Vietnamese Speech Act Realization and Some Factors Influencing Refusal Strategies: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this pilot research was to explore the refusal strategies and factors influencing speech act realization of refusals employed by a group of Vietnamese language learners when making refusals to invitations, requests, offers, and suggestions by 5 participants at Tien Giang University to shed light on the possible problems leading to cross-cultural differences in communication. A Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT) and 5 interview questions in English versions developed by the researcher were used to collect the data and analyze it qualitatively and quantitatively. The results illustrated that the participants frequently used indirect strategies for refusing each context given in the WDCT. Furthermore, based on the participants' answers via the interview records, it could be concluded that social contexts, distance, and cross-cultural differences influenced L2 learners of English as a Foreign Language. The findings of this study highlight some strategies to help learners understand and gain more strategies in speech act realization of refusals and misunderstanding can be avoided. Besides, the interlocutors can receive appropriate responses to refusing invitations, requests, offers, and suggestions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The performance of speech acts takes place through spoken words and holds a pivotal position in pragmatic research, which is crucial for learners to study how to refuse any occasion so that they can make refusals spontaneously in a variety of contexts. Therefore, investigating speech acts, specifically in expressing refusals, can provide a better comprehension of how to gain communication through linguistic behaviours. Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019), Bangun and Stevani (2020), suppose that refusal is commonly used in everyday communication so that speakers can reject or decline; however, realizing how to refuse effectively is a challenge for language learners, especially for those learning English as a Foreign Language. Therefore, the ability to produce a polite and appropriate refusal is important for communicating in an effective way as well as building positive social relationships.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in speech act strategies in different languages and cultures, and they become increasingly important areas in applied linguistics. Several researchers studied speech act realization of refusals in such foreign languages as Korean (Kwon, 2004; Lee, 2013; Krulatz and Dixon, 2020), Mexican (Brasdefer, 2006; 2008),

Arabic (Morkus, 2009; Sattar et al., 2010; Al-Ghamdi, et al.,2019; Ahmed, et al., 2021; Benbouya & Rabab'ah, 2022), Indonesian (Bangun and Stevani, 2020; Rusminto & Ariyani, 2022), Russian (Lliadi & Larina, 2017) and Iranian (Sahragard and Javanmardi, 2011; Sa'd & Qadermazi, 2014; Shashi, 2022). Cross-culture, the key reason for misunderstanding in communication, is investigated by Beebe and Takahashi (1989), Han and Burgucu-Tazegül (2016), and Demirkol (2019). Besides, social contexts that are considered factors found to be affecting the speakers who use strategies of refusals are explored in several studies (Teufle, 1996; Boonsuk, 2019). According to Teufle (1996), successful communication requires more than mastery of grammar rules alone, one must assimilate the rules of social use of language as well, that is, knowing when and under circumstances to use specific linguistic form. Moreover, Aliakbari and Changizi (2012) agreed that awareness of using cross-cultural strategies would lead to success in communication.

Pragmatics is what the speakers express in a real context, and the way they speak or write will be affected in one way or another (Thomas, 1995; Spencer & Zegarac (2019). Pragmatic transfer is influenced by the language acquired, and a positive one can be easy to comprehend thanks to sharing the same usage of language-specific conventions (Kasper, 1992; Kwon (2003); Meznah, 2018). How refusal pragmatic patterns are used differently from English and other languages was explored in different research. On the other hand, Cruz (2013) and Laich (2016) believe that pragmatic transfer can cause misunderstanding when speakers have different knowledge of pragmatic aspects and behaviours towards the target language.

As far as I know, Vietnam is a country where learners have more tendency to pursue English as an international language these days because of its significance at school, university, and the workplace. English is also a required language in the education system. From my perspective of teaching experience, I realize that although all four skills are integrated into the textbook, students are still not good at English speaking. They find trouble in selecting suitable strategies to react to the speech act in communication. Besides, breakdowns in communication can be caused by social contexts and unawareness of pragmatic failures. However, there has been little attention paid to speech act realization of refusals in Vietnam. Accordingly, this current study attempts to analyze the refusal strategies and explore factors influencing speech act realization of refusals of invitations, suggestions, offers, and requests among L2 Vietnamese learners at Tien Giang University, Vietnam.

1.1. Research Questions

This current paper finds out a variety of strategies and factors affected by Vietnamese speakers of Tien Giang University, Vietnam in performing refusals of requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions in English. The following research questions include:

- What strategies do Vietnamese speakers of Tien Giang University, Vietnam perform in speech acts of refusals?
- What factors are influenced by Vietnamese speakers of Tien Giang University, Vietnam on acting the refusals of requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions in English?

1.2. Objectives of the Research

There is a gap in how foreign language speakers use refusal strategies and what affects their usage in communication with other native speakers. In this paper, I tried to investigate the

strategies realized by Vietnamese speakers of Tien Giang University, Vietnam and also considered what influences the speaker's gender, social status, and social distance on refusal strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Speech Act of Refusals

Speech act is performed in the form of uttering a word via acting, and it plays a crucial role in pragmatic research. Refusal is also frequently used and usually exists in everyday communication. As defined by Beebe et al. (1990), refusal seems to be important to some foreign-language speakers. Refusals show that an individual is not willing to carry out the task. It means that someone refuses, which delivers an intention to express a rejection. In response to requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions, speakers use refusal words.

2.2. Classifications of Refusal Strategies

Alzeebaree (2018) and AlBugam (2019) state that a non-native speaker requires pragmatic competence to be polite and avoid insults thanks to the significance of culture in using the strategies to express a refusal speech act; therefore, to examine the pragmatic transfer in the realization of the speech act of refusal, these two researchers designed a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) consisting of three requests, three invitations, three offers, and three suggestions. To code the data, a taxonomy by Beebe et al (1990) was applied for interpretation. Overall, the research groups share that most of the refusal strategies and pragmatic transfer exist in the choice and content of refusal strategies (Anchalee, 2008; Lliadi and Larina, 2017; Hashemian, 2012; Su, 2020). Jiang (2015) is centred on the differences between Chinese and Americans in the speech act of refusal, with a focus on examining the pragmatic transfer of Chinese high school EFL learners. From the frequency of semantic formulas used by participants, Jiang found out that American English speakers used more direct refusals than Chinese speakers. Furthermore, Han and Tazegul (2016) also employed this classification scheme to encode the frequencies of the semantic formulas used by Turkish EFL students and English native ones in each scheme for all groups and calculated inter-group percentage formulas. Because of the profounded taxonomy (Beebe et al, 1990, as cited in Tamimi Sa'd, 2014), a lot of researchers have popularly analyzed the data, and refusals are categorized into three main groups: direct, indirect refusals, and adjunct refusals.

Table 1. Classification of Refusal Strategies (Beebe et al., 1990)

Refusal strategies	Semantic formulas	Examples
Direct refusal strategies	Per-formatives	"I refuse …"
	Non-performatives	"No…" or Negative willingness: "I can't", "I won't", "I don't think so"

Indirect refusal strategies	Statement of regret	"I'm sorry...", "I feel terrible."
	Wish	"I wish I could help you..."
	Excuse/Reason/ Explanation	"I have a headache."; "My children will be home that night."
	Statement of alternatives	"I'd rather do..."; "I'd prefer…"; "Why don't you ask someone else?"
	Setting conditions for future or past acceptance	"If you had asked me earlier, I would have..."
	Statement of Philosophy	"One can't be too careful."
	The promise of future acceptance	"I'll do it next time"; "I promise I'll..." or "Next time I'll.."
	Statement of principle	"I never do business with friends."
	Attempt to dissuade interlocutor: Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester or to refuse an invitation	"I won't be any fun tonight"
	Guilt trip	Waitress to customers who want to sit a while: "I can't make a living off people who just order coffee."
	Criticize the request/requester	"That's a terrible idea!"
	Insult/attack	"Who do you think you are?"; "That's a terrible idea!"
	Let the interlocutor off the hook	"Don't worry about it."; "That's okay."

	Self-defense	"I'm trying my best."; "I'm doing all I can."
	Unspecific/ indefinite reply	"I don't know when I can give them to you"
	Lack of enthusiasm	"I'm not interested in."
	Avoidance:	
	+ Nonverbal	Silence, Hesitation, Do nothing, and Physical departure
	+Verbal:	
	- Repetition of part of the request - Postponement - Hedging	"Monday?" "I'll think about it." "Gee, I don't know." "I'm not sure."
Adjuncts to refusal strategies	Statement of positive opinions/feelings or agreement	"That's a good idea..."
	Statement of empathy	"I realize you are in a difficult situation."
	Pause filler	"uh"; "well"; "uhm"
	Gratitude/ Appreciation	"Thank you."
	Exclamation	"Gosh! Ouch!.."

2.3. Speech Act Realization of Refusals and Factors Affecting Refusal Strategies

Over the past few years, the speech act of refusals has been studied in different languages and cultural settings. These studies are related to three strands of differences in speech act realization. First, the behaviour towards expressing a refusal performed by native speakers is examined. Second, the characteristics of the second language or foreign language speakers are investigated. Last but not least, social distance and cross-cultural differences are the main reasons leading to the distinguishes (Al-Ghamdi and Alrefaee, 2020). Al-Ghamdi and Alrefaee, 2020 also show the dissimilarities in the semantic formulas by comparing Egyptian Arabic and American English, to Iranian and American English. According to Hovsepyan (2021), it is worth mentioning that speakers' behaviour, speakers' characteristics, social distance and cross-cultural differences are highly involved in interlanguage pragmatic refusal research. In

addition, such factors as social distance and cross-cultural differences existing in the developmental pattern of interlocutor variation found to be influencing speech act realization of refusals have been explored in several studies (Sattar and Rozina, 2011; Tabatabaei and Farnia, 2015; Chunli and Mohd, 2016). What we know about these differences is largely based upon empirical studies that investigate how speech act realization of refusals is affected among EFL learners.

The investigators examine the effectiveness of the pragmatic transfer on speech act realization. Jafari & *Sadeghoghlo* (2018), Tabatabaei (2020), and Ansarin and Yaghiny (2014) mention almost half of the pragmatic failure is due to L1 interference. According to Abed (2011), these findings also underscore that instructing pragmatics and cultural behaviours of the target language in language classrooms might build up pragmatic competence. Besides, the issue of pragmatic competence and pragmatic failures has received considerable critical attention Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019). Besides, Su (2020) explores that pragma-linguistic features distinguish ostensible refusals from genuine refusals as well as the socio-pragmatic constraints for ostensible refusals. As a result, the type of the initiating speech act, motivation for the initiating speech act, and power relation between speakers' interaction can constrain the use of ostensible refusals. These are important components that influence the pragmatic transfer.

Different authors have measured factors influencing the speech acts in making refusals among interlocutors in a variety of ways. Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019) found that Yemeni learners of both levels showed limited pragmatic competence because they have never employed the statement of alternative strategy and empathy, which is widely used by some English native speakers. Hashemian (2021) uses a TOEFL test besides a Discourse Completion Test to select the participants based on their performances. As a result, the influence of social status on refusal speech acts plays a more important role than social power in American English. Furthermore, Allami & Naeimi (2011) collected the data via the Discourse Completion Test in the form of a questionnaire introducing some natural situations responded by 30 Persian-English speaking learners and 31 native speakers of Persian (all males) participating when making refusals. The research's results show that there are differences in the content of semantic formulas used in making refusals by Iranian and American speakers when they respond to a higher, an equal, and a lower-status person. In general, there are differences in the realization of speech acts.

The study was conducted in the form of a survey, with data being gathered via responses to a modified version of a 10-item discourse multiple-choice task dealing with the pragmatic transfer of Iranian EFL learners' refusal strategies. Chang & Ren (2020) examined cross-cultural differences in American 1st-grade, American 8th-grade, Chinese 1st-grade, and Chinese 8th-grade students' pragmatic development of refusing interlocutors with different social statuses and social distances. In addition, Su (2020) explored socio-pragmatic constraints for ostensible refusals via a 12-scenario roleplay task from 22 native speakers and five native-speaker interlocutors. Such factors as teaching pragmatics and cultural behaviours of the target language in language classrooms affecting second language (L2) pragmatic competence on refusal speech act are found in Tabatabaei (2020) with 95 Iranian learners studying in India. In a study investigating the development of L2 learners' interactional competence specifically how their dispreference marking in refusals changes as their general target language competence and interactional competence increase, Roever & Gahtani (2018) employed 30 L2 speakers of English with first language (L1) Arabic at three proficiency levels and 10 native

English speakers conducted dyadic role plays involving requests and refusals. Similarly, Morkus (2014) collected the data by using context-enhanced role plays consisting of six refusal situations eliciting refusals of requests and offers, 10 native speakers of Egyptian Arabic and 10 native speakers of American English participated in the study. In contrast, power-low refusals caused by self-face, power-low situations, and lower status were the most difficult and influenced by Korean learners of English at two different proficiency levels produced refusals of request in a role-play task in six social situations (Lee, 2013).

3. METHOD

This study employed an experimental research design to observe the effects, which was significant for understanding how different factors affected the outcome of the study. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were implemented to notify the study during the design phase. Moreover, they contributed to enhancing conceptual and instrument development. A written DCT, a data elicitation method generating a large amount of contextually varied and comparable cross-linguistic speech act data, used predominantly in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics, was a research instrument for this study. It is also a tool used in linguistics and pragmatics to elicit particular speech acts. The researcher will develop and design some modifications and supplementary. 12 situations related to refusals of requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions will concentrate on the university, workplace, and daily life conservations in a shop and a restaurant to test the context. Moreover, the researcher will interview the participants to ensure that the answers are their own opinions.

The study was implemented in three stages. The first pilot stage for completing written DCT lasted from January to February 2023. The second pilot stage for answering 5 interview questions occurred in April 2023. The process of analyzing the data collection immediately got started as soon as the researcher collected enough information from the participants. In summary, this current part carries out the objectives, participants, data collection instruments, and procedures for the pilot stage of the research.

3.1.Participants

The participants of this study include 5 students studying in semester 3 from such different academic fields as economics, mathematics, literature pedagogy, tourism, and plant protection at Tien Giang University, Vietnam. These students were 20 years old. They were selected from among a wide variety of English language learners at Tien Giang University. They have learned English for over 10 years.

Table 2. Number of Participants in the Pilot

Number of the Research Participants/ Major	Sex	Total
1/ Plant protection	Male	
1/ Tourism	Male	
1/ Literature pedagogy	Female	**5**
1/ Mathematics	Female	

1/ Economics	Female

3.2. Instruments

The research instrument for this study was a written DCT, a data elicitation method generating. It is also a tool used in linguistics and pragmatics to elicit particular speech acts. Furthermore, the written DCT is regarded as one of the reliable and valid methodologies to analyze the strategies of refusal among cultures. The instrument was originally developed by Blum-Kulka (1982) for studying speech act realization comparatively between native and non-native Hebrew speakers, based on the work of Levenston. Later on, it has been popularly used in the research (Sadler and Eroz, 2002; Kasemsin, 2006; Hashemian, 2012; Han and Burgucu-Tazegul, 2016; Sartika et al, 2020)

3.3. Data Collection Procedures
3.3.1. Questionnaire Designs

All five participants were asked to answer the demographic information questionnaire consisting of their age, gender, English language learning background, major, and native language. All of the Vietnamese participants completed the English version. The following table illustrates the related information.

Next, 12 situations related to refusals of requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions will concentrate on the university, workplace, and daily life conservations in a shop and a restaurant to test the context. Moreover, the relationships between the speakers are equal, unequal, or high power. The subject is familiar with the interlocutor in each situation, which includes either the subject and another classmate, or the subject and a professor. In more detail, it can be seen that the subjects in the study made refusals of a person from higher status (e.g., manager, boss, owner, teacher, and professor), lower status (e.g., employee, worker, and student), and equal status (e.g., friends). The subject of each context is shown in the tables below.

Table 3. Stimulus Type - Refusal of Request

Items	Stimulus Types	Subjects	Interlocutors	Scenarios
		A professor	An assistant	Ask an assistant for an extra hour or two to help finish correcting the students' papers.
1, 2, 3	Refusal of request	A classmate	Another classmate	Ask a classmate to borrow the notes.
		A worker	An owner	Ask an owner for a pay increase.

Table 4. Stimulus Type - Refusal of Suggestions

Items	Stimulus Types	Subjects	Interlocutors	Scenarios
		A friend	Another friend	Suggest a friend to lend some money.
4, 5, 6		A student	A teacher	Suggest a teacher to give more practice on conservation and less on grammar.

	Refusal of suggestion	A boss	An employee	Suggest an employee to stay at work late.

Table 5. Stimulus Type - Refusal of Invitation

Items	Stimulus Types	Subjects	Interlocutors	Scenarios
		A boss	An employee	Invite an employee to attend a little party.
7, 8, 9	Refusal of invitation	A friend	Another friend	Invite a friend to a birthday party.
		A student	A teacher	Invite a teacher to a party.

Table 6. Stimulus Type - Refusal of Offer

Items	Stimulus Types	Subjects	Interlocutors	Scenarios
		A boss	An employee	Offer an employee a raise and promotion but move.
10, 11, 12	Refusal of offer	A friend	Another friend	Offer a friend a snack.
		A friend	Another friend	Offer a friend a piece of cake.

3.3.2. Procedures

The participants chosen by the researcher received 12 written situations both in English version through Google Forms, and they were encouraged to answer in English and put themselves in those specific situations and respond to the questions given. There was an example for the participants to read before getting started. The researcher used such strategies as Direct Refusal (DR), Indirect Refusal (IR), and Adjunct Refusal (AR) to code the data. Besides, formal and informal situations relating to social status with three levels: High (H), Equal (E), and Low (L), were coded by the researcher. As soon as they got the link via Google Form, they spent 20 - 30 minutes writing down how they responded to each situation.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The data from the DCT adapted from Beebe et al. (1990) were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively by investigating the refusal strategies used by Vietnamese EFL learners based on the framework of refusal strategies. Moleong (2008) supposed that qualitative research identified a phenomenon related to behaviour, motivation, action, etc., and described it via words and language in a specific situation. All the refusal responses via the DCT were coded into three categories: direct, indirect, and adjuncts. Finally, the factors influencing speech act realization of refusals were examined by the researcher. This classification system was applied to examine refusal strategies among native and non-native speakers of various languages throughout the world. Semantic formulas as units of analysis were used to analyze the data collected from the participants.

5. RESULTS

After getting the responses from the participants, each situation was carefully analyzed and also discussed in detail. The following answers were collected from the respondent (R):

Situation 1 (S1):

R1: *Sorry sir, but now, I have to leave to prepare for my part-time shift.*

R2: *I'm sorry. I've been busy with my work, so I can't help you. Hope you understand and don't be sad.*

R3: *Sorry. Perhaps I cannot come to help you because I have an appointment. I will stay and help you next time.*

R4: *I would like to help. However, I should finish work at home since I am going to have another job.*

R5: *I wish I could help you, but right now, I can't because I have an appointment.*

Situation 2 (S2):

R1: *Okay, but next time you have to come to class and take notes.*

R2: *I'd be happy to help, but this is the last time I help you. Take a look at yourself and study harder.*

R3: *Okay, but I think you should go to school more frequently. If this happens later, I will not help you.*

R4: *Sorry, I can only lend it to you to go to the nearest photocopy shop to print out a copy of my notes as I still need them to study at home. Hope you can understand me.*

R5: *What a pity! I lent Mai my notebook. She was in the hospital, but she always wanted to be instructed every day.*

Situation 3 (S3):

R1: *First of all, thank you for working hard for my bookstore till today. As you know, your most demanding job is mid-range, so your salary above is the same, so please sympathize with the bookstore.*

R2: *You work very well. I suggest that you should get a reward, but I can not increase your salary.*

R3: *Yes, I know you are one of those high-performing employees. But it's not all about a pay rise. That depends on many other factors such as business situation, earnings, long-term strategy, and aspirations of the remaining employees. We need to think and consult other opinions. Shall we discuss this in more detail at the next meeting?*

R4: *I will consider this issue.*

R5: *No.*

Situation 4 (S4):

R1: *I'm always willing to lend money, but I'm having a hard time right now.*

R2: *Oh, my god! Why didn't you tell me sooner? I just lent my little brother the money for school yesterday.*

R3: *I'm sorry. I don't have enough money for you to borrow, can you ask someone else to borrow it?*

R4: *What a pity! So sorry, but now I don't have enough money.*

R5: *I'm afraid that I can't help you this time.*

Situation 5 (S5):

R1: *I need time to think about this proposal.*

R2: *I think that's a good idea. I will keep it in mind.*

R3: *Really? Thank you for sharing. I will think about what to do to make the class better. You all also need to master more grammar to apply it to practice. It will be hard to communicate without grammar. Once you all have mastered them, I'll consider adding more conversation lessons. Do you all promise?*

R4: *Of course, practice is important. However, it is extremely integral for you to understand grammar to apply it to practice other skills.*

R5: *The conversation is very good, but first of all, you need to learn grammar to be able to use it.*

Situation 6 (S6):

R1: *I wish I could work overtime, but I have some work left to do.*

R2: *Sorry, I don't think I can, my mom doesn't feel very well these days, so I have to be there for her.*

R3: *I'm sorry. I can't help you because I have to take care of my mom. She's 80.*

R4: *Unfortunately, there's something wrong with my family, so I can't stay to work.*

R5: *Sorry, because my house is too far from work, I can't stay at work late.*

Situation 7 (S7):

R1: *I appreciate your invitation, but I'm sorry, I have to stay home with my mother. She is ill.*

R2: *I'm sorry. I can't come to your party because that day is my mom's birthday.*

R3: *Sorry, but I think my wife cannot join! Maybe it's not convenient.*

R4: *Sorry, I have some things to do on Sunday, so I can't attend.*

R5: *Unfortunately, my wife has just been hospitalized.*

Situation 8 (S8):

R1: *I am sorry. I cannot go to the birthday party because my family is going to the beach on that day.*

R2: *Thank you for inviting me, but I won't be able to attend your birthday party. My family and I plan to go to the beach on that day.*

R3: *If you told me earlier, I would have gone because I have just booked a ticket and a room for a family trip and please forgive me. I wish you a very happy birthday when I return and I'll buy a gift for you.*

R4: *I appreciate the invitation, but my family will be travelling on Sunday.*

R5: *Uh oh, I can't come that day because I have planned to travel with my family, maybe next time I will organize a birthday party just for you.*

Situation 9 (S9):

R1: *Thank you for inviting me. But I have an appointment at that time, and I can't join your party.*

R2: *I'm sorry. Today, I have an important work, so I can't come to the invitation.*

R3: *I wish I could come, but unfortunately, I must attend a lot of work.*

R4: *Perhaps another time.*

R5: *I'm so sorry, but I already have work at home. If you had told me earlier, I would have arranged a time to come to your party. Thank you for the invitation. Goodbye.*

Situation 10 (S10):

R1: *Thank you so much. It is an honour, but now I can not move to another place. I am sorry if it makes you disappointed.*

R2: *I appreciate the opportunity. I'm sorry because the office is very far from my house.*

R3: *Thank you for your suggestion, I'm afraid I can't accept that because my family is here, and I'm not good at getting well with new places.*

R4: *I'm thankful, and honoured to be promoted to a higher position by my boss, but it's a pity that it is really hard for me to move, and it takes a long time. I don't think I can manage it myself.*

R5: *Let me think about it, then I will tell you.*

Situation 11 (S11):

R1: *Oh, you know. I'm very busy. I don't have enough time to do it.*

R2: *Hmm, maybe no. I feel it will be so hard.*

R3: *I appreciate your assistance; however, I have tried numerous diets without success.*

R4: *Hmm, a new diet?*

R5: *No, I'm on a diet. I feel myself gaining weight. I think I'll try a little bit next time when the diet is over.*

Situation 12 (S12):

R1: *Thanks, but I'm too full. I can't eat anymore.*

R2: *Thanks, I love but I'm full. I'm sorry, I can't, my clothes won't fit me.*

R3: *I'm sorry. These seem fantastic, but I have to stay on my diet.*

R4: *No. I'm already full. I will gain weight if I eat more. I'm on a diet! Oh, my goddess. Let's split!*

R5: *Uh uh, I don't like sweet.*

60 refusals are produced by 5 Vietnamese EFL speakers in twelve situations. These refusals are classified into three categories "direct", "indirect" and "adjuncts to refusals" based on the framework of Beebe et al (1990). The refusals are varied in terms of semantic formulas. Regarding the first research question: "What strategies do Vietnamese speakers of Tien Giang University, Vietnam perform in speech acts of refusals?", Vietnamese L2 participants used a variety of strategies related to "direct", "indirect" and "adjuncts to refusals" towards the situations in terms of refusal of request, suggestion, invitation, and offer. To requests (S1, S2, and S3), there were 8 strategies employed when refusing a request. Besides, 9 strategies were applied for refusing a suggestion among the participants in the study for S4, S5, and S6. To refuse an invitation (S7, S8, and S9), 7 strategies were used, and for declining an offer in S10, S11, and S12, they employed 6 strategies. Generally, the gathered data in Table 7 showed that indirect refusal strategies making up 55% were the most frequently used in responding to the situations (from S1 to S12). In addition, figure 1 illustrates the percentage of classification of refusal strategies used by Vietnamese L2 speakers.

Table 7. Classification of Refusal Strategies Used by Vietnamese L2 Speakers

Items	Classification of refusal strategies	Frequency	Percentage
S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6,	Direct	6	10%
	Indirect	33	55%
S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12	Adjuncts	21	35%

**Figure 1. Classification of Refusal Strategies Used by Vietnamese L2 Speakers**
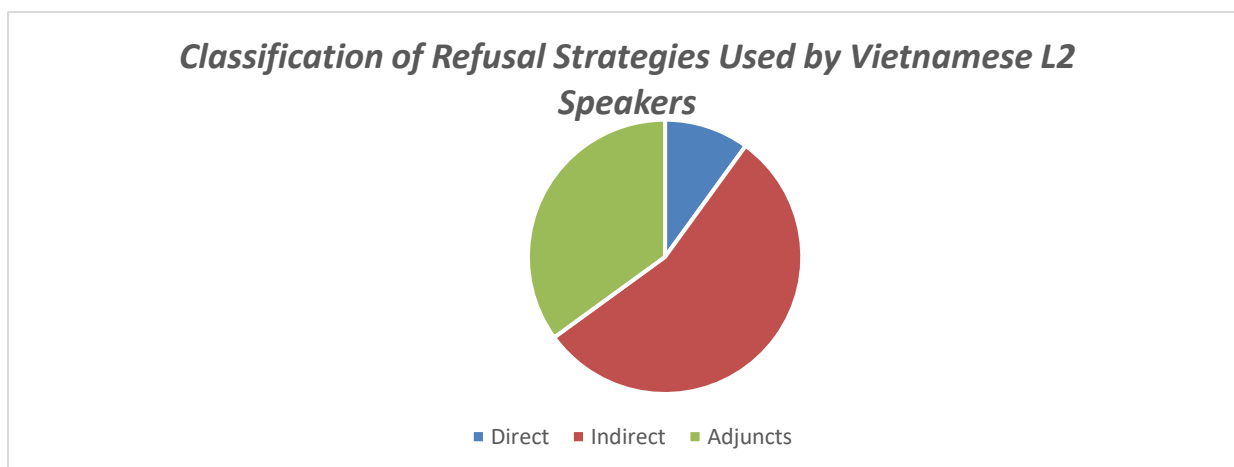
The total number of refusals in each situation in indirect respondence was slightly decreased meanwhile that of each situation in direct respondence stayed the same except for an invitation, no one used a direct answer for refusing an invitation. In contrast, participants tended to

increase in employing adjuncts. Table 8 shows the percentage of each semantic formula, and refusals of request, suggestion, invitation, and offer were figured out in the chart. Among the 4 classifications of refusals, indirect responses of requests make up 73.34%, which is the highest one. However, indirect ones for refusing suggestions and invitations stayed the same percentage, 66.77%. To refuse offers, the speakers used more adjuncts which accounted for 73.34%. Table 8 and Figure 2 illustrate this in detail.

Table 8. Percentage of Each Semantic Formula

Situations	Refusals	Semantic Formulas	Numbers of Refusals	Total Number of Responses	Percentage
S1, S2, S3	of a request	Direct	2	15	13.33%
		Indirect	11		73.34%
		Adjuncts	2		13.33%
S4, S5, S6	of a suggestion	Direct	2	15	13.33%
		Indirect	10		66.67%
		Adjuncts	3		20%
S7, S8, S9	of an invitation	Direct	0	15	0%
		Indirect	10		66.67%
		Adjuncts	5		33.33%
S10, S11, S12	of an offer	Direct	2	15	13.33%
		Indirect	2		13.33%
		Adjuncts	11		73.34%

Figure 2. Refusals of Requests, Suggestions, Invitations, and Offers
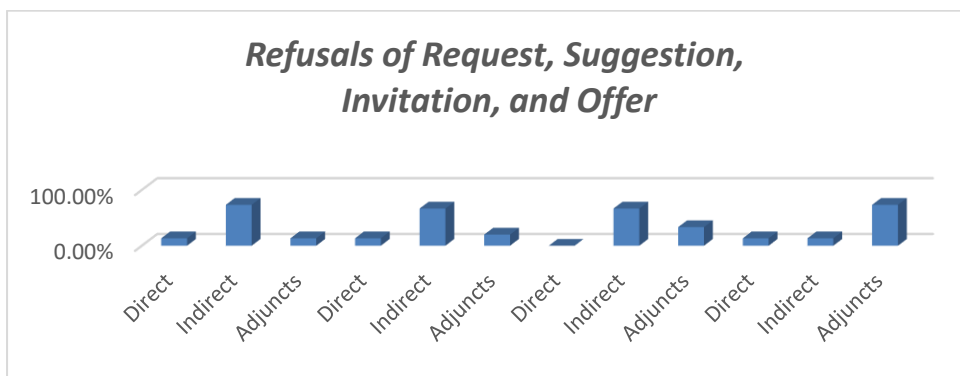
As stated in Table 9 below, there were 14 strategies employed by 5 participants in refusing requests, suggestions, invitations, and offers. 6 non-performatives (10%) were directly used,

most of which followed the process: Say "no" and then state the reason; however, one participant reacted "no" without explanation. Furthermore, to express "I can't", an explanation or reason was first given, and then a statement of "I can't" was given.

Direct	*- Non-performatives*	*"No"*
		"No, I'm on a diet. I feel myself gaining weight. I think I'll try a little bit next time when the diet is over."
		"Unfortunately, there's something wrong with my family, so I can't stay to work."

6 strategies for making a refusal directly consist of the statement of regret, wish, excuse, statement of alternatives, setting conditions for future or past acceptance, letting the speakers off the hook, self-defence, and hedging. Among these, the participants tended to state being regretful about the situation (28.33%). They also use "I'm sorry", and then explain why or explain each item. 8.33% was avoided by avoidance with verbal – hedging to refuse. The others were rarely used by the participants.

Indirect	*- Statement of regret*	*" Sorry sir, but now I have to leave to prepare for my part-time shift."*
	- Wish	*"I wish I could work overtime, but I have some work left to do."*
	- Excuse/Reason	
	Explanation	*"Of course, practice is important. However, it is extremely integral for you to understand grammar to apply it to practice other skills."*
	- Statement of alternatives	*"I would like to help. However, I should finish work at home since I am going to have another job."*
	- Setting conditions for future	
	or past acceptance	*"If you told me earlier, I would have gone because I had just booked a ticket and a room for a family trip and please forgive me. I wish you a very happy birthday when I return. I'll buy a gift for you."*
	- Let the interlocutor	
	off the hook	*"Okay, but next time you have to come to class and take notes."*
	- Self-defense	*"I'm always willing to lend money, but I'm having a hard time right now."*
	- Hedging	*"Let me think about it, then I will tell you."*

As we can see, 21.66% of adjuncts in terms of gratitude were applied. Statements of positive opinions, feelings, agreement and statements of empathy were the least used in refusals (1.67%). In contrast, the pause pillar and exclamation were chosen to give the refusals (5%).

Adjuncts	*- Statement of positive opinions, feelings or agreement*	*"I think that's a good idea. I will keep it in mind."*
	- Statement of empathy	*"I'd be happy to help but this is the last time I help you. Take a look at yourself and study harder."*
	- Pause filler	*"Hmm, maybe no. I feel it will be so hard."*
	- Gratitude/ appreciation	*"I'm thankful, and honoured to be promoted to a higher position by my boss, but it's a pity that it is hard for me to move, and it takes a long time. I don't think I can manage it myself."*
	- Exclamation	*"Oh, my god! Why didn't you tell me sooner? I just lent my little brother the money for school yesterday."*

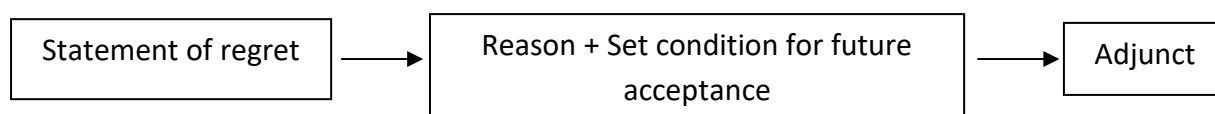**Table 9. Percentage of Refusal Strategies Used by L2 Learners**

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Direct		
Non-performatives	6	10%
Indirect		
Statement of regret	17	28.33%
Wish	3	5%
Excuse/Reason/ Explanation	3	5%
Statement of alternatives	1	1.67%
Setting conditions for future or past acceptance	1	1.67%
Let the interlocutor off the hook	2	3.33%
Self-defense	1	1.67%
Hedging	5	8.33%

Adjuncts

Statement of positive opinions, feelings or agreement	1	1.67%
Statement of empathy	1	1.67%
Pause filler	3	5%
Gratitude/ Appreciation	13	21.65%
Exclamation	3	5%
TOTAL	60	100%

To analyze the analyzing process, an example of one of the participants was segmented into elements to clarify the strategies used. Sample response for S9 is the most frequently used for answering *"I'm sorry. But I already have work at home. If you had told me earlier, I would have arranged time to come to your party. Thank you for the invitation. Goodbye"*. First of all, *"I'm so sorry"* is an example of regret, so it is an indirect refusal strategy (statement of regret). *"But I already have a work at home"* is the reason put forward by the participants. Then the participant stated to set conditions for future acceptance *"If you had told me earlier, I would have arranged a time to come to your party".* Finally, the adjunct of refusal *"Thank you for the invitation"* was used.

```
┌─────────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────────────┐     ┌──────────┐
│ Statement of regret │ ──▶ │ Reason + Set condition   │ ──▶ │ Adjunct  │
│                     │     │ for future acceptance    │     │          │
└─────────────────────┘     └──────────────────────────┘     └──────────┘
```

In addition, another response to a request in S1 performed by the participant was *"Sorry. Perhaps I cannot stay to help you because I have an appointment. I will stay and help you next time."*. It was seen that the refusal process was also employed in a continuity getting started with indirect refusals, statements of regret *"Sorry"*, and then with direct refusal, non – performative *"I cannot…"* together with giving the reason, and finally, the promise of future acceptance *"I will stay and help you next time"*.

```
┌─────────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────┐
│ Statement of regret │ ──▶ │ Non – performative       │ ──▶ │ The promise of   │
│                     │     │ "I cannot…" + Reason     │     │ future acceptance│
└─────────────────────┘     └──────────────────────────┘     └──────────────────┘
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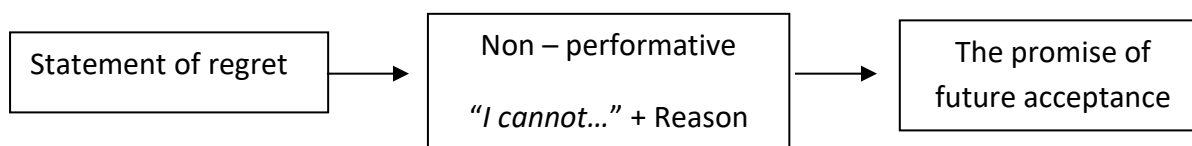
Several refusal strategies were used as indirect refusal head acts, which consist of categories such as a statement of regret, wish, excuse, reason, explanation, etc. Among these, "statements of regret" occurred with high frequency as stated in Table 9 above. In general, the participants used twice or even more than twice with many explicit refusals when interacting with interlocutors of high status and high distance. For each situation, the participants frequently stated the reason to explain to the requesters, inviters, suggesters, and offerers so that these

interlocutors were able to sympathize with them. However, each one does not have the same strategies to refuse.

It can be seen from the data in Table 10 that the differences in the use of semantic formulas used by Vietnamese L2 participants with speakers of equal, higher, or lower social status. The results pointed out that Vietnamese L2 participants preferred indirect refusal strategies – statements of regret and adjuncts to refusal strategies - gratitude/ appreciation for refusing the speakers of higher status, meanwhile they employed both direct and indirect refusal strategies for refusing speakers of lower and equal status. Based on the ways of expressing, it can be inferred that the participants were affected by the frequency of semantic formula transfers from L1 to L2. Furthermore, social status, distance, and culture influenced their behaviour towards expressing the refusal process.

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics for Each Situation Responded to by the Participants

Items	Situations	Types	Status	Distance
S1	Ask an assistant for an extra hour or two to help finish correcting students' papers.	Request	Higher	- Distance
S2	Ask a classmate to borrow the notes.	Request	Equal	- Distance
S3	Ask an owner for a pay increase.	Request	Lower	+ Distance
S4	Suggest a friend to lend some money.	Suggestion	Equal	- Distance
S5	Suggest a teacher give more practice on conservation and less on grammar.	Suggestion	Lower	+ Distance
S6	Suggest an employee to stay at work late.	Suggestion	Higher	+ Distance
S7	Invite an employee to attend a little party	Invitation	Higher	- Distance
S8	Invite a friend to a birthday party.	Invitation	Equal	- Distance
S9	Invite a teacher to a party.	Invitation	Higher	- Distance
S10	Offer an employee a raise and promotion but move.	Offer	Higher	- Distance
S11	Offer a friend a snack.	Offer	Equal	- Distance
S12	Offer a friend a piece of cake.	Offer	Equal	- Distance

To gain more insights research question 2 "What factors are influenced by Vietnamese speakers of Tien Giang University, Vietnam on acting the refusals of requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions in English?", 3 participants were randomly selected to answer the following interview questions. Here are the results from the respondents:

Question 1: Did you consider the social status of your interlocutor when you responded to each situation in the Discourse Completion Test?

R1: Yes, I always consider who I am talking to so that I can choose a suitable answer to reply for each context.

R2: Yes, of course, I mostly care about the speaker's status, for example, to the adults or the people who have higher positions than me, I will be more careful in my speech.

R3: For sure, talking to the employees, owners, or professors makes me nervous, but I feel relaxed when talking to friends.

Question 2: Did you think of the social distance, close or not close, when you responded to each situation in the Discourse Completion Test?

R1: Certainly, to close relationship, I feel free to respond to the questions.

R2: Yes. I often pay attention to the distance.

R3: I agree.

Question 3: Did you relate to your own culture when you need to refuse your interlocutor into each situation in the Discourse Completion Test?

R1: Sure. I'm always afraid of losing face, so I'm very careful in my speech.

R2: Of course, Vietnamese culture affects me. In my refusals, I also use explanations.

R3: Yes, culture is important to me.

All in all, the pilot research participants regarded such elements as social status, distance, and culture when they made refusals. They had habits of giving more information, reason, and explanation as the interlocutor was of high status. They put more effort into saving the faces of other interlocutors, which was evident in their interview responses. They tried to be polite in refusing interlocutors with higher status.

6. DISCUSSION

Question 1 is now possible to state that this pilot study provides new insights into and a clear understanding of what strategies L2 Vietnamese perform in the speech act of refusal in English. The study carried out that indirect strategies were mostly employed by the respondents. Moreover, they liked adding further information by giving explanations and reasons to make the interlocutors sympathize with them. These current results were in line with Morkus (2014), Allami & Naeimi (2011), Alrefaee, Alghamdi, & Almansoob (2019) in applying different strategies in refusals. Thanks to the situation, each participant used a variety of strategies; however, they refused indirectly to avoid threatening the initiator's face.

Some of them chose direct strategies and adjuncts to refusal strategies. In Vietnamese culture, an explicit "no" is avoided, therefore, in an attempt to mitigate refusals, they made a combination of positive and negative politeness strategies. Question 2 was designed to find out the factors affected by the participants when they refused a request, a suggestion, an invitation, or an offer. The results of this investigation show that social status, distance, and culture influenced L2 Vietnamese speakers towards expressing the refusal process, which Allami & Naeimi (2011) and Hashemian (2021) also carried out.

However, certain limitations in conducting this research should be acknowledged. Caution must be exercised in generalizing the findings as only one group of 5 participants, students, similar ages, and homogenous L2 backgrounds, which means that additional features may have occurred if more and more participants of different L2s. If the study was replicated with participants of different age groups, L1s, or from other work of society, different results might be obtained. Furthermore, the study suggests that there should be different groups and backgrounds. Because it is a pilot study, the researcher can't draw any firmer results from the very small data set. It is hoped that when the full-scale study starts, the discussion will be in many ways the absolute core of the text.

7. CONCLUSION

This pilot study revealed different strategies used among five L2 Vietnamese participants at Tien Giang University, and indirect strategies of refusals were employed when they refused a request, a suggestion, an invitation, or an offer. Statement of regret was ranked the first in the frequency of occurrence in the L2 Vietnamese language. Besides, in order not to threaten the interlocutor's face, they supplied more reasons or explanations after each type of semantic formula. This research also contributed to understanding the factors influencing speech act realization. Social status, distance, and culture were three factors found among L2 participants.

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Appendixes
Appendix 1
Discourse Completion Test

The following are 12 situations relating to the refusals of requests, suggestions, invitations, and offers. You are expected to answer the set of situations given in this Discourse Completion Test. Please read these cases and imagine yourself in that role in real life so that you may give the most appropriate response in each situation. There is an example for you to consider.

Example:

You work in a department store. You are busy helping someone when one of your regular customers asks to see something in the display case.

You: I'm sorry, I'll be with you in a minute.

Customer: Okay, I'll wait then.

Gender: _____ Male

_____ Female

Level of study:

_____ Undergraduate

_____ Master

_____ Doctorate

Years of learning English: _____

Field of study: _____

Nationality: _____

Situation 1. You are an assistant to a professor. At the end of the office hours, you are going to leave. The professor asks if you could stay an extra hour or two to help him finish correcting students' papers, but you can't. What do you say to refuse his request?

You: _____

Professor: Perhaps another time.

Situation 2. You are a junior in college. You attend classes regularly and take good notes. Your classmate often misses a class and asks you for the lecture notes.

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

You: _____

Situation 3. You are the owner of a bookstore. One of your best workers asks to speak to you in private.

Worker: As you know, I've been here just a little over a year, and I know you've been pleased with my work. I enjoy working here, but to be honest, I need a pay increase.

You:_____

Worker: Well…then I guess I'll have to look for another job.

Situation 4. Your friend wants to borrow some money from you, but you do not have enough money, so you refuse your friend's suggestions. What do you say?

You: _____

Friend: Ok. I will try to manage.

Situation 5. You're a language teacher at a university. It is just about the middle of the term now, and one of your students asks to speak to you.

Student: Ah, excuse me, some of the students were talking after class recently, and we felt that the class would be better if you could give us more practice on conversation and less on grammar.

You: _____

Student: OK, it was only a suggestion.

Situation 6. These days, the amount of production of the new product is high. Your manager suggests you should stay at work late. However, you cannot.

You: _____

Boss: That's too bad. I hope that you can manage.

Situation 7. You are a top executive at a very large accounting firm. One day the boss calls you into his office.

Boss: Next Sunday, my wife and I are having a little party. I know it is short notice, but I'm hoping all my top executives will be there with their wives. What do you say?

You: _____

Boss: That's too bad. I was hoping everyone would be there.

Situation 8. This weekend, your friend is going to invite you to her birthday party, but you plan to travel to the beach on that day. What do you tell her?

You: _____

Friend: OK, have a good time with your family.

Situation 9. You are a teacher. Your students are preparing for an evening party. They invite you to go to the party, but you cannot go. What do you say to decline the invitation?

You: _____

Student: What a pity!

Situation 10. You've been working in an advertising agency now for some times. The boss offers you a raise and promotion, but it involves moving. You don't want to go. Today, the boss calls you into his office.

Boss: I'd like to offer you an executive position in our new offices in Hick town. It's a great town - only three hours from here by plane. And a nice raise comes with the position.

You: _____

Boss: Well, maybe you should give it some more thought before turning it down.

Situation 11. You are at a friend's house watching TV. He / She offers you a snack.

You: No, thanks. I've been eating like a pig, and I feel just terrible. My clothes don't even fit me.

Friend: Hey, why don't you try this new diet I've been telling you about?

You: _____

Friend: You should try it anyway.

Situation 12. You are at a friend's house for lunch.

Friend: How about another piece of cake?

You: _____

Friend: Come on, just a little piece?

You: _____

Appendix 2
Interview Questions

Question 1: Did you consider the social status of your interlocutor when you responded to each situation in the Discourse Completion Test?

Question 2: Did you think of the social distance, close or not close, when you responded to each situation in the Discourse Completion Test?

Question 3: Did you relate to your own culture when you need to refuse your interlocutor into each situation in the Discourse Completion Test?