Refusal Semantic Formulas
Used by Foreign Language Learners*

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The notion of communicative competence has received much attention in the field of second language (L2) learning. Sociopragmatic competence plays a significant role in realizing speech acts for nonnative speakers. To elucidate the nature of pragmatic speech use by nonnative speakers, many L2 speech act studies have been conducted, including requests, apologies, complaints, and refusals. As refusals are often seen as face-threatening acts by both requesters and refusers, this study aimed to investigate the effect of social status on the refusal semantic formulas used by Korean EFL learners and native English speakers. Thirty Korean English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, 30 native English speakers, and 30 native Korean speakers participated in the study. Data were collected via Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs). Results showed that the Korean EFL learner group tended to be more emotional and collectivistic, while the native English speaker group was more likely to be rational, individualistic, and direct. The implications of these findings and their potential applications to help L2 learners develop sociopragmatic competence are discussed.

I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of communicative competence has received a great deal of attention in the field of second language (L2) learning in recent years. Effective communication depends not only on achieving linguistic knowledge but also on acquiring appropriate sociopragmatic knowledge embedded in the target language. Appropriate sociopragmatic competence plays a significant role in realizing speech acts for nonnative speakers.

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Speech act theories were developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Austin proposed that utterances can be interpreted in terms of three different acts: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. The locutionary act conveys the literal meaning of the words and the grammatical structures of the utterance. The illocutionary act conveys the force or function of the utterance. The perlocutionary act is the actual behavior of the respondents. Austin claimed that speech acts have the conventional force of illocutionary acts. In this regard, speech acts of refusal are illocutionary acts that convey the force or function of the utterance by a speaker to express his/her refusal to a hearer’s request.

Searle (1976) developed Austin’s theory and classified these illocutionary acts into five types of speech acts: (a) representatives; (b) directives; (c) commissives; (d) expressives; and (e) declarations. According to Searle (1976, p. 10-13), representatives are acts that commit the speaker to the truth of the utterance; directives are acts that ask the hearer to do something; commissives are acts that commit the speaker to do something in the future; expressives are acts that express feelings about the utterances; and declarations are acts that deal with the correspondence between the content of utterances and its reality. In his classification of illocutionary acts, refusal speech acts are classified into the expressives category, in which the speaker shows negative or uncomfortable feelings about the requests or the requesters.

Speech acts are also realized in a series of communicative acts to accomplish particular purposes. That is, speech acts can be realized not only in a single discourse but also in a connected discourse in the form of adjacent pairs. Refusal speech acts are realized in the form of adjacent pairs with different types of acts such as requesting, apologizing, complimenting, or inviting (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Example (1) illustrates a pair of utterances by interlocutors in which inviting and refusing speech acts are performed together.

(1) A: I’m throwing a little party this weekend. Will you able to come?
   B: I’m sorry. I’ve got a previous engagement. So I can’t come this weekend.

As shown in example (1), the refusal responses are combined with an inviting speech act in a connected discourse. It is important to be aware that refusal speech acts are realized with other connected communicative acts.

Studies have examined the differences and similarities of refusal strategies between native and nonnative English speakers (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996; Nelson, Carson, Batal, & Bakary, 2002). Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1991) investigated refusal responses employed by native English speakers and proficient nonnative English speakers. Nonnative English speakers came from six different cultural
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Their refusal responses were audio-taped during academic advising interviews. In Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s study, the framework of status congruence\(^1\) introduced by these researchers in 1990 was used to examine refusal responses. The findings showed that both groups used the explanation strategy as the most common semantic formula, but native English speakers preferred to use the alternative strategy as the second most favored formula while nonnative English speakers employed the avoidance strategy as the second most favored formula instead. The results also showed that nonnative English speakers could not maintain their status balance because they did not use appropriate status-preserving strategies.

Liao and Bresnahan (1996) compared the refusal strategies of American English speakers and those of Chinese EFL learners. Social status and gender variables were investigated to determine whether these social factors might influence the realization of speech acts by Chinese EFL learners. The findings showed that American English speakers and Chinese EFL learners employed different refusal strategies. For example, American English speakers often used the expression “I would like to help” to show their positive desire to help with the reason strategy and then apologized in their refusals. However, Chinese EFL learners did not start with the positive desire to help but rather with an apology and then the reason for the refusal. This is because Chinese EFL learners thought that expressing positive opinions first would mean that they would be willing to accept the requests. Social status also had a significant effect on the speech act performances of Chinese EFL learners. For instance, these learners employed different strategies toward people of higher status, while Americans did not show any difference in their use of refusal strategies with people of unequal status. Furthermore, gender difference was found to affect the refusal strategies. Female participants were more willing to help people of higher status than male participants.

Nelson et al. (2002) investigated the effect of social status on the refusal strategies used by Egyptian Arabic and American speakers, using discourse completion tests (DCTs). Their findings indicated that there were much more similarities than differences between Americans and Egyptians in the use of refusal strategies. That is, both Egyptians and Americans used more indirect refusal strategies than direct ones. Furthermore, both groups used fewer indirect strategies when refusing people of equal status than when refusing people of lower or higher status. One difference worth noting was that Americans took into consideration the interlocutor’s feelings more frequently than did the Egyptians. This difference was attributed to the fact that American participants tended to be more careful

\(^1\) Status congruence is a term indicating a match between the speaker’s status and the appropriateness of speech acts based on that status. Congruent speech acts reflect the expected or established role of the participants (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990).
than Arabic speakers when using face-saving indirect strategies.

As refusals are often seen as face-threatening acts by both requesters and refusers, much research has been conducted in this area. However, few studies have been carried out on refusal speech acts of Koreans who are learning English as a foreign language (Chang, 1995; Lee & Kang, 2001; Lyuh, 1992). Lyuh (1992) examined refusal speech acts by Koreans and Americans, using both DCTs and multiple choice questionnaires. Social variables such as social status, social distance, and gender of requesters were considered to investigate their possible effects on speech act realizations. The findings of this study demonstrated that refusal strategies used by Koreans and Americans did not seem to be affected by social status and social distance, but were affected by the content of the requesting situations. That is, both groups used the most semantic formulas when refusing requesting situations, fewer for invitations/offers, and the fewest for suggestions. These groups were found to be more affected by social status than social distance. The gender of requesters was not found to affect the refusal strategies of either group.

Chang (1995) investigated refusal speech acts among native Korean speakers, native English speakers, and Korean EFL learners using DCTs and situational assessment tests. The effect of social variables including social status, solidarity, and the degree of imposition on the refusal strategies of these groups was examined. Native English speakers tended to give clear explanations in their responses, while Koreans refused in indirect and vague ways. Korean participants tended to use more direct strategies when refusing familiar interlocutors, while Americans used more indirect strategies with familiar interlocutors. Sociocultural norms of first language (L1) were also found to be transferred in the speech acts of Korean EFL learners. Korean EFL learners were as sensitive to social status factors as native Korean speakers. They tended to employ more direct refusals with lower status interlocutors, while they preferred indirect refusal strategies with people of higher status.

The study by Lee and Kang (2001) also examined the effect of social status on the refusal strategies of Korean EFL learners and native English speakers. Similar to the previous study, they found that while Korean EFL learners refused in more vague ways, native English speakers provided more clear and specific reasons why they could not accept the request. Furthermore, Korean EFL learners employed a limited number of refusal strategies in their responses, while native English speakers used various refusal strategies. Korean EFL learners’ speeches also tended to be more verbose. That is, Korean EFL learners tended to make longer statements than native English speakers when realizing refusal speech acts.

The findings of previous research (Chang, 1995; Lee & Kang, 2001; Lyuh, 1992) should be interpreted with caution due to some methodological drawbacks. None of these studies (Chang, 1995; Lee & Kang, 2001; Lyuh, 1992) controlled for the participants’ gender.
Research shows that gender plays a significant role in carrying out speech acts. It is therefore necessary to control for the participants’ gender to avoid confounding variables when examining the effect of social status on the performance of L2 speech acts. Moreover, these studies (Chang, 1995; Lee & Kang, 2001; Lyuh, 1992) only examined a limited number of situations in the DCT questionnaires. For example, Chang drew a conclusion on the basis of a maximum of ten situations. Lee and Kang also reported their findings on the basis of only a maximum of 12 situations. In Lyuh’s study, only speakers of equal social status appeared in the DCT situations where the gender variable was being investigated.

This study examines whether social variables such as social status affect the refusal strategies of Korean EFL learners and native English speakers, with a refined research design such as controlling for gender effects and increasing the number of DCT situations. The cultural differences between speakers from English-speaking countries and Korea are discussed to explain the different refusal strategies used and possible misunderstandings that may arise. Further, the implications of these findings and their potential applications to help L2 learners develop sociopragmatic competence are discussed.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Participants

This study involved native English speakers (n=30), Korean EFL learners at an intermediate to high English proficiency level (n=30), and native Korean speakers (n=30). The age of the participants ranged from the twenties to the mid-thirties. An equal number of males and females participated in each group to avoid possible gender effects.

The native English speakers were mostly exchange students attending Korean universities, who were majoring in business, philosophy, linguistics, computer science, or international studies; however, a few teachers that were teaching English at language institutes also participated. Most participants were native speakers of American English; however, two Canadians, one Australian, and one New Zealand English speaker also participated in the study.

Korean EFL learners were all undergraduate and graduate students majoring in English Literature, Linguistics, or English Education at Korean universities. These participants had a score of 540 to 620 on the PBT (or 207 to 260 on the CBT) on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or 705 to 930 on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Only those who had less than a year of experience living or studying abroad in English-speaking countries were selected for the study.

Native Korean speakers participated in the study to provide L1 baseline data. All of
them were currently undergraduate and graduate students attending universities in Korea. They were drawn from various fields, including statistics, chemistry, bio-science, Chinese, and economics. The majority of these students did not have any experience living or studying abroad in English-speaking countries.

2. Procedures

Data were collected through a DCT that was revised based on previous refusal speech act studies by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990), Chang (1995), and Lyuh (1992). Social status was divided into three categories: (a) people who had a higher status than the refuser, such as a professor, a boss, or a senior at school; (b) people who had equal status to the refuser, such as a friend, a classmate, or a roommate; and (c) people who had a lower status than the refuser, such as an employee, a younger sibling, a student, or a freshman at school. In the DCT, a total of 18 situations were devised including requests, invitations/offers, and suggestions. These DCTs were developed in both English and Korean (see the Appendix for the complete set of English version of DCT situations). The English version of the DCT was distributed among native English speakers and Korean EFL learners, who were required to respond in English. The Korean version of the DCT was distributed to native Korean speakers, who were required to respond in Korean. In addition to the DCT set, background questionnaires were developed and distributed among all the participants, in which they were required to answer questions related to their personal information (e.g., age, gender, major, English proficiency test scores, period of living or studying abroad in English-speaking countries, and the time spent in Korea).

3. Data Analysis Framework

The data analysis framework used in the present study was revised on the basis of study by Beebe et al. (1990). According to Beebe et al., refusals consist of a sequence of (a) a semantic formula as an independent idea unit and (b) an adjunct to semantic formula as a supporting idea unit. Semantic formulas can function as a refusal utterance independently (direct and indirect strategies), while adjuncts to semantic formulas cannot function as a refusal independently because they often imply positive opinions or feelings in response to the requests (adjunct strategies).

In the present study, participants’ utterances were divided into idea units and then classified into either semantic formulas or adjuncts to semantic formulas. If a refuser says, “I’d love to, but I can’t” to a lunch invitation, this utterance can be divided into two different idea units, as in example (2).
The utterance “I’d love to” can be categorized as the positive feeling strategy. It cannot function alone as a refusal because it sounds like an acceptance to an invitation, which then serves as an adjunct to the semantic formula. The utterance “But I can’t” can be classified as a direct strategy, and can function independently as a semantic formula. Figure 1 summarizes the classifications of semantic formulas (direct and indirect strategies) and adjuncts to semantic formulas (adjunct strategies).

**FIGURE 1**
Classifications of Refusals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantic Formulas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Direct Strategy: Refusing the requests clearly or showing negative ability and willingness (e.g., ‘I refuse,’ ‘No,’ ‘I can’t,’ ‘I won’t’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Indirect Strategy: Refusing the request indirectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Regret/Apology: Showing regrets for not accepting the requests (e.g., ‘I’m sorry…’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Wish: Showing a wish to help the requester (e.g., ‘I wish I could help you….’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Reason: Explaining the reasons for not accepting the request. This category includes excuses and explanations as well (e.g., ‘I have a headache’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4. Statement of an alternative: Giving alternatives to the requesters instead of accepting the requests (e.g., ‘I’d rather…’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5. Set condition for past acceptance: Explaining to the requester why he/she would accept the request if he/she were told earlier (e.g., ‘If you had asked me earlier, I would…’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6. Promise of future acceptance: Showing active willingness to accept the request in the future (e.g., ‘I’ll do it next time’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7. Principle: Showing personal values (e.g., ‘I never do business with friends’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor: This category includes several substrategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.1. Negative consequences: Showing negative feelings about the requests (e.g., ‘I won’t be any fun tonight’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.2. Criticize: Criticizing the request and requester or insulting the requester (e.g., ‘That’s a terrible idea’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.3. Request for help: Requesting for help and assistance from the requester (e.g., ‘Please, understand me’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.4. Off the hook: Ensuring the requester that it’s okay (e.g., ‘That’s okay’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9. Acceptance that functions as a refusal: Accepting the request as a refusal (e.g., ‘That’s right’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10. Avoidance: Avoiding the requesting situations or providing unspecific comments in response to the requests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10.1. Topic switch: Changing the topics (e.g., ‘By the way’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10.2. Joke: Making a joke (e.g., ‘It was just a joke’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10.3. Repetition: Repeating the part of requests (e.g., ‘This weekend?’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10.4. Postponement: Postponing the request in a passive manner (e.g., ‘I’ll think about it’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10.5. Hedging: Showing uncertainty to the requester (e.g., ‘I don’t know’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10.6. Question: Asking a question about the requests (e.g., ‘Can you do me…?’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10.7. Suggestion: Making a suggestion or proposal to the requester (e.g., ‘You should.’).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Adjuncts to Semantic Formulas
3. Adjunct Strategy
3.1. Positive feeling: Responding positively towards the request (e.g., ‘I’d love to’).
3.2. Empathy: Responding the request in an empathetic manner (e.g., ‘I realize you are in a difficult situation’).
3.3. Pause fillers: Using ‘uhh,’ ‘well,’ ‘oh,’ or ‘um.’
3.4. Gratitude: Expressing gratitude (e.g., ‘Thanks for suggesting’).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Higher Social Status

Table 1 presents the distribution of refusal strategies when refusing people of higher status. To uncover whether there were any significant differences among groups in their refusal strategy use, Chi-square tests were conducted. Both Korean EFL learners and native English speakers showed a distinctive distribution in their use of refusal strategies ($\chi^2 (24, N = 1592) = 65.128, p < .001$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refusal Strategies</th>
<th>NES</th>
<th>KEFL</th>
<th>NKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regret/Apology</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wish</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past acceptance</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future acceptance</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissuade interlocutors</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance as a refusal</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>67.2%</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Adjunct                  |       |       |      |
| Positive feeling         | 7.8%  | 11.9% | 8.4% |
| Empathy                  | 0%    | 0.1%  | 0%   |
| Pause fillers            | 3.0%  | 3.8%  | 5.1% |
| Gratitude                | 8.5%  | 8.3%  | 3.9% |
| Sub-total                | 19.3% | 24.1% | 17.4%|
| Total                    | 100%  | 100%  | 100% |

Note. NES: native English speakers; KEFL: Korean EFL learners; NKS: native Korean speakers.
Native English speakers preferred to use the direct strategy (13.1%) more frequently than Korean EFL learners (8.7%) when refusing people of higher status. Concerning the low preference for direct strategy use by native Korean speakers (5.6%), vertical power seems to play a significant role in Korean culture. Interestingly, the utterance “I refuse,” one of the direct refusal expressions, was used six times by six different native English speakers, while it was used only once by a single Korean EFL learner. The following example illustrates direct refusal expressions of native English speakers when refusing a person of higher status:

(3) No. I can’t pick up and leave like that.

(In Situation 14, refusing a promotion offer from the boss)

Among the indirect strategies, both groups preferred the reason strategy most often although Korean EFL learners (37.0%) used it more frequently than native English speakers (34.3%). The preference for the reason strategy is consistent with previous studies (Beebe et al., 1990; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Chang, 1995; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996; Nelson et al., 2002). The next most favored strategy used by both groups was the regret/apology strategy, with Korean EFL learners using the regret/apology strategy (15.2%) more frequently than native English speakers (13.5%). A strong preference for the regret/apology strategy was also found in native Korean speakers’ refusals (19.3%). This preference may be due to the emphasis of humbleness and modesty in Korean culture. The following examples illustrate regret/apology strategies used by Korean EFL learners in Situation 1 (refusing a request to help a professor with his/her work).

(4) Oh, I am sorry sir. This semester I took 4 courses so I don’t have enough time. I am sorry.

(5) I am so sorry I can’t help you this time. I feel awful I disappointed you. I promise that I’ll make it for the next time.

The above examples show that Korean EFL learners tried to mitigate the offenses that the requester might feel by using a regret/apology strategy, which is polite and appropriate in Korean culture. In contrast, native English speakers tended to employ different strategies such as wish or direct strategies when responding to the same situation (Examples (6) and (7)).

(6) I wish I could, but I just got a new job. (wish strategy)

(7) No, my other classes keep me busy. (direct strategy)
The different refusal preferences of Korean EFL learners and native English speakers confirm the claim by Hall (1976) that communication styles of people from a Korean culture and an English-speaking culture vary. According to Hall, Korean sociocultural norms are based on high-context cultural systems, in which group-oriented values are strongly preferred. Thus, each individual person in a high-context group tends to maintain other group member’s face more than they do their own face. In contrast, English-speaking cultures are based on low-context cultural systems, in which individualistic values are emphasized and maintaining self-face is important. Therefore, in the present study, Korean EFL learners made more use of regret/apology strategies when communicating with people of higher social status to maintain each other’s face, while this culture-specific value was not present in English-speaking cultures.

Another striking difference between Korean EFL learners and native English speakers is the distribution of avoidance strategies. It is worth exploring the findings that avoidance strategies occurred more frequently in the responses of native English speakers (7.6%) than in those of Korean EFL learners (4.3%). Such a result is surprising and inconsistent with Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s (1991) study, which showed that the avoidance strategies were used primarily by nonnative speakers. Table 2 presents the distribution of avoidance substrategies when refusing people of higher status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoidance Substrategies</th>
<th>NES</th>
<th>KEFL</th>
<th>NKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic switch</td>
<td>0%(0)</td>
<td>0%(0)</td>
<td>0%(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joke</td>
<td>0%(0)</td>
<td>0%(0)</td>
<td>0%(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>2.6%(1)</td>
<td>16.0%(4)</td>
<td>18.1%(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postponement</td>
<td>63.2%(24)</td>
<td>72.0%(18)</td>
<td>57.6%(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedging</td>
<td>23.7%(9)</td>
<td>0%(0)</td>
<td>6.1%(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>7.9%(3)</td>
<td>12.0%(3)</td>
<td>6.1%(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>2.6%(1)</td>
<td>0%(0)</td>
<td>12.1%(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%(38)</td>
<td>100%(25)</td>
<td>100%(33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the various avoidance substrategies, the postponement substrategy was employed most frequently by both groups (KEFL 72.0% vs. NES 63.2%). However, native English speakers employed the hedging substrategy (23.7%), while none of the Korean EFL learners used this substrategy. Example (8) illustrates the hedging substrategy employed by native English speakers.

(8) Thank you for offering me such a wonderful opportunity. But, since my family and friends are all here, I don’t know. I hope you don’t take this the wrong way. (In
Situation 14, refusing a promotion offer by the boss)

Also, Korean EFL learners used the repetition substrategy (16.0%) more frequently than native English speakers (2.6%). Example (9) demonstrates the repetition substrategy used by Korean EFL learners.

(9) A movie? Sorry, I can’t. I have a work to do now. (In Situation 8, refusing a movie invitation from a senior at school)

Korean EFL learners used adjunct strategies (24.1%) more frequently than native English speakers (19.3%). This finding was attributed to the fact that Korean EFL learners tended to either repeat the same adjunct strategies several times or use various adjunct strategies to convey their meanings in a single situation. The following example illustrates the use of adjunct strategies by Korean EFL learners.

(10) It sounds awesome! Thank you very much for your offer. I really appreciate your proposal. However, I’m afraid I can’t move to another place at the moment, because I’m a teacher of Sunday school. I am sorry. (In Situation 14, responding to a promotion offer by a boss at work)

In example (10), Korean EFL learners employed three adjunct strategies to convey their refusals in a single situation (positive feeling strategy plus the repetition of gratitude strategy). Korean EFL learners repeated adjunct strategies several times and made longer explanations. Such an overuse of adjunct strategies can be explained by the verbosity phenomenon typically present in nonnative speakers’ utterances (Byon, 2003; Lee & Kang, 2001). In the study by Lee and Kang (2001), for example, Korean EFL learners repeated or elaborated the off the hook strategy (e.g., “That’s okay”) several times in their responses.

2. Equal Social Status

Table 3 presents the distribution of refusal strategies when refusing people of equal status. Korean EFL learners and native English speakers differed in their refusal strategy use ($\chi^2 (24, N = 1478) = 87.801, p < .001$).
According to the analysis of direct strategy use, native English speakers used direct refusals (12.6%) more often than Korean EFL learners (9.9%). Among the indirect strategies, the most commonly used strategies were the reason strategy (KEFL 38.0% vs. NES 38.4%) and the regret/apology strategy (KEFL 13.4% vs. NES 9.8%). As with the findings with people of higher status, Korean EFL learners showed a strong preference for the regret/apology strategies. However, unlike the findings on avoidance strategies involving people of higher social status, Korean EFL learners used more avoidance strategies (4.6%) than native English speakers (3.1%) when refusing people of equal status.

A noticeable difference between Korean EFL learners and native English speakers was the frequency of use of an alternative strategy. That is, native English speakers employed more alternative strategies (9.4%) than Korean EFL learners (4.1%). According to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1991), alternative strategies can mitigate the face-threat of rejection for the refusers. In their research, native English speakers tended to provide alternatives along with explanations in their rejections as the second most favored strategy. The following examples illustrate the responses of native English speakers, who often used
alternative strategies in Situation 3 (refusing a best friend’s request to lend him/her a jacket).

(11) I haven’t even worn it yet. I have another formal jacket that I’ll be willing to lend you. You can come take a look at it.

(12) Oh, my sister borrowed it for the weekend. Maybe you can call Suzie?

The following examples indicate the responses of Korean EFL learners, who employed regret/apology strategies with reason instead of using alternative strategies in the same refusing situation.

(13) I am so sorry to tell you this. But I have not worn the new jacket yet, so I don’t think I can lend it to you this time.

(14) I’m so sorry. I did the laundry today, so my jacket is moist. I think it won’t dry until tomorrow.

Another discrepancy between Korean EFL learners and native English speakers was the distribution of dissuade interlocutors strategies. Native English speakers employed the dissuade interlocutors strategy (2.7%) more frequently than Korean EFL learners (0.9%). Table 4 presents the distribution of dissuade interlocutors substrategies according to the group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dissuade Interlocutors Substrategies</th>
<th>NES</th>
<th>KEFL</th>
<th>NKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Consequence</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticize</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request for help</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off the hook</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The criticize substrategy was the substrategy most frequently employed by both native English speakers (75.0%) and Korean EFL learners (60.0%). The criticize substrategy, which was likely to result in negative consequences, was employed more frequently by native English speakers than by Korean EFL learners. The criticize substrategy involves verbally insulting or attacking the requester, using phrases such as “Who do you think you are?” or “That’s a terrible idea.” Such a criticize substrategy was employed mainly in Situation 4 which involves refusing a classmate’s request to lend him/her a note for an
exam. In the present study, the native English speakers directly showed unpleasant and uncomfortable feelings without consideration of the requester’s face. The native English speakers tended to give more specific and clear reasons for why they could not lend their notes. In contrast, Korean EFL learners employed the regret/apology strategies instead when refusing the same situation, as the types of expressions used by native English speakers are considered to be impolite in Korean culture (see examples (15) and (16)).

(15) I am sorry. Will you ask other people?
(16) I am sorry, I can’t. But I can tell you some important things about the exam. But I can’t lend you my note.

The Korean EFL learners’ preference for the regret/apology strategies is consistent with Liao and Bresnahan’s (1996) study which examined refusal speech acts of English and Mandarin speakers. Their findings revealed that Americans did not hesitate to show their unhappiness when they were asked to share their notes. However, Chinese people refused the request more indirectly even though they also did not wish to share their notes. These findings can be explained by different cultural and social values. Several researchers (Byon, 2003; Liao & Bresnahan 1996; Lyuh, 1992; Sohn, 1986) claim that western cultures are based on individualism, in which an individual person is considered to be more important than a group. In contrast, Korean culture is collectivistic, in which the group interest takes priority over individual interests.

Similar to the verbosity phenomenon displayed in higher status situations, Korean EFL learners used the adjunct strategy (26.2%) more frequently than native English speakers (21.4%). Korean EFL learners employed the positive feeling (12.6%), pause fillers (6.9%), and gratitude (6.7%) strategies more often than native English speakers (positive feeling 9.7%, pause fillers 5.8%, and gratitude 5.9%).

3. Lower Social Status

Table 5 demonstrates the distribution of refusal strategies when refusing people of lower status. Both Korean EFL learners and native English speakers showed a distinct distribution in their use of refusal strategies ($\chi^2 (26, N = 1412) = 69.362, p < .001$).
Consistent with the refusal strategies used when conversing with requesters of high or equal social status, native English speakers preferred more direct strategies (16.1%) than Korean EFL learners (8.6%). Among the indirect strategies, both Korean EFL learners and native English speakers still preferred the reason strategy most often (KEFL 36.3% vs. NES 35.2%). The notable differences between Korean EFL learners and native English speakers were also found. For example, Korean EFL learners used the regret/apology strategies (8.6%) more frequently than native English speakers (5.7%) with interlocutors of lower status. Considering that native Korean speakers used regret/apology strategies (9.0%) to the same extent as Korean EFL learners (8.6%), it was speculated that this might reflect the influence of L1 on the speech acts of Korean EFL learners.

Another difference between these two groups was in the use of dissuade interlocutors substrategies. Table 6 illustrates the distribution of subcategories of the dissuade interlocutors strategy.
As shown in Table 6, both Korean EFL learners (52.2%) and native Korean speakers (55.2%) employed the request for help substrategy to a far greater extent than native English speakers (12.5%). A typical example of the Korean participants’ preference for this substrategy was seen in Situation 5 which involves refusing a request to increase an employee’s pay. Korean participants tended to ask for the requester’s understanding of their current financial situation. As Sohn (1986) pointed out, Korean people tend to be more emotional and affective because of their collectivistic values. In the present study, this type of communicative value was reflected in the speech acts of Korean EFL learners because they favor more emotional expressions to ask for the interlocutor’s understanding and obtain support instead of giving specific and clear reasons. The following examples are illustrations of responses from Korean EFL learners who employed the request for help substrategy in Situation 5.

(17) Oh! I think I have to raise your payment too. But as you know, the economic situation is not so good. Please understand.

(18) Well, I am afraid to tell you that as you know, our store is currently difficult to manage. Please try to understand. Would you wait for a while?

In contrast, native English speakers employed alternative or promise of future acceptance strategies in the same situation. The native English speakers tended to be more rational and specific based on their individualistic values. They tended to make a distinction between official and personal issues. The following examples demonstrate the responses of native English speakers in Situation 5.

(19) I can’t give you a raise at this point, but I’ll give you first choice in hours and a 15% increase in employee discounts. (alternative strategy)

(20) You’ve been a very good worker and I enjoy having you. Let’s discuss it at your next performance review in June and we can work something out then. (promise of future acceptance strategy)
Another interesting difference between Korean EFL learners and native English speakers was the use of the criticize substrategy. Korean EFL learners resorted to the criticize substrategy (43.7%) more frequently than native English speakers (30.4%). The following examples illustrate the responses of both Korean EFL learners and native English speakers who employed the criticize substrategy in Situation 17 (refusing a younger sibling’s suggestion to change a hairstyle).

(21) No way! You don’t have any good sense of hairstyle. How can you be so sure about what I should do on my hairstyle? (KEFL)

(22) Really? You think that would look good on me? No way. (NES)

Another striking discrepancy between Korean EFL learners and native English speakers lay in the use of the principle strategy when refusing requests from people of lower status. Native English speakers employed the principle strategy (2.1%) more frequently than Korean EFL learners (0.4%) when refusing requests from people of lower status. In particular, the principle strategy was mostly found in Situation 6, in which a student asked a professor to lend him/her a book. In this situation, native English speakers tried to refuse the request in a more direct way and convince the requester by saying that there were certain rules and principles that professors had to adhere to. However, this reasoning was rarely used by Korean EFL learners. Examples (23) and (24) illustrate responses from native English speakers who employed the principle strategy in Situation 6.

(23) I would like to, but I actually have a policy about not lending my books to students. I’ve lost too many books that way. (NES)

(24) How about trying a library outside school? You can definitely get hold of a copy there. As a rule, I can’t lend materials to students because there have been other students who felt slighted by what they thought of as preferential treatment. (NES)

Examples (23) and (24) suggest that native English speakers tend to be more rational than emotional in communicative acts. As Sohn (1986) pointed out, native English speakers do not want to be involved in personal emotions as English-speaking culture is based on rationalism.

Similar to the adjunct strategy use found in higher and equal social status situation, Korean EFL learners employed the adjunct strategy (22.0%) more frequently than native English speakers (14.6%). Korean EFL learners used positive feelings (10.9%), empathy (1.9%), and pause fillers (5.8%) significantly more than native English speakers (positive feelings 6.1%, empathy 0.7%, and pause fillers 3.1%), whereas native English speakers preferred the gratitude strategy (4.7%) more often than Korean EFL learners (3.4%).
The goal of the present study was to investigate the effect of social status on refusal speech act realizations by Korean EFL learners and native English speakers. In refusing situations involving a person of higher social status, native English speakers employed direct strategies, while Korean EFL learners preferred regret/apology strategies. This seems to be because maintaining one’s self-face is more valued in low-context cultures (e.g., English-speaking culture), while maintaining each other’s face is more important in high-context cultures (e.g., Korean culture). Another finding was that native English speakers preferred using avoidance strategies more often than Korean EFL learners. Among the avoidance strategies, Korean EFL learners preferred the question substrategy while native English speakers favored the hedging substrategies.

When refusing requests from an individual of equal social status, native English speakers employed alternative and dissuade interlocutors strategies such as the criticize substrategy. In contrast, Korean EFL learners preferred the regret/apology strategies. Results showed that individuals from the Korean culture value modesty or humbleness as indirect forms of communicative acts on the basis of their collectivistic values, whereas individuals from English-speaking cultures prefer direct refusals with specific, clear reasons why they cannot accept the requests on the basis of individualistic values.

In refusing situations involving an individual of lower social status, native English speakers preferred principle strategies, while Korean EFL learners employed dissuade interlocutor strategies such as the request for help substrategy. The Korean EFL group tended to be more emotional and collectivistic, while the native English speaker group was more likely to be rational, individualistic, and direct.

Cultural values of native language were reflected in the refusal speech acts of Korean EFL learners. For example, as Korean culture tends to prefer emotional and affective expressions, culture-specific strategies such as the request for help substrategy were used predominantly by Korean EFL learners and native Korean speakers, but rarely used by native English speakers. Moreover, Korean society is based on collectivistic and high-context cultural norms. This cultural tendency influenced Korean EFL learners to employ regret/apology strategies more often than native English speakers.

This research contributes to the understanding of how different cultural backgrounds affect the different refusal strategies used by Korean EFL learners and native English speakers. The present findings demonstrate that Korean EFL learners are not fully aware of sociopragmatic knowledge embedded in English-speaking cultures. Even advanced L2 learners who have already achieved considerable linguistic knowledge fail to perform appropriate communicative acts. The pedagogical implications of this study are as follows:

First, it is important to develop various teaching methods to raise L2 learners’
sociopragmatic consciousness. One of the useful ways to teach L2 learners sociopragmatic knowledge is to create speech-act sets typically used in the target language. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) suggested that syllabus designers should develop lists of speech-act sets for English as a Second Language (ESL)/EFL learners. A speech-act set is a series of connected discourse that contains various communicative acts. Speech acts should be taught in a connected discourse with different types of communicative acts.

To present the speech-act sets to L2 learners, the following teaching methods introduced by Jung (2004) can be applied to the current findings. Students should listen to model dialogues that include native English speakers’ refusal speech acts. These dialogues represent real-life situations and conversations in which turn-taking, negotiations, elaborations, and hesitations are typically present. It is also recommended that students engage in role-playing activities that include various social variables and contextual factors in refusal situations. Because the refusal strategy can vary according to situational factors such as status, distance, and gender, it is important to include various situations that contain these variables. Classroom discussion is also recommended. Classroom discussions will enable L2 learners to appreciate the similarities and differences between native and nonnative cultures and raise their sociopragmatic consciousness needed in carrying out refusal speech acts.

Second, the present findings can be applied to computer assisted language learning (CALL). Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) suggested how to construct and design a CALL program to apply speech act findings. As much refusal speech act data as possible should be gathered as a first step. Various refusal situations involving different social factors should also be included to help L2 learners practice the various refusal speech acts. Once the refusal speech act data is gathered, L2 learners can practice refusals in given situations. Then, CALL evaluates the L2 learners’ refusal speech act performances and provides appropriate feedback. This individual learning can help learners gain sociopragmatic knowledge.

Third, it is important to develop ESL/EFL textbooks and materials that reflect authentic refusal speech acts in the target language. As discussed in previous studies (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Harlow, 1990; Lyuh, 1992; Seo, 2001), commonly used ESL/EFL textbooks and materials often fail to reflect appropriate sociopragmatic knowledge embedded in the target language for various communicative acts. There seems to be a gap between these textbooks and real-life refusal situations. It is important to develop ESL/EFL textbooks and materials which reflect natural language use.

Lastly, both ESL/EFL instructors and learners should be aware that sociocultural values and norms of the target language are different from those of the native language (Lyuh, 1992; Seo, 2001). As the current study shows, specific strategies are preferred by groups depending on their different cultural backgrounds. For example, English-speaking culture
is characterized by rational, individualistic values and low-context cultural systems, while Korean culture is characterized by emotional, collectivistic values and high-context cultural systems. In this regard, both ESL/EFL instructors and learners should be aware of the culture-specific communication strategies that are commonly preferred in the target language to avoid possible miscommunication or communication breakdown.

Despite the benefits of the current study, it has some limitations. First, a DCT was adopted in the study to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time and to control social factors. However, this methodology has been criticized for failing to elicit natural responses. Nonverbal communication strategies (e.g., gestures, eye contact, etc.) cannot be examined when using only written questionnaires. In this regard, it will be meaningful to compare speech act realizations on the basis of different eliciting methods such as written questionnaires and natural conversation in future research. Moreover, the current study focused on the effect of social status on the speech act performance. As Brown and Levinson (1987) pointed out, the ranking of imposition assessed by speakers from different cultural backgrounds may affect their speech act patterns. Future research can investigate the effect of the degree of imposition on the use of refusal strategies.

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX**

**Situations of Discourse Completion Test (English Version)**

**Situation 1:** You are a senior student at a university. While passing through your department, you meet your professor. You have taken two classes with this professor since your freshman year, and you know this professor very well.

Professor: Hey, it’s nice to see you again. I have been very busy lately, and I am desperately looking for a research assistant. Can you help me?
You refuse by saying:

**Situation 2:** You are in a meeting with your boss at your part time job. It is getting close to the end of the day, and you want to leave soon. You have been working here since last week. So you do not know your boss well.

Boss: If you don’t mind, I’d like you to spend an extra hour or two now so that we can finish up with this work tonight.

You refuse by saying:

**Situation 3:** You and your best friend went shopping for a formal jacket a couple of days ago and you bought one. Several days after shopping, this friend calls you.

Friend: Could you do me a favor? Some of my friends asked me out to dinner tomorrow at a very elegant French restaurant, but I don’t have anything appropriate to wear. Could I possibly borrow your jacket that you bought a couple of days ago?

You refuse by saying:

**Situation 4:** You are taking the same class with this classmate. You attend classes all the time and take good notes, but this classmate often misses classes. You do not know this classmate very well, and you have never had a conversation with this classmate before. After class, this classmate approaches you.

Classmate: Oh, God! We have an exam tomorrow, but I don’t have any notes from last week. I am sorry to ask you this, but could you please lend me your notes?

You refuse by saying:

**Situation 5:** You are the owner of a bookstore. One of your best workers who has been working for you over two years and you know very well, asks you for a raise.

Worker: As you know, I’ve been here more than two years now, and I know you’ve been pleased with my work. I really enjoy working here, but to be quite honest, I really need an increase in pay.

You refuse by saying:

**Situation 6:** You are a language teacher at a university. You have just started teaching a new class for this semester. One day after class, an unfamiliar student asks you.

Student: Excuse me, professor. Could you lend me the book that you introduced to us last week? I like to borrow it for a few days. I really want to read the book, but I can’t find it in the library and the bookstore.

You refuse by saying:
Situation 7: You have been working at a company as a part time job for over three years. You have enjoyed working here and get along with manager and coworkers like family members. One day, the manager calls you into the office.
Manager: I’m throwing a little party this weekend for all the employees. I know it’s a short notice, but I hope everyone will be there. Will you able to come?
You refuse by saying:

Situation 8: You are a freshman at a university. You are new and unfamiliar with the people around, and you are not used to getting along with new people. One afternoon, a senior at your department invites you out. You have seen this guy a couple of times before, but do not know this guy very well in person.
Senior: A group of us are going to see a movie tonight. Would you like to join us?
You refuse by saying:

Situation 9: Spring break is approaching, and some of your close friends are making travel plans.
Friends: We’re going to Florida during spring break, and we need one more person to join us. Would you like to go?
You refuse by saying:

Situation 10: You have just found a new roommate and have started living together for only one week. You are taking the same class with your roommate, but you and your roommate have had few conversations with each other. At one evening, both of you study for the weekly quiz together. Your roommate offers you some chocolate cookies.
Roommate: My mother sent me tons of homemade chocolate chip cookies. Would you like some?
You refuse by saying:

Situation 11: You are watching TV with your younger sibling (brother/sister) one evening. Your younger sibling (brother/sister) offers you a snack. But, you do not feel like eating it because you are on a diet now.
You: No thanks. I’ve been eating like a pig, and I feel just terrible these days. My clothes don’t even fit me.
Sibling: Hey, why don’t you try the new diet I’ve been telling you about?
You refuse by saying:

Situation 12: You have just started living with a freshman in a school dormitory. It has been only one week since you started living with this freshman together, so you do not
know this freshman personally. One afternoon, this freshman invites you out to play tennis. 
Freshman: Hey, how about a game of tennis tomorrow? 
You refuse by saying:

**Situation 13:** You meet with your professor to plan courses for your last semester. You have been given a lot of advice on your course planning from this professor several times before since your freshman year, and you know this professor very well. 
Professor: Considering the area you are interested in, I would suggest that you take a course in statistical techniques. 
You refuse by saying:

**Situation 14:** You have just found a new job in an advertising agency and it has been only a week now. The boss offers you a raise and promotion all of a sudden, but it involves moving. You don’t want to go to another place. 
Boss: I’d like to recommend you an executive position in our new office in Hicktown. It’s a great town which is only 3 hours from here by plane. A nice raise comes with the position, too. 
You refuse by saying:

**Situation 15:** You are planning your courses for the next semester. You like to consult with one of your close friends who is a student of the same department with you. You have a specific course in mind. 
Friend: Well, that course you have in mind isn’t bad. But if you take this Linguistics course with me, it will be fun. 
You refuse by saying:

**Situation 16:** At the clothing store, you are shopping for your mom’s birthday gift. While talking with a salesperson at the clothing store, you run into one of your classmates. You have seen this classmate a couple of times before around school, but you have never spoken to this classmate. 
Friend: Hey, I would recommend this for your mom. These are one of the favorites for women in their 50’s. 
You refuse by saying:

**Situation 17:** While watching TV, you are talking with your younger sibling (brother/sister) about getting a new hair cut. You have been thinking about changing your hair style recently and have a certain style in mind. 
Sibling: I think your hair is nice, but this new curly style on TV would look even better on
you.
You refuse by saying:

**Situation 18:** You have just started giving English private lessons to a middle school student. You have been tutoring this student since last week a couple of times. So you do not know this student very well. One day, this student calls you.

Student: I have been thinking about your English lessons recently, and it would be better if I could have more practice in conversation and less on grammar.

You refuse by saying:

Applicable levels: adult English education
Key words: social status, refusing, foreign language learners

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