REFUSAL STRATEGIES AND POLITENESS IN VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION: A CYBERPRAGMATICS STUDY

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the use of speech act refusal strategies in virtual communication via instant message application, *WhatsApp*. This study uses cyberpragmatics and relative relations studies to determine the form of a politeness strategy for the participants who are involved in virtual communication. The object studied are screenshots of the WhatsApp chat between a banker and a prospective bank customer which is analyzed by using a qualitative descriptive and Discourse Completion Task (DCT) methods. The results showed that the dominant refusal strategy that emerged was the indirect refusal strategy, which included reason, statement of regret, and promise of future acceptance. Also, the use of negative politeness has a more tendency towards the use of refusal strategies.

Keywords: *Cyberpragmatics, Refusal Strategies, Politeness, Relative Relation, Virtual Communication*

Introduction

The rapid development of Information Technology triggers linguistics phenomenon dealing with the IT media. The internet-mediated interaction is a lucrative object of research to explore in the field of pragmatics and communication sciences that coined the term of cyberpragmatics are one of the linguistics phenomena [1]. The special interest of this analysis is the role of intentions and the quality of the interpretation when the internet-mediated interactions take place along with the employment of virtual politeness. The cognitive pragmatic interpretation and the virtual politeness are often influenced by the textual properties and conventional attitude of the media.

In analyzing the study of cyberpragmatics, several aspects need to be reviewed, namely speech acts which include types and functions of speech acts describing the speaker intention of delivering such utterance through chat rooms interactions or internet mediated audio-visual interactions, and utterance and propositional attitude [1]. The interpretation of the intended interpretation it is important to identify the speaker's propositional attitude upon coding the utterance (or in a more general sense, the relationship between the speaker and the thought expressed by the utterance) because the eventual interpretation will be different depending on whether the speaker is regretting, ordering, asking, advising, etc. with the utterance. One way to identify the speaker's propositional attitude is the speech acts used in the message and how the speech acts are conveyed both explicitly and implicitly [1].

One type of speech acts is refusal and rejection. Refusal and rejection can be illustrated as a form of disapproval of the intention conveyed by the speaker. Searle and Vandervenken [2] in Chen [3] define that refusal strategies are one type of illocutionary speech act is the negative counterparts to acceptances and consenting rejections and refusal which functions as a response to an intrinsic act and is considered a speech act that "a speaker fails to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor". Every individual has their

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way of rejecting something, be it an offer, suggestion or invitation, either directly or virtually. In this case, virtual communication is a major concern. Even though communication via the internet is virtual, this still does not take into account the ethics used as indirect communication. In terms of type, politeness on the internet is called netiquette (from the net and etiquette). Others define it as chatiquette – when politeness is used in chat rooms. Cybermedia ethic covers communication strategies on the internet to produce electronic messages [4].

Beebe et al [5] classified refusal strategies into three categories, namely direct strategies, indirect strategies, and adjuncts. Direct strategy includes *performative* and *non-performative statements*. This indirect strategy includes *statement of regret, wish, reason/excuse/explanation, consideration of interlocutor's feeling, exemption of the interlocutor from any responsibility, promises of future acceptance, statement of alternatives, statement of philosophy, statement of principle, set conditions for future. or past acceptance, repetition and avoidance*. While adjuncts include *positive opinion, gratitude, pause fillers, and willingness*. The entire system is included in a semantics formula that can be used on different speech acts such as requests, invitations, offers, or suggestions. "The form, sequence, and content of these suggested strategies may vary depending on the type of speech act that elicits them" [5]. Therefore, it should be noted that not all forms of refusal strategy are used to respond to all forms of speech acts delivered by the speaker.

Apart from refusal strategies of speech acts, politeness theory is important to avoid and minimize shifts in interpersonal meanings [6]. Politeness involves taking account of the feelings of others. When it comes to refusing, the addressee is the main concern. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987)

stated that politeness involves us showing an awareness of other people's face wants. In this case, the theory of politeness in Indonesian culture, Aziz [8]in Chojimah [9] explains that politeness in Indonesian culture is constructed from the Principle of Mutual Consideration (PMC) which includes Harm and Favor Potential, Shared-feeling Principle, Prima Facie Principle and Continuity Principle.

The use of the refusal strategy will be different in each context. In the study of cyberpragmatics, at least there is a social context, a societal context, a cultural context, and a situational context. Social context is a horizontal social relationship, while societal is vertical. Cultural context refers to the dimensions of cultural assumptions, both personal and communal, philosophical considerations that are inseparable from local cultural aspects. Besides, sociocultural competence refers to the speaker's knowledge of how to express messages appropriately within the overall social and cultural context of communication, in accordance with the pragmatic factors related to variation in language use [10]. The situational context includes aspects of participants in speech acts, participant actions in speech acts, relevant speech situations, and the impact of speech acts [11]. Besides, Holmes [12] states that refusing "involves assessing social relationships along the dimension of social distance and relative power or status". In 1987 [7] suggested three variables that influence the choice of politeness strategy: relative power (P) of the addressee towards speaker; social distance (D) that includes intimacy and familiarity between the interlocutors; ranking of imposition (R) of an act on the interlocutor's face.

In the study of cyberpragmatics, there is a term contextual constraints [13] which relates to strategy refusal in virtual communication via internet media. This includes non-proportional feelings, emotions, impressions and so on that are

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indirectly deliberate by the locutor or interlocutor, because this is part of communication activities related to cognitive effects that come from the propositional context. In addition, virtual communication via internet media is also influenced by interface-related and user-related qualities that change communication activities. This relates to user interface management and the relationship between locutors and interlocutors so that this can also produce successful and unsuccessful outcomes from a virtual communication [13].

Several previous studies have investigated refusal strategies, namely English Speech Act Realization of "Refusals" among Iranian EFL Learners [14], Investigating Refusal Strategies in Situational Comedy: A Case Study of Sheldon Cooper, Ph.D. [15]. Refusal Strategy Performed By Indonesian EFL Learner [16]. Refusal Strategies Among Omani EFL Students [17], and Refusal Strategies in Offers and Directives: An Overview of Selected Texts from Radio Drama Episodes [18]. All of these studies examined strategy refusals indirect speech without going through virtual media.

Based on this, this study aims to investigate the form of speech act refusal delivered by prospective customers to bankers of one of the banks in Indonesia through *WhatsApp* in offering these bank products and investigate the use of refusal strategies based on politeness and relative power relations in virtual conversations. This research also deals with the pragmatic aspect of virtual media which is known as cyberpragmatics.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative method and Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The choice of using qualitative methods in terms of research objectives is to understand how a group or individual accepts and understands certain issues.

Also, qualitative methods help provide rich descriptions of phenomena. Qualitative methods encourage understanding of the substance of an event. Thus, qualitative research is not only to fulfill the desire of researchers to get interpretations or explanations, but also to help get deeper explanations [19]. The DCT was intiated in 1982 by Blum-Kulka in her study. According to Blum-Kulka in [8] DCT is a brief description which clearly identifies the setting, the social distance between participants, and their relative status. DCT was originally a form of questionnaire that represent some natural situations to which the respondents are expected to make refusal. In this case, the questionnaire are altered by *WhatsApp* chat since the main concern of this study is cyberpragmatics. Refusal strategies can be used to refuse requests, invitations, offers, and suggestion but the refusal strategy was only used to respond offers in this research. The use of DCT in this research is to find out relative relation between locutor and interlocutor in making refusal strategies in virtual communication. The object and sample data in this study were taken from 30 chat screenshots containing the Bank's product offerings through the WhatsApp instant messaging application between the banker and several prospective bank customers from May 2020 to January 2021. All data were identified based on the category of speech acts refusal strategies put forward by [5] and describe the context in virtual communication.

Findings and Discussion

Of the 30 data that have been analyzed, 41 types of refusal strategies, both direct refusal strategies and indirect refusal strategies are used by prospective bank customers to bankers when offering these Bank products but in general, indirect refusal strategy were favored by the prospective bank customers as in the following table:

Table 1:
Result of Refusal Strategies in WhatsApp Chat

DCT Item	Refuser/Interlocutor Status (Relative to the Banker)	Situation	Refusal Strategies	Semantic Formula Code	F	%
Offer	Higher	The banker offering bank's product to prospective bank customers.	Direct	Negative willingness	7	17,07%
	Equal		Indirect	Reason	17	41,46%
				Statement of Regret	10	17,07%
				Promise of Future Acceptance	7	24,39%
Total					41	100%

To find out the refusal strategy, several dialogues in WhatsApp are raised in this section. From these data, several types of refusal strategies were found as follows:

Direct Refusal Strategy

Picture 1
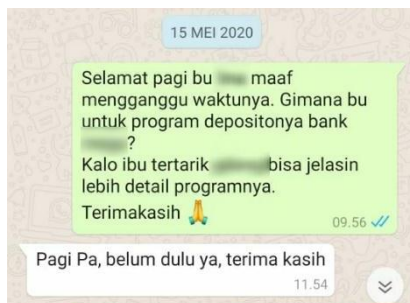
Source: WhatsApp chat

Datum 1
Banker : Good Morning, Mrs. A, sorry for interrupting your time. What about our Bank deposit program? If you are interested, I can explain the program in more detail. Thank you.
Customer A : Morning *pak*, not now. Thank you.

Picture 2

WhatsApp chat

Datum 2
Banker : Good afternoon, Mrs. B, sorry for interrupting your time. About the USD deposit, has it considered?
Customer B : Not now.

Source:

The context of the situation in the virtual speech event shows a banker making a deposit offer to a prospective Bank customer who has been contacted via *WhatsApp* before the rejection occurs. The refusal strategy used by the two prospective Banks is the Non-performative Direct Refusal Strategy: Negative Willingness which is contained in the proposition *Belum dulu* (not yet). Negative willingness is a type of refusal strategy in refusing offers used by the two prospective bank customers. Both decided to be direct but could still sound friendly to the banker.

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Indirect Refusal Strategy

Picture 3

Datum 3

Banker : *Assalamualaikum,* Mrs. C. Sorry ma'am, if your husband gone to Bandung this Saturday or Sunday, may I and Mrs. X (Banker) met your husband to talk about yesterday's topic?

Mrs. C : *Waalaikumsalam.* Sorry *mas* (banker's name) my husband said later, it seems that for now he doesn't want to.

Source: WhatsApp chat

The context of the situation shows that a banker makes a deposit offer to a prospective Bank customer who has been contacted before the refusal occurs. This communication occurs virtually via *WhatsApp*. However, the prospective customer refuses the offer previously described by the Banker because the husband of the prospective customer does not want to deposit funds in the form of a deposit. The refusal strategy used by the two prospective banks is a statement of regret, as in the proposition *Oh iya, punten mas* (Sorry *mas* (banker's name)) and reason as contained in the proposition *Suami aku bilang nanti aja, sepertinya untuk sekarang belum mau katanya* (my husband said later, it seems that for now, he doesn't want to).

Picture 4
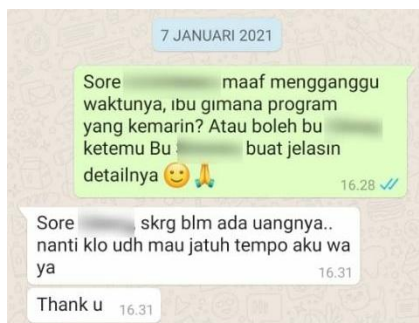
Datum 4

Banker : Good afternoon, Mrs. D sorry to interrupt your time, has yesterday's program considered? May I have chance to see you to explain it in more detail?

Mrs. D : Good afternoon, (banker's name). There's no money for now.. next time I'll call you. Thank you.

Source: WhatsApp chat

The context of the situation shows that a banker makes a deposit offer to a prospective Bank customer who has been contacted before the refusal occurs. This communication occurs virtually via *WhatsApp*. In this case, the prospective customer in the conversation refuses the offer that has been explained by the banker because the customer does not yet have more funds to save deposits at the bank. Besides, these customers also have deposits in other banks. If the deposit at the other

bank is close to maturity for withdrawal, the customer plans to transfer the deposit to the bank where the banker works. In this case, the refusal of the strategy used by the two prospective Bank reasons, as in the present proposition *Sekarang belum ada uangnya* (there is no money for now) and the promise of future acceptance as contained in the proposition, *Nanti kalau udah mau jatuh tempo, aku whatsapp ya* (later when it is about to maturity date, I'll call you).

Picture 5

Datum 5

Banker : (...) Placement if funds in saving, you will get an additional gift of shopping voucher of 1.2 million and samsung tv.

Mr. E : Not now *kang*, there are no funds either.

Source: WhatsApp chat

The results of the data show that the indirect refusal strategy reason, promise of future acceptance, and statement of regret are semantic formulas that are often used instead of the direct refusal strategy by prospective customers when the banker is offering the Bank product. Reason is a type of indirect refusal strategy that is most widely used in refusing an offer. This strategy builds a rationale for resisting and preventing confrontation. Besides, reason serves as a justification for an event. When speakers give or explain a reason, speakers usually give reasons for rejection for the interlocutor to understand [20]. Also, based on the principles of PMC, this shows that both the speaker and the speaker understand each other's feelings. In delivering a speech, both direct speech and written utterance such as in the chat room on the *WhatsApp* between the Banker and the prospective customer, a speech can trigger other strikes should be avoided. Thus, the use of indirect strategies in virtual communication is also used to avoid social disharmony known as hints. Hinting, according to Kartomiharjo in [9] is considered more polite than the use of the word no or no.

In refusing, the refusers tend to use reason or explanation and general acceptance when their position are equal to the banker. Meanwhile, the direct refusal is used by the refusers when their position is higher than the banker. Concerning relative power relations, a speaker, in this case, a banker, considers himself to be powerless compared to his said partners, in this case, the prospective customer is determined by the distance between the banker and the prospective customer. In this research, it is found that the banker puts his position in a lower position and does not have a close relationship with the prospective bank customer, so the banker uses negative politeness. As in all the data that has been described above, the banker uses negative politeness, this is shown in the use of the address terms *'Pak'* and *'Bu'* which mean Mister (Mr.) and Missus (Mrs.), where the two terms are used as honorific terms usually used in Indonesian culture to refer to an older person who is respected so that it shows that the Banker is in a lower position. Turning to the written utterance perspective expressed by prospective bank customers in chat rooms on the WhatsApp,

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prospective customers who use this indirect refusal strategy use a combination of negative politeness and positive politeness. Negative politeness is shown in the use of honorific address *Mas* (Javanese culture) as in data 3 and *Kang* (abbreviations of *Akang* in Sundanese culture) as in data 5. The use of *Mas* and *Kang* is a pronoun to a young male. In this case, the prospective customers consider that the Banker is younger than the prospective customer and does not have a close relationship with the Banker. Besides, positive politeness is shown in propositions that contain strategic refusals: reason. In the politeness strategy, giving reasons for rejection is a form of positive politeness strategy which is considered an external modification device, and positive politeness is used to make the banker feel good about himself.

In the focus of contextual constraints related to virtual communication on the results of the analysis of the conversation strategy refusal on WhatsApp media, there are emojis as done by locutors and interlocutors. In this case, Lesduska in [13] emoji is included in the culturally constrained because it provides a different pragmatic function outside of the whatsapp media users. Yus has another opinion, he states that when viewed from the pragmatic function, there are eight emoji functions in virtual conversations [13]. In the results of this analysis, the emoji function contained in the conversation between the Banker and the prospective customer is to signal the proportional attitude that underlies the utterance which would be difficult to identify without the aid of emoji [13]. This is included in the contextual constraints in the speech act on virtual communication via WhatsApp.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research findings refusal strategy on virtual communication, it can be concluded that indirect refusal strategy: reason dominates the refusal form of all data because participants in virtual communication have the same pragmatic background knowledge based on social, societal, cultural, and situational contexts. Indirect refusal strategy reason, both in conventional conversation and virtual conversation (cyberpragmatics) is an alternative way of rejection and is followed by a statement to clarify a refusal. Associated with relative power relations, the indirect refusal strategy aims to make prospective customers look more polite than saying no to the banker and apply PMC principles based on the culture in Indonesia, which is an important point that prospective bank customers reject in an applicable and acceptable manner. even though through virtual media, which one cannot see directly, the context of communication is still running well.

Due to time constraints in this analysis, the authors hope in further research to study cyberpragmatics not only in the form of written utterance, but also emojis and emoticons that are usually found in chat rooms between speakers and speech partners. Since online interaction is mostly formed in the form of writing, aspects of gestures, emotions, facial expressions, body language, voice interactions and moods shown by the speech partner can be seen directly by the interlocutor. In a study of cyberpragmatics, it is tough to interpret texts without social cues. Fortunately, the internet furnishes its users with emojis and emoticons to append close by the writings to address individuals' expected feelings identified with multimodal analysis. This opens up pleasant regions of cyberpragmatics examination that move past the inflexibility of composed content and into more unique mixes of text and image in virtual communication.

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