A Cross-linguistic Study on the Speech Act of Refusals with Pedagogical Implications

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Abstract

This paper examines the similarities and variations between Chinese and English in the strategic types of refusals to provide pedagogical guidelines for Chinese learners of English. Miscommunication often occurs in intercultural interactions due to interlocutors’ lack of awareness of the culture imbedded in language. On the assumption that Chinese learners may transfer their pragmatic rules and social norms to the use of English, Shih (1986) explored Chinese refusals and proposed the preference for off-record strategies, as opposed to American inclination to on-record ones. Liao and Bresnahan (1996) conducted a quantitative study on Chinese and English speakers’ refusing strategies in light of data obtained through questionnaires. The present study however aims to approach this issue by observing authentic data produced by native speakers. The Chinese data were elicited from university students who sent in their application mail for a short-term assistant position. They were notified by telephone of the job but refused to take it. Their conversations with the notifier indicate that Chinese refusing types resemble those found by Turnbull and Saxton (1997) in English in that both are characterized by ‘negate capacity’, ‘identify impediments’, ‘use performatives’, and ‘indicate reluctance’. The first two are most common, while English outnumbers Chinese as regards the last two types. There also exist idiosyncrasies: ‘negate request’ is exclusive in English, but Chinese exhibits prevalence of ‘off-record strategies’, including ‘show goodwill’, ‘express sympathy’, ‘switch topics’, and ‘indicate uncertainty’. These reveal the realization of ‘politeness’ and the conceptualization of ‘face’ specific to each language. Chinese society views as politeness care about others’ feelings, unlike western culture, which favors a direct and unequivocal reply to others’ requests. Results in this study also suggest the significance to equip learners with the understanding of both linguistic forms and behavior patterns in the refusing strategies of the target language.

1 Introduction

Speech act performance has gained momentum in the field of interlanguage pragmatics where many efforts have been devoted to investigating learners’ immature pragmatic manifestations in their speech act behaviors. Previous works (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Tseng, 1999; Yu, 1999; 2004; Hassall, 2001; 2003; Byon, 2004) have shown that second and foreign language learners find difficulty in performing speech acts,
particularly ‘face-threatening acts’ (see Brown and Levinson, 1978:65-71) that need to be accomplished through effective use of linguistic tactics. What complicate these acts are mostly the underlying socio-cultural norms varying across languages but play a decisive role in the strategic use of speech acts. For example, socio-cultural factors have proved significant in accounting for the variations between Chinese and English (e.g., Shih, 1986; Liao and Bresnahan, 1996). Such socio-cultural knowledge is also a main concern in the study of first language transfer. Previous studies (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Hassall, 2001; 2003; Byon, 2004; Yu, 2004) have provided empirical support to demonstrate that language learners tend to transfer socio-pragmatic rules they have acquired in their native language to the target one. Therefore, a cross-linguistic study on the innate linguistic complexity and socio-cultural values attached to speech acts constitutes a valuable contribution to the research of language learning.

The speech act to be examined in this study is refusals in response to requests, which belong to what Brown and Levinson (1978:65) term ‘face-threatening acts’ for its performance potentially clashes with the face wants of the requester. A number of scholars (e.g., Shih, 1986; Beebe et al., 1990; Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1991; Liao and Bresnahan, 1996; Turnbull and Saxton, 1997; Nelson et al., 2002; Hsieh et al., 2004) have verified that refusals embody an effort on the part of the refuser to apply strategies for restoration of his or the requester’s face. Refusals have also been found to contain Brown and Levinson’s (1978:101-211) ‘positive politeness’ and ‘negative politeness’ as face-saving maneuvers. Accordingly, mastering the overlapping and exclusive uses of refusing strategies in the native and target languages helps language learners develop communicative competence that paves the way for social negotiation. It is to this end that this paper attempts to look into the similarities and differences in the functions of refusing strategies adopted by Chinese and English speakers.

Attested data have been shown to be more representative and convincing than those drawn from questionnaires or interviews (see Golato 2003). For this reason the present study bases the contrastive analysis on natural linguistic productions given by native speakers of the two languages at issue. Moreover, for convenience of contrast, the refusing data of Chinese is collected through a genuine situation analogous to those designed by Turnbull and Saxton (1997) among English speakers. On the basis of native speakers’ actual performance of refusals to comply with requests, this cross-linguistic investigation aims to clarify the socio-pragmatic factors that are in operation and to provide pedagogical implications for the instruction of English to Chinese speakers.
2 Background

2.1 Speech Act of Refusals

Thus far studies on speech acts fall into tripartite dimensions: within one specific language (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1987; Koike, 1989; Turnbull and Saxton, 1997; Wei, 1996), between two or more languages (e.g., Chen, 1993; Fukushima, 1996; Liao and Bresnahan, 1996; Lee-Wong, 1994; Nelson et al., 2002; Pair, 1996), and between languages produced by native and non-native speakers (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Yu, 1999; 2004; Hassall, 2001; 2003; Byon, 2004). These studies uncover manifold manipulations of corresponding politeness strategies in support of facework in the type of acts that intrinsically threaten interlocutors’ face.

Refusal, in virtue of its noncompliant nature, also impedes interactants’ face want and hence falls into the type of face-damaging act that calls for maneuvers to reach politeness. On this ground, scholars have carried out research validating that refusers utilize divergent linguistic devices to preserve mutual face. A significant one is conducted by Turnbull and Saxton (1997), who induced phone interviewees to reject a research assistant’s request to participate in psychological experiments. They contend that in refusals English speakers engage themselves in interpersonal work with modal structures. These include ‘epistemic probability/possibility’ (e.g., I don’t think so), ‘root necessity/probability’ (e.g., I have to work), and a combination of both (e.g., I don’t think I can), used across five types of refusing strategies: ‘negate request’, ‘negated ability’, ‘indicate unwillingness’, ‘performative refusals’, and ‘identify external impeding factors’. This modal logic denotes the speaker’s reluctance and/or obligation to decline, thereby taking on a critical role in repairing the interlocutors’ face.

In addition to refusals within particular languages, some other studies compare the act of refusals across different languages. The following two are done between English and Chinese. Shih (1986:142-145) proposes that ‘off-record’ strategies (see Brown and Levinson, 1978:211-227) are most familiar in refusals among Chinese, for whom saying ‘no’ is more difficult than not answering at all. Liao and Bresnahan (1996) inspect how American and Taiwanese university students give refusals in response to six hypothetical scenarios of requests. Their exposition recognizes social power as a crucial factor in that, when refusing people of higher positions, Taiwanese students give specific reasons more often than American ones.

The above studies address that discrepancies in refusing mechanisms derive from cultural variations, which may pose formidable obstacles for language learners in the process of acquiring speech acts. Beebe et al. (1985) presents an in-depth analysis on
refusals gathered from questionnaires. The cultural effect is substantiated by the fact that Japanese learners lack apologies or regretting expressions in answer to a request of lower status, in contrast to American English native speakers’ primary concern for social distance. Another piece of evidence can be seen in the strategic use of excuses in refusals. It is reported in Beebe et al. (1990) that Japanese learners of English prefer vague excuses—vague as to the detailed time and place involved with their excuses, as opposed to Americans’ specific way of telling others their plans. This difference, as Beebe et al. (1990:66) conclude, can be attributed to the transfer of sociocultural principles. This also suggests that the performance of refusals, as a people and culture oriented behavior, is a complicated task for language learners; therefore a cross-linguistic research is worth pursuing.

2.2 Learners’ Performance on Speech Acts

The relationship between speech acts and language learners’ performance has been marked by a great number of scholars who have probed into the discourse of learners’ speech act behaviors. Of these studies, two features of correlation can be identified across various speech acts.

One is the emergence of first language transfer. When performing speech acts, learners tend to transfer both linguistic and sociocultural knowledge of their first language to the second or foreign language. First, for the transfer of language itself, what researchers have found most evident is the similarity or equivalence in the discourse patterns between the first and the target language. For example, according to Byon (2004:1697-1698), when making a request, American learners of Korean prefer advancing it before stating the reason. This is a sequence normally adopted by American English native speakers speaking in English, but in a reverse order of that employed by Korean native speakers speaking in Korean. Another example of the discourse transfer in requests is furnished by Hassall (2001). He points out that Australian learners of Indonesian are found to favor supportive moves similar to those in their first language, such as offering reasons, explanations, or justifications for the request. Second, the transfer of sociocultural norms is typically reflected by the use of strategies involved in speech acts. Yu (2004) discovers that, unlike Americans, who tend to accept compliments with agreement, Chinese learners of English are more likely to react to compliments with rejections. This is due to Chinese speakers’ first attention to modesty and relative power attached to the behavioral values of their indigenous culture.

A second common feature of learners’ speech act performance is the tendency to display heterogeneous sociocultural perspectives at a homogeneous representation of
language. The use of direct requests, for instance, is referred to in English as a ‘bald-on-record’ strategy with the least politeness (see Brown and Levinson, 1978:94-95). It is however considered socio-pragmatically appropriate in Chinese and Israeli societies since Chinese give weight to the solidarity want; Israeli to the sincerity want (see Blum-Kulka, 1987; Yu, 1999). In another study (Pair, 1996), the ‘suggestory formula’ is found less usual in requests produced by Dutch speakers of Spanish. This is because unlike its conventional indirect force in Spanish requests, in Dutch such ‘inquiry of reason for not doing the requested’ is indicative of the speaker’s irritation or displeasure.

Studies discussed here portray the potential socio-pragmatic difficulties language learners may experience in the acquisition of speech acts. Their conclusions provide language and culture specific explanations for learners’ behaviors, which teachers and learners should both be aware of to facilitate the acquisition of speech acts.

3 Research Design

This study plans an experiment to solicit naturally occurring refusals from Chinese speakers as the antithesis of English ones provided by Turnbull and Saxton (1997). The majority of literatures on speech acts have deduced generalizations from data relying on intuition of the linguist or on results of questionnaires. However, as upheld by Yuan (2001), an inquiry into speech act behaviors via oral Discourse Completion Test (DCT) has its advantage of being realistic and close to life. This can be shown by Yuan’s observation that in DCT the length of responses is longer and the use of exclamation, repetition, inversion, or omission occurs more frequently than in other data-gathering methods (2001:278-283). Beebe and Cummings (1996) also argue that the output in orally elicited data is more comprehensively elaborated than that in written forms, for the sheet provides less space for respondents to yield a large amount of reactions. On these grounds, Chinese data to be examined in this paper is collected through a genuine requesting condition that demands due deliberation in its design to draw out refusals. In addition, this condition is simulated to resemble that in Turnbull and Saxton so that possible interference of social variables, such as the relative social distance or status between participants and the setting or function of interactions, can be obviated.

The experimental paradigm in this study was set in a real situation of recruitment where job seekers were not aware of their conversational contributions to this study. The experimental process started with the research assistant’s posting on the TANet (Taiwan Academic Network) BBS’s (Bulletin Board Systems) announcements for recruiting part-time assistants among university students. Those interested in this
position were asked to leave their phone numbers for later contact. 62 applicants’ information was successfully obtained and computerized. They were students from universities in northern Taiwan, including National Chiao Tung University, National Tsing Hua University, National Cheng Chi University, and National Taiwan Normal University. The research assistant then phoned each applicant to describe the job requirements. One is labor work that requires them to clean classrooms at National Chiao Tung University from seven to ten o’clock every Saturday and Sunday morning for three months in a row. If this job was accepted, the research assistant proceeded to inquire whether they would participate in work demanding mental efforts: reading over one hundred websites on English writing and grammar, for each of which a Chinese introduction as a guide to users needed to be completed within a given time. The applicants’ conversations with the research assistant were tape recorded. After collecting their responses, the research assistant identified the objective of this study and had their consent to use their linguistic productions for research. The answers of the five applicants who accepted both jobs were excluded from observation. The remaining 57 data were transcribed subsequently for analysis.

4 Results and Analysis

4.1 Cross-linguistic Similarities

Results show that Chinese bear four striking resemblances to English in terms of the type of refusing strategies.

Negate capacity: First, negating capacity amounts to the largest proposition (more than 40%) of all the refusing types in both languages. It means that the speaker responds to the request by alluding to his lack of capacity to justify his declination. Here ‘capacity’ is used as a cover term for the ability, quality, or physical strength of the speaker or any other conditions the speaker needs to meet in order to actualize the requested event. Examples in Chinese and English are given in (1) and (2):

(1) Libailiu… libailiu, libairi keneng bu tai xing.
   Saturday Saturday Sunday may Neg. too can
   “I may not be able to make it on Saturday and Sunday.”
(2) No, I can’t make it on Saturday. (160:S59)

It should be noted that this maneuver is situation oriented in the sense that its adjacent elements vary with the type of requesting situations. This can be observed from the contrast between the two requests designed in this study. If the request involves

1 The page number followed by a serial number is offered in parentheses at the end of each English example quoted from Turnbull and Saxton (1997) for convenience of reference.
mental work, the refuser tends to negate his capacity by making clear what particular ability he is short of, as illustrated by (3). Conversely, for one relating to labor work, the refuser usually leaves the cause unspecified, as in (1) above. (4) supplies another instance of this type.

(3) Keshi zhege wo youkeneng meiyoubanfa, yinwei wo yingwen bushi hen hao.
   but this I may can’t because I English Neg. verygood
   “But this I may not be able to do, because my English is not very good.”

(4) Jiushi wo jiari keneng jiu meibanfa.
   it’s I weekend may then can’t
   “It’s that I may not be able to make it on weekends then.”

**Identify impediments:** The strategy constituting the second largest proportion of all shared by the two languages is to identify impediments, i.e., to name events that prevent the speaker from compliance. In doing so the refuser gives rational grounds for his declination. (5) and (6) are examples from Chinese; (7) and (8) from English. This strategy is characterized by the occurrence of modal devices with a reading of uncertainty, such as *keneng* ‘may’ in Chinese and *might* or *think* in English, or obligation, such as *yao* ‘have to’ in Chinese and *have to* in English. The former carries a sense of tentativeness weakening the speaker’s commitment towards the truth of the impediment, which suggests that the refusal to follow is negotiable. The latter, on the other hand, signals necessity for the refuser to be involved with the impeding event, thereby implying his unwillingness to decline. Consequently, these two modal constructions assist in repairing the damage the rejection may cause to the requester’s face (see Hsieh and Chen, 2005, for details). They can also appear in combination to reinforce the face-saving effect, as shown by (5) and (8).

(5) Yinwei jiu keneng yao hui jia.
   because then may have to go home
   “It’s because I may have to go home then.”

(6) Keshi wo xia xingqi yao hui jia ye.
   but I next week have to go home Part.
   “But I am going to go home next week.”

(7) I might be doin a lab of my own at that time. (168:M71)
(8) I think um I like have to go pick up my parents from the airport. (169:M111)

**Use performatives:** A third common strategy is of the type of performatives, in which the refuser performs the illocutionary act of refusing by uttering a performatival verb with similar meaning to ‘refuse’. English outnumbers Chinese with regard to the occurring frequency of this type. Examples are presented by *gei bieren* ‘give (this chance) to others’ in (9), *fangqi* ‘give up’ in (10), *declining* in (11), *pass* in (12). Since the utterance of performatival verbs is understood as the act of refusing, such response
is as such highly face-threatening even though it is not more so than a direct ‘no’. Thus these performative verbs are, more often than not, placed within the scope of modal expressions to convey a sense of indefiniteness or compulsion. This can be exemplified by *keneng* ‘may’ in (10) and *probably* and *have to* in (12), fulfilling identical face-maintaining functions as those in (5) to (8). In Chinese there also exist formulaic expressions such as *buren* ‘then’ and *haole* ‘then’ in (9) and *zheyangzi* ‘that’s it’ in (10). They serve to turn a factual assertion into an inference drawn by the speaker, in this way lowering the degree of certainty expressed, and in turn alleviating the face-menacing force brought about by the performative verb.

(9) Buran gei bieren haole.
then give others then
“Then I give this chance to others then.”

(10) Zhege gongzuo wo jiu keneng jiu… jiu… jiu… fangqi zheyangzi.
this job I then may then then then give up that’s it
“This job I may then… then… then… give up, and that’s it.”

(11) Okay, then I am (declining). (168:M42)
(12) I’m probably going to have to pass on this one. (168:M153)

**Indicate reluctance:** Refusers may also indicate lack of interest or inclination to the requested action, as in (13) to (16). This subtype appears more often in English than in Chinese data. Again such answer typically co-occurs with various forms of mitigators. Most prevalent is modal elements, as demonstrated by *hui* ‘will’ and *ba* ‘probably’ in (13), *would* in (15), and *think* in (15) and (16). Equally important is the formulaic expressions in Chinese, such as *buren* ‘then’ and *haole* ‘then’ in (14).

(13) Buguo… xianzai… keneng… e… bu hui xiang le ba.
but now maybe um Neg. will feel like Part. Part.
“But… now… maybe… um… I probably won’t feel like doing that any more.”

(14) En… buran… jiu… jiu… jiu… bu yao haole la.
um then then then then Neg. want then Part.
“Um…then… then… then… I don’t want it then.”

(15) No, I don’t think I’d be interested in one like that. (160:S60)
(16) I really don’t think I want to do that one. (160:S16)

### 4.2 Cross-linguistic Variations

Idiosyncrasies also exist in refusing types favored by the two language groups. In

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2 ‘Sentence final particles’ appear in Chinese as a lexical category that can express epistemic modality (see Tang and Tang, 1997; Chu, 1998). A case in point is *ba* in (13), which designates conjecture of the speaker with a semantic scope coinciding with the preceding epistemic modal *keneng* ‘maybe’. Absent from English, this category is translated here into modal adverbs closest in meaning.
general, more on-record strategies are found among English speakers than off-record ones, while the reverse situation holds true in Chinese.

**Negate request:** Of the on-record strategies, ‘negating request’ is found to be almost exclusive to English refusals. For example, in the following excerpts the speakers deny the possibility of their granting the request:

(17) I don’t think so. (160:S3)
(18) No, probably not, no. (168:M55)

However, the same construction is considered so rude and offensive that it is generally avoided among Chinese speakers. They would rather turn to off-record strategies, which account for the major part of refusing types detected in the Chinese data. There four subtypes can be recognized as follows.

**Show goodwill:** The first subtype is marked by the refuser’s being generous in proffering others the opportunity to undertake the requested action, as in (19) and (20):

(19) Na… meiguanxi, wo ba zhege jihui rang chulai haole.
well that’s alright I cause this chance give out then
“Well… that’s alright. I give this chance to others then.”
(20) Na… wo haishi ba nage gongdu de jihui liu gei bieren haole.
well I still cause that working Poss. chance leave to others then
“Well… then I leave this chance of working to others then.”

Here the goodwill the refuser manages to show to attain the purpose of politeness is twofold. For one thing, by using such words as *jihui* ‘chance’, *rang* ‘give’ and *liu* ‘leave’, the refuser identifies the request with an opportunity others will need or find interesting. That means the request yields benefits to the one being requested, including the refuser himself. This in a sense turns a request into an offer that brings less imposition to the refuser and is thus less face-threatening by nature. Interpreting the requester’s act as one advantageous to the refuser helps to highlight the goodwill with which the request is advanced. Therefore, facework taking effect here lies in the goodwill of the requester. For another, this friendly and helpful attitude may also be directed toward the refuser. By replacing a rejection with an offer of a chance to others, the refuser may impress the interlocutor as being kind and generous. This projection of a favorable image can make up for the impoliteness following from the noncompliance. As a result, the refuser not only mitigates the damage to the requester’s face, but protects himself from losing face.

**Express sympathy:** A second preferred strategy among Chinese is to express sympathy by revealing their regret for not being able to comply. This can be done by *baoquian* ‘sorry’ in (21) and *yihan* ‘sorry’ in (22), two common expressions used in Chinese to apologize for what the speaker has done that would upset the listener.
Accordingly, the listener will infer from this attitude of being sorry that the request is not accepted. Because the intention of rejection is deduced by the listener, rather than spelled out by the refuser, a face-maintaining effect is produced.

(21) Na wo xian gen ni shuo baoqian haole.
   then I temporarily to you say sorry then
   “Then for the moment let me say sorry to you then.”

(22) Na… wo… na jin hen yihan.
   well I then then very sorry
   “Well… I… then I am very sorry.”

**Switch topics:** Switching topics serves as another off-record strategy. Its function is to divert the listener’s attention from the ongoing topic of conversation to another, which is however related to the original topic to the extent that the listener may well figure it out. As illustrated by (23), the speaker manifests an inclination toward another job without commenting on the one under discussion. This is indicative of a rejection, but in a less face-damaging manner since being refused is a conclusion derived by the requester. Hence facework is done in (23) in a way similar to (21) and (22).

(23) wo bijiao xiang de shi nimen po zai bibi shangmian de
   I than like Poss. is you post on BBS on Poss. lingwai yige e.
   another one Part.
   “Well, what I prefer is another one you posted on BBS.”

**Indicate uncertainty:** Chinese speakers may also respond to a request with nothing but uncertainty, as in (24) and (25). The speaker suggests that for the time being he cannot make the decision; that is, he neither rejects nor accepts the request. Because it is against reason to keep a positive answer back, the most probable motive for giving such an equivocal response is that the speaker is reluctant to grant the request on one hand, and reluctant to disappoint the listener on the other. As a consequence, though these speakers did promise to reply later, they never answered the notifier’s phone call again. This silent response also implies a negative reaction.

(24) O… na zheyangzi… keneng… bu tai… bu tai queding ke bu keyi.
   oh then in this case maybe Neg. quite Neg. quite sure can Neg. can
   “Oh…then in this case… maybe… I am not quite… not quite sure if I can.”

(25) O… zheyangdehua linshi wo ye bu tai zhidao yao zeme huida.
   oh in this case temporarily I also Neg. quite know should how answer
   “Oh…in this case temporarily I don’t quite know how to answer either.”

5 **Discussion**
The above analysis of refusing strategies is based on data from one specific set of refusing situations, i.e. one between university students and a research assistant who conversed on the telephone. Given that the functions and distributions of refusing strategies are regulated by various contextual and social factors, the similarities and differences between Chinese and English to be generalized here is interpreted in terms of a tendency of preference, instead of an absolute rule that governs behaviors of refusers speaking in the language. To put it differently, on a scale of relative likeness, similarities depicted in 4.1 are said of features located closer to the end of complete overlapping between the two languages, whereas differences in 4.2 are nearer to the extreme of features exclusive to only one language. Consequently, among similarities, differences still exist as to the occurring frequency of strategies. As noted above, using performatives and indicating reluctance are strategies adopted more often in English than in Chinese. They can be identified as ‘minor differences’, standing in opposition with ‘major ones’ regarding a contrast in the choice between on-record and off-record strategies, which are placed far closer to the exclusive end. This section will be devoted to a discussion on the socio-cultural factors responsible for both the minor and major differences.

First, in the course of interaction, Chinese speakers tend to center their attention on maintaining face of both sides. For fear of losing his own face, the Chinese refuser may fill in the embarrassing silence expected to ensue from the rejection by rendering a sufficient amount of information capable of justifying his noncompliance, such as pointing out a conflict between the requested action and his internal capacity or the external circumstances. This allows the refuser to conceal his discomfort and awkwardness, thus preserving a positive self-image. In addition, when using in place of a direct rejection such strategies as negating capacity, identifying impediments, and those of the off-record type, the refuser leads the listener to conclude by himself that the answer must be negative. The conversation would then as presumed come to an end without overt confrontation of opinions or attitudes. Since the refuser does not need to actually say words he considers rude or rash, such responses constitute strategies he believes to be in favor of his face.

Chinese speakers also care for the interlocutor’s face want. A result is that they find it necessary or favorable to offer excuses. This makes clear that the refusal is directed against the impeding factors, not against the requester or the requested event. Such reply, though somehow verbose or off the point, can also be reflective of the refuser’s showing thoughtfulness by economizing the requester’s mental efforts in understanding why the request is not granted. Therefore, the facework acting on the requester accounts for the strategic preference in Chinese.
Likewise, English speakers’ concern about face of the two parties also explains the higher frequency of on-record strategies than that in Chinese refusals. Examples include using performatives, indicating reluctance, and negating requests, the last displaying a considerable cross-linguistic variation. These on-record strategies are partly motivated by the refuser’s attempt to protect his own face. On one hand, the contour of the requesting episode where the act of refusal occurs is sketched by an inquiry about the refuser’s intention. In such interrogation, the refuser is convinced that the requester bestows upon him a right to make the choice, and that neither choice would contradict with this common consensus. In other words, when giving a response of the on-record type, the refuser assumes that he is doing what he is authorized to do, whereby his dignity is retained. A macroscopic view, on the other hand, proceeds from individualism emphasized all along in the western culture. This self-centered value is instilled into English speakers and makes them believe that they should be treated with the same respect others would like to receive. Hence, in reply to a request, the refuser’s free will ought to be esteemed. He has no need to bear guilt over showing no disposition to comply. This can be how on-record strategies aid the English refuser in meeting his face want.

English speakers also take the interlocutor’s face into account. One way they manage to attain this purpose is to react to requests with an immediate and pertinent answer that costs the least expenditure of cognitive endeavor on the part of the listener. That is, the easier it is for the requester to comprehend the intention of rejection, the better his communicative need is satisfied. In this sense on-record strategies are of vantage given their pragmatic transparency. This affords part of the grounds for more on-record strategies in English than in Chinese.

In brief, refusal maneuvers correlate significantly with the ideology held by speakers of the language in question. These built-in cultural resources upon which refusers can draw to interact with the requester smooth the way for appropriate integration of interpersonal goals within the broader social system.

6 Conclusion

This study lends empirical support to the convergence and divergence in the refusing types between Chinese and English. It should be noted that these equalities and disparities are not meant to be located absolutely on the opposite ends of the spectrum of preference. That is, they are not features completely overlapping or exclusive in the languages under consideration, but are relatively strong or weak correspondences of tendency. In particular, Chinese refusers are likely to seek for off-record strategies; English refusers for on-record ones. These preferences can be
traced back to language-specific conventions controlled by cultural values and logical thinking on face concern. Speakers need to manipulate these maneuvers appropriately as expected in the course of interpersonal communication to fit into the society.

In consequence, the above analysis carries important pedagogical implications. It suggests that Chinese learners of English need to be equipped with knowledge not only at a linguistic but at a cultural level for successful mastery of the target language. Along the lines of culture-oriented logic, learners are able to acquire the linguistic knowledge within a conceptual world more comprehensive and thus more conducive to language learning. In dealing with face-threatening contexts such as refusing in compliance with requests, learners endowed with this logic will possess interpersonal skills guiding them to avoid responses grammatically well-formed but pragmatically inappropriate. Therefore, the instruction of English should attach importance to such pragmatic prerequisites. This is a new direction this cross-linguistic analysis provides for language teaching.

Reference


