» (Salazar, Safont-Jordà & Codina-Espurz, 2009, p.140).

Beebe et al.'s (1990) taxonomy is considered to be one of the most influential studies on refusals. However, the study of the present paper has followed a more recent taxonomy, illustrated in Table 1, which was proposed by Salazar et al. (2009) of the speech act of refusing. This work is deeply entrenched in Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification system, although it was modified to justify a

discourse perspective in the study of refusal behavior taking into account Kasper's (2006) study on interlanguage pragmatics.

Salazar et al. (2009) categorise refusal responses into two main groups: refusals and adjuncts to refusals. Their refusal taxonomy includes two main categories of direct and indirect strategies clearly distinguished from adjuncts. Unlike refusal responses (direct and indirect) are categorized into semantic formulas which can be used to perform a refusal, in the case of adjuncts those expressions which follow the refusal cannot be used by themselves to perform the intended function of refusing.

Within the direct category, they include two semantic formulas: bluntness (e.g. «No»), and negation of proposition (e.g. «I don't think so»). In both instances, the person declines the request, suggestion, etc. without any kind of mitigation.

Indirect strategies include seven semantic formulas: plain indirect for expressions such as «It looks like I won't do it». Salazar et al. stated: «we propose this term to avoid the term «mitigation» since we consider all Indirect Strategies instances of mitigated attempts to avoid using a Direct refusal» (p. 145). The strategy of reason / explanation can be used when the speaker wants to justify why the request, invitation, etc. cannot be carried out (e.g. «I have to study»). In regret / apology (e.g. «I'm so sorry, I can't») the speaker says sorry for declining the request. The next strategy is named alternative, which is subdivided into two categories: change of option (e.g. «I would drink if you give me a glass») and change of time (e.g. «I could meet you next Saturday»), in which the speaker suggests to postpone the request. A further strategy is disagreement, in which the addressee expresses his or her nonconformity with the requested act. «In this case the refuser turns down the request by stating her/his disagreement about the requester's action of asking, the refuser's intention to dissuade the requester from asking (Dissuasion) or even criticising her/him for doing it» (Salazar et al., 2009, p. 145-146) (e.g. «I don't want to listen to you, that has no sense»).

In statement of principle/ philosophy, the refuser turns down the petition because s/he feels that complying the request goes against his or her own beliefs or moral convictions (e.g. «That is inappropriate, you are my boss»). Finally, the last indirect strategy is avoidance, which is divided into two categories: non-verbal, that is, when the request is ignored by the listener by means of silence, not moving or even walking away, and verbal, in which some of the expressions include hedging (e.g. «Well, I don't know if it is exactly the same»), change topic, joking or expressing sarcasm.



**Table 1.** Taxonomy on the speech act of refusing (Salazar et al., 2009)

REFUSALS	
Direct Strategies	
1. Bluntness	No. / I refuse.
2. Negation of proposition	I can't, I don't think so.
Indirect Strategies	
1. Plain indirect	It looks like I won't be able to go.
2. Reason/Explanation	I can't. I have a doctor's appointment.
3. Regret/Apology	I'm so sorry! I can't.
4. Alternative:	
- Change option	I would join you if you choose another restaurant.
- Change time	I can't go right now, but I could next week.
5. Disagreement/Dissuasion/Criticism	Under the current economic circumstances, you should not be asking for a rise right now!
6. Statement of principle/philosophy	I can't. It goes against my beliefs!
7. Avoidance	
- Non-verbal: Ignoring (Silence, etc.)	
- Verbal:	
• Hedging	
• Change topic	Well, I'll see if I can.
• Joking	
• Sarcasm	
ADJUNCTS TO REFUSALS	
1. Positive opinion	This is a great idea, but...
2. Willingness	I'd love to go, but...
3. Gratitude	Thanks so much, but...
4. Agreement	Fine!, but...
5. Solidarity/Empathy	I'm sure you'll understand, but...



Regarding adjuncts, as it has been mentioned previously, they go together with refusal strategies but are not considered as refusal by themselves. Therefore, in willingness-based refusals, the refuser considers the proposal, invitation, etc. a good option, as it occurs in positive opinion, but s/he has to decline it since cannot comply with it (e.g. «I'd love to go, but...»).

It should be pointed out that classifying refusals into one strategy is not a clear-cut issue since, as Beebe et al. suggested, «the form, sequence, and content of these suggested strategies may vary depending on the type of speech act that elicits them» (p. 56). This is the reason why, following the results obtained in this study, I propose '*no*' + *indirect response* as a further direct strategy to express the refuser's intention to deny the request, petition, invitation, etc. This category subsumes '*no*' + *explanation*, in which the addressee turns down the request by giving a blunt '*no*' but, at the same time, also providing a motive to show why it cannot be accomplished (e.g. «No. I am allergic to dried fruit»), '*no*' + *negation*

*of proposition*, in which the speaker also says a direct 'no' and reinforces her or his position with another negative expression (e.g. «No. I'm not going to do it») and '*no*' + *statement of principle*, in which the refuser bluntly declines the petition, request, etc., and employs beliefs or moral convictions to justify the unfulfillment of the action requested («No. That's plagiarism!«).

In the next section, reasons why refusals should be instructed in an EFL classroom will be commented on.

### 3.2. Instruction of refusals in the English as a Foreign Language context

When learning a foreign language, learners should understand how grammar and lexicon acquired can be used in a target-like manner; and they need to be aware that pragmatics may vary significantly from one language to another (Chen, 1996). Rubin (1981, p. 1) stated:

One of the more important communicative tasks that confronts a traveler is the recognition of when a speaker has said «no». That is, one needs to be able to recognize that a respondent has refused or denied that which the speaker has demanded, solicited, or offered. Equally, one needs to acquire the appropriate manner in which to respond in the negative when offered, solicited, or demanded something.

Likewise, cross-cultural studies on refusals reveal that the reasons for refusing and refusal strategies may vary across cultures (Eslami, 2010). Thus, «an inappropriate use of speech acts can lead to pragmatic failure» (Fernández-Guerra, 2013, p. 6). In the case of refusals, learners tend to apply rules from their first language (L1) to their second language (L2) which may make them sound rude and impolite in some situations (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Eslami, 2010; Fernández-Guerra, 2013). Thus, as Chen claims, «given the recognition of culture as an important aspect in foreign language learning, what is meant by the culture of a language and how to become culturally sophisticated in the target language are still vague ideas to most learners» (1996, p. 2). At this point, FL learners should understand: firstly, that a foreign language functions in a different way than their native language and, secondly, that this depends on how native speakers use their language and what they think it is appropriate when using it (Chen, 1996).

Alcón (2010, p. 77) suggested:

It seems that providing learners with opportunities for audiovisual pragmatic input, awareness and comprehension of different pragmatic meanings, together with opportunities to work with pragmatic consciousness-raising tasks, makes a difference in learners' awareness of refusals. Secondly, teaching the speech act of refusals at the discourse level may indirectly help to focus on

other conversational skills such as turn taking or negotiation strategies that are often neglected in pragmatic instruction, which is mostly concerned with the teaching of speech acts.

A study focused on the effect of instruction on learners' use of refusal strategies and concern for pragmatics showed benefits of pragmatic instruction on learners' use and negotiation of refusals (Alcón & Guzman, 2013). Even if both studies have some limitations, taking into account the complexity of this speech act, research on pragmatic instruction has shown refusals are amiable to be taught in EFL classrooms in order to help learners interpret and realise this speech act successfully.

### 3.3. Audiovisual input: a powerful tool

In order to develop learners' communicative competence, that is the ability to communicate appropriately, teachers should offer their students as many opportunities as possible to practise the proper use of the language to a given situation (Usó-Juan, 2007). Moreover, «in foreign language contexts, learners lack the opportunities to face authentic pragmatic input and chances for interaction outside the classroom» (Martínez-Flor, 2007, p. 245). For that reason, the development of their pragmatic competence depends entirely on the pragmatic input that is presented to them in the classroom, which is mainly limited to textbooks. However, «there is still a great artificiality in the presentation of the pragmatic issues in coursebooks» (Fernández-Guerra, 2008, p. 111).

Bearing all this in mind, it seems clear that the use of films and TV shows is an excellent opportunity for foreign language learners. In fact, based on all the studies related to the issue, Fernández- Guerra (2008) emphasizes eight major benefits of using authentic audiovisual input in the classroom which are briefly enumerated as follows:

1. It increases students' motivation in learning English and, at the same time, activates their cognitive domains.
2. It provides contextualised language examples instead of isolated instances and phrases.
3. Learners are exposed to real life speech spoken at a normal speed by native speakers.
4. A great variety of accents, dialects and different situations is offered.
5. It is a good stimulus to catch learner's attention to the language.
6. In combination with well-prepared tasks, videos can help with the teaching and learning of the four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing.

7. Learners are exposed to different social realities and cultural conventions as well as they can observe aspects related to non-verbal communication.
8. Students can observe which formulaic expressions, discourse conventions or syntactic choices are socially appropriated in a real-life context which will help them to acquire pragmatic competence.

Another advantage of the use of video in EFL classroom is that videos can be controlled, that means that teacher can stop, pause or repeat the film recording as many times as s/he considers necessary. Moreover, they can be used not only in class with a group of students but also individually or for self-study (Bello, 1999). It must be stressed that videos like films, television programmes or news broadcasts are produced as entertainment for native English speakers. For that reason it is assumed that they present real language spoken at a normal speed and with authentic accents (Burt, 1999).

Some scholars point out that using films and TV programmes also shows some disadvantages, to mention but a few examples:

1. The use of authentic videos implies that preparing adequate activities and tasks according to the learners' English level is time-consuming work for the teacher (Burt, 1999).
2. These materials can contain inappropriate or controversial language, content or themes to be showed in a FL classroom (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Burt, 1999).
3. They are often not adequate to explain complex concepts or to practice particular grammar or writing skills (Burt, 1999).
4. They cannot be taken as natural speech because it is 'fictitious' language which has been previously written to be performed by actors and actresses. Thus, they are not considered genuine and spontaneous conversations but planned and adapted dialogues (Fernández-Guerra, 2008).

In her 2008 and 2013 studies, Fernández- Guerra concludes that TV shows can be considered as a good instrument to provide students with an authentic and realistic representation of actual language. Furthermore, she proves that TV series can be helpful in enhancing learner's pragmatic competence in the production of refusals due to their resemblance of natural and genuine discourse. On that account, this paper analyses the refusal situations presented in several episodes of *Grey's Anatomy* to examine if we can consider this medical drama fit for purpose, that is, to be used in an EFL classroom in order to help learners to improve their pragmatic competence in this particular pragmatic issue.



## IV. The study

### 4.1. Data collection procedure

The previous sections have shown the importance of offering rich and contextually appropriate input for developing learner's pragmatic competence. Further, it has been pointed out the benefits of using films and TV series in EFL classrooms. Data for the present study were excerpted from the American medical drama series *Grey's Anatomy*; more specifically from the first three episodes of the first season.

Sherman (2003, p. 35) contends that:

Like soap operas, drama series always have the same basic cast and the same main settings, but unlike soaps each episode usually has one main story which is played out in the course of the episode and which can be understood fairly well without reference to previous episodes. This, together with the length (usually 30-45 minutes), makes them good for class use.

Besides, Sherman also remarks that «the settings are often very realistic and can provide a window into working practices and procedures» (p. 35). Bearing in mind the benefits mentioned above, the *Grey's Anatomy* series was chosen not only due to its popularity but also for the setting since the actions take place mainly in a hospital and their dialogues are supposed to represent day-to-day language use. This working context is plenty of different relationships and also offers a great amount of one-on-one dialogue between the characters making it easier for the students to follow the conversations.

*Grey's Anatomy* is an American medical drama television series which follows the life of the main character, Dr. Meredith Grey. It was created by Shonda Rhimes and premiered on American Broadcasting Company (ABC). As mentioned above, the episodes analysed belong to the first season:

*A Hard Day's Night*, aired in March 2005, in which main characters and surgical interns are introduced. The episode starts with Meredith and Derek awakening together. They had a one-night stand the night before and he tries to reintroduce himself but Meredith considers that conversation unnecessary since it is her first day at work and she does not want to be late. Later, they discover that are workmates because Derek is the new attending at Seattle Grace Hospital and, to make matters worse, Meredith's boss.

*The First cut is the Deepest*, originally broadcasted in March 2005. In this episode, Meredith is looking for housemates. After a hard day's



work and due to their insistence, George and Izzie finally move in with her. Otherwise, Meredith discovers that a baby has been misdiagnosed and asks Burke for help who, after a conversation with Webber, decides to examine the newborn and work harder to become the next Chief. Besides, Izzie treats an illegal Asian woman on the street. Meanwhile, Derek and Burke are in the Operating Room (O.R) treating a rape victim. Surprisingly, they find the rapist's penis inside of the patient and Meredith has to carry it around until the police come.

*Winning a Battle, Losing the War*, premiered in March 2005. In this episode, there is a bike race in which several people are injured. Unfortunately, one of them is declared brain dead so, Cristina and Izzie want to use his organs for organ donation, but they have to find his family to get permission for this purpose. Furthermore, they feel the organ harvesting process affects them emotionally. Meanwhile, Meredith and Alex disagree with the diagnosis of a patient and, O'Malley has to deal with a very special patient, a Chief's friend, who needs a liver transplant and is always flirting with the young intern.

Regarding the procedure followed in this study, all episodes were viewed in their entirety and different refusal situations were identified. Then, each refusal situation was transcribed in its full conversational context after watching each episode repeatedly. Finally, all these expressions were classified according to Salazar et al.'s (2009) refusal taxonomy as shown in table 2.

## 4.2. Results and discussion

A total of 67 refusal situations were identified in the three episodes analysed. Table 2 shows the number of refusals belonging to each subtype of direct and indirect groups. The most frequent strategy appearing in the episodes is the one of Disagreement, Discussion or Criticism (22.4 %). Besides, there are a high number of occurrences of No + explanation (16.4 %). Needless to say, results showed more instances of indirect refusals (65.7 %) than direct ones (34.3 %), perhaps due to the context in which this speech act occurs and the relationship between the characters considering that mostly of the responses take place in their workplace.

**Table 2.** Number of occurrences of refusals in *Grey's Anatomy*

Type	Strategy	Total	%
Direct	Bluntness	7	10.4
	Negation of proposition	3	4.5
	No + indirect response:		
	• No + explanation	11	16.4
	• No + negation of proposition	1	1.5
	• No + statement of principle	1	1.5
Indirect	Plain indirect	2	3

Reason / Explanation	7	10.4
Regret / Apology	0	0
Alternative:		
• Change option	1	1.5
• Change time	0	0
Disagreement / Discussion / Criticism	15	22.4
Statement of principle / philosophy	1	1.5
Avoidance:		
• Non-verbal	7	10.4
• Verbal:	3	4.5
Hedging	3	4.5
Change topic	4	6
Joking	1	1.5
Sarcasm		
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.2.1. Direct strategies

Within this category, a total of 23 occurrences of direct refusals were found in the selected episodes. Results showed instances of Bluntness (10.4 %), Negation of proposition (4.5 %), and a high number of No + indirect response, which is divided into three subcategories: No + explanation (16.4 %), No + negation of proposition (1.5 %) and No + statement of principle (1.5 %). The following examples display different situations in which the speaker addresses a person who is known to him or her, thus, there is a close social distance between them. First of all, a clear example (1) of direct 'no' (bluntness) is provided, as well as a Negation of proposition (example 2).

##### Example 1 from episode two *The First Cut is the Deepest*:

[Izzy has an Asian patient. She cannot understand what Mrs. Lu is talking about and asks the room if anybody there speaks Chinese but nobody answers. For that reason, she asks Cristina for help]

Izzy            I wouldn't have called you, but I can't get the translator. Can you just ask her what's wrong?

Cristina        **No.**

Izzy            Why not?

Cristina        Because I grew up in Beverly Hills. The only Chinese I know is from a Mr. Chow's menu. Besides, I'm Korean.

**Example 2 from episode two *The First Cut is the Deepest*:**

[Derek Shepherd and Preston Burke are two attendants who work at Seattle Grace Hospital. Shepherd bumps into Burke in the corridor of the hospital]

Derek        Dr. Burke? I'm off at six. You want to get that drink we talk about?  
Burke        **I don't think so.**

In contrast to these two previous conversations, the following two situations show a combination of direct 'no' with an explanation to why the request, offer, invitation or suggestion cannot be carried out. No + explanation strategy is illustrated in example 3 while example 4 shows a No + statement of principle case. Moreover, example 5 presents a direct 'no' reinforced by another negative expression. As has been mentioned in 3.1, these are three subcategories which belong to a new group named No + indirect response that I have considered essential to add due to the high number of occurrences in the episodes.

**Example 3 from episode two *The First Cut is the Deepest*:**

[Meredith thinks that a baby has been misdiagnosed in Peds and asks Burke to go up and look at him because she has had an argument with the intern responsible]

Meredith    Dr. Burke? There's a baby up in Peds. I saw him have a Tet spell, and I think I hear a murmur.  
Burke        Hmm. Did Peds call us for a consult?  
Meredith    Actually no, they're not...  
Burke        So, you want me to what?  
Meredith    If you could just go up and look at him.  
Burke        **No without a Peds consult. I'm a busy man, Grey, and there are rules. Look, it's not like I'm the chief or something.**

**Example 4 from episode one *A Hard Day's Night*:**

[Derek and Meredith had sex the night before. Once in the hospital, they discover that are going to work together]

Derek        Want to take advantage again? Friday night?  
Meredith    **No. You're an attending and I'm your intern. Stop looking at me like that.**

Derek Like what?  
Meredith Like you've seen me naked. Dr. Shepherd, this is inappropriate.

**Example 5 from episode three *Winning a Battle, Losing the War*:**

[Izzie and O'Malley are Meredith's housemates. They have unpacked some of her mother's things without her consent and want to watch several surgery tapes]

Izzie Oh. I unpacked some of your mother's things. I was upset. And when I'm upset, I like to nest.  
Meredith [she starts to pick up pictures from the furniture]  
Izzie Oh...Hemipelvectomy!  
O'Malley I think we should watch this one first.  
Meredith **No. No. We're not watching my mother's surgery tapes.** We're not unpacking boxes. We're not having conversations where we celebrate the moments of our lives. And use a coaster!  
O'Malley I ordered Chinese food.  
Meredith I hate Chinese food!

Once examples of direct refusals have been illustrated, we turn to consider instances of indirect ones.

**4.2.2. Indirect strategies**

A total of 44 refusal situations were identified in the three episodes analysed. There are a high number of indirect refusals showing disagreement (examples 6 and 7), accounting for a 22.4 % of the total occurrences. Results also showed a large number of instances of avoidance (26.9 %), being the most frequent those verbal expressions (16.5 %): hedging (4.5 %), change topic (4.5 %), joking (6 %) and sarcasm (1.5 %). In addition, 10.4 % of refusal correspond to those cases of non-verbal avoidance. Examples (8) and (9) provide samples of these two frequently used strategies.

**Example 6 from episode three *Winning a Battle, Losing the War*:**

[Kevin is a patient who is a good candidate for organ donation. He has just died and Cristina is asking Kevin's wife which organs can be donated]

Cristina What about his skin?  
Kevin's wife What? [clears throat]  
Cristina It's used to help burned victims.

Kevin's wife **Do you want to cut off his skin? What about the funeral? You want me to have a funeral and have people look at him and... have his daughter look at her father and he doesn't have any skin? It's his skin!**

[Cristina leaves]

In this example (6) the woman is clearly refusing skin donation. She does not say a blunt 'no' maybe because she is shocked and she needs to take time to assimilate that her husband has died and surgeons are going to pull out his organs. Thus, she declines the proposal showing disagreement.

**Example 7 from episode three *Winning a Battle, Losing the War*:**

[O'Malley and Izzie are arguing. She wants to change her room since she thinks that O'Malley's room is bigger and has more space in the wardrobe]

O'Malley You can put your clothes somewhere else.  
Izzy **Everywhere else is filled with Meredith's mom's boxes.**

**Example 8 from episode one *A Hard Day's Night*:**

[This is the first day of work for the new interns. Some of them are having lunch at hospital's cafeteria]

O'Malley This shift is a marathon, not a sprint. Eat.  
Izzie I can't.  
O'Malley You should eat something.  
Izzie **You try eating after performing 17 rectal exams.**  
The Nazi hates me.  
O'Malley The Nazi's a resident. I have attendings hating me.

**Example 9 from episode two *The First Cut is the Deepest*:**

[Burke bumps into Chief in the corridor of the hospital. He takes advantage of the situation to talk about his employment status.]

Burke Chief. So, you asked Shepherd to come to Grace, huh?  
Chief He was an old student of mine.

Burke Oh. He left a Manhattan private practice because you asked.

Chief Yes.

Burke No other reason? Just a favor for an old professor.

Chief It'll be years before I retire.

Burke Chief of surgery is mine. Chief of surgery is mine.

Chief It was yours. Now, I'm not sure.

Burke I am the best surgeon at Grace with the lowest mortality rate. You can't just bring ...

Chief Now ask me why I'm not sure about you. Ask me why.

Burke **[He leaves]**

Occurrences of Reason/ Explanation (example 10) are also relevant (10.4 %). However, the use of strategies of Plain indirect (3 %) and Alternative (1.5 %) is very low, with only few situations of these indirect refusals (examples 11 and 12). Moreover, there are no instances of the subcategory named Change time, nor cases of the refuser showing regret or apology.

#### **Example 10 from episode one *A Hard Day's Night*:**

[Derek Shepherd has requested help from his interns to diagnose a patient in a coma. The one who finds the solution for the problem will participate in the surgery. For that reason, Meredith decides to help Cristina - who is really excited with the attendant's proposal - but when they find the solution Derek chooses Meredith]

Meredith Did you choose me for the surgery because I slept with you?

Derek Yes. [silence] I'm kidding.

Meredith I'm not gonna scrub in for surgery. You should ask Cristina. She really wants it.

Derek **You're Katie's doctor. And on your first day, with very little training, you helped save her life. You earned the right to follow her case through to the finish. You shouldn't let the fact that we had sex get in the way of you taking your shot.**

#### **Example 11 from episode three *Winning a Battle, Losing the War*:**

[Mr. Mackie is a patient who needs urgently a liver transplant. O'Malley has found a matched donor and has gone to inform Mr. Mackie about the good news]

- Mr. Mackie I owe you, George.  
 O'Malley No, you don't owe me anything. I'm just happy we found a liver.  
 Mr. Mackie Well. When I get out of here, how about I take you and my new liver out for a night on the town? What do you say?  
 O'Malley **Uh. Mr. Mackie, no offense or anything. You're very handsome, but, I, um, I'm not...I mean you're not my type because... you're a man, and...**  
 Mr. Mackie [chuckling] George, I never thought you were gay.  
 O'Malley You didn't?  
 Mr. Mackie Oh, child, please. You? Gay? I'm sick George, not blind.



**Example 12 from episode three *Winning a Battle, Losing the War*:**

[Cristina and Izzie have a brain death patient who needs a heart operation to be a perfect organ donor. They ask O'Malley for help]

- Cristina How much would you kill to be in on the transplant surgery?  
 O'Malley You underestimate me. I'm not a baby. I'm your colleague. You don't have to manipulate me. If you want something, all you have to do is ask.  
 Izzie We want you to go over Burke's head to the chief.  
 O'Malley **Ask me something easier.**

After reporting the total number of refusal strategies identified in the three episodes analysed and providing contextualized instances for each particular type of strategy examined in this study, several important points can be raised in relation to the use of direct and indirect categories when a refuser turns down a request, suggestion, offer or invitation. Firstly, occurrences of all types of both direct and indirect strategies were found in our data, except for those cases of the refuser showing regret or apology and offering a change of time. This finding indicates that *Grey's Anatomy* is a good source of pragmatic input that may be used to present learners adequate instances of refusal strategies. Secondly, we can observe that borders among strategies are strongly blurred, for that reason we have considered crucial to create a new direct category called No + indirect response due to the great number of occurrences in which the refuser says directly 'no' but s/he also provides an indirect response to mitigate the previous answer, probably to protect their positive or negative 'face' - notion defined by Brown and Levinson as «the public self-image that every member [of a society] wants to



claim for himself» ( 1987, p. 61) – depending on the context. Thirdly, all the refusal strategies identified in our data were presented in contextualised situations, what reinforce the idea of the potential that audiovisual input, in this case extracted from Grey’s Anatomy series, can have in foreign language contexts to help learners develop their pragmatic awareness towards those aspects they have to take into account when performing the speech act of refusing. Finally, the results of this paper show that speakers prefer using indirect strategies when refusing, accounting for a 65.7 % of the total occurrences in Grey’s Anatomy series, perhaps due to the social distance between the participants – taking into account that they are talking with their chiefs, patients and workmates most of the time. Bearing all these points in mind, it is understandable that they make use of a great amount of No + indirect response since they try to reduce the directness of their answers providing immediately reasons or showing disagreement to the interlocutor.

As far as adjuncts to refusals in this study are concerned, only one agreement case has been identified in the three episodes analysed (example 13):

**Example 13 from episode three *Winning a Battle, Losing the War*:**

[A patient is seriously injured. Meredith and Alex take him to the surgery room]

Bailey            Meredith, get cleaned up and scrub in. Alex, get back downstairs.

Alex                **Yeah, but I helped.**

Bailey            They tell me down in the pit, you only wanna take the hot cases. Every pack of interns, there’s always one fool running around trying to show off. And Alex, this time the fool is you. Get out.

Adjuncts do not constitute a refusal by themselves. Thus, «by accompanying the refusal head act, they vary politeness levels and reduce the face-threatening act of saying no.» (Fernández-Guerra, 2013, p.16). On that account, we can say that, in example 13, Alex probably uses an agreement adjunct since he is refusing his boss and, that situation of power- imposition, makes him to feel the necessity to protect his *face*.

As a last remark, it also needs to be pointed out that, maybe due to this situation of power- imposition, the use of an indirect refusal instead of an adjunct is preferred.

## V. Conclusion

The aim of the present paper was to examine whether American medical drama series *Grey's Anatomy* can be considered appropriate to present EFL learners the speech act of refusing. To do so, the three first episodes belonging to the first season of the series were analysed in detail. Results from our analysis have indicated that a great amount of occurrences of all types of direct and indirect strategies have been found in the episodes under analysis. The only exception was that no cases of a speaker showing regret or apologies as well as proposing a change of time were found. Thus, we can consider *Grey's Anatomy* series an excellent source to show learners real instances of this pragmatic issue. Certainly, we should take into account the level of our students since as Burt (1999) and Guariento and Morley (2001) pointed out, some materials may not be adequate for some students. In this case, learners should have at least an intermediate level of English to make the best of the series. However, although the series offers a great amount of specific vocabulary, I do not consider that a problem to follow the conversations main thread. Indeed, in my opinion further research should be conducted focusing in another pragmatic issues as requesting or complaining, as well as I consider this series not only good for teaching pragmatics but also for enhancing specific medical lexicon of medicine students or even idioms and conventionalised expressions for any kind of learner.



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