

"Sticking points": Effects of instruction on NNS refusal strategies

Kendall A. King and Rita Elaine Silver
University of Pennsylvania
Graduate School of Education

The refusal strategies of intermediate level second language learners and the potential for developing sociolinguistic competence through instruction is examined in this study. Six university student volunteers were divided into treatment and control groups. The treatment group received an instruction class focusing on sociolinguistic variables important in refusing in American English; the control group participated in a class on how to make conversation (small talk) with Americans.

Immediately prior to and one week following instruction participants completed a discourse questionnaire designed to elicit written refusals. Based loosely on the discourse completion test used by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990), the questionnaire contained situation descriptions designed to elicit refusals, each followed by an uncompleted dialogue. The questionnaire contained situations in which requests and invitations were made by interlocutors of varied status and social distance. Two weeks after instruction participants were telephoned by a researcher who requested that the participants perform a burdensome activity at a time known to conflict with their schedules.

Results from the questionnaire indicate little effect of instruction. Data from the telephone interview reveal no effect of instruction. Of interest are the patterns of responses found in certain questionnaire situations and the large disparity between the written and spoken refusal strategies. We believe these two findings hold important implications for teaching and future research.

Introduction

The development of sociolinguistic competence, as part of a larger communicative competence, has been widely discussed (e.g., Canale & Swain, 1980; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1982; Thomas, 1983). The potential importance of how speech acts are appropriately realized as part of sociolinguistic competence for non-native speakers (NNSs) has also been discussed in the literature (e.g., Schmidt & Richards, 1980; Blum-Kulka, 1982; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985). Teachers and materials developers have realized the importance of including information about speech acts and language use in classroom teaching. However, as Wolfson notes:

Having accepted the necessity to include sociolinguistic information in language instruction, therefore, textbook writers and teachers turned to the literature in sociolinguistics for the information they needed to apply. Unfortunately, too little research into sociolinguistic rules had been done, leading to a situation in which the TESOL profession wanted and needed to apply information that did not yet exist (1989:48).

Several studies have been done which describe speech acts, their use, and differences/similarities cross-culturally. Apologies (e.g., Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989), requests (e.g., Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), compliments (e.g., Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Manes, 1983; Holmes, 1988), and refusals (e.g., Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990) have all been studied sufficiently for us to begin to draw an empirical description for pedagogical purposes.

The problem of instruction remains: Is it possible to develop sociolinguistic competence through instruction? What type of instruction would be most beneficial? Do students benefit from instruction of specific speech acts?

Several studies have looked at the development of sociolinguistic competence with regard to SL/FL setting. Schmidt (1983) conducted a longitudinal study of one learner in both EFL and ESL settings. His study indicated that communicative demands in the ESL situation were important for continued development of sociolinguistic competence. However, it was a gradual process; after several years, the learner's performance was still far from native-like. Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985) found that length of stay in an SL environment influenced development of native-like speech behavior. This was further supported by their 1988 study. However, this information seems to be discouraging since they note, "we find that generally speaking, response patterns of nonnative speakers (over 10 years) become *similar* to native speakers' responses" (317, underline emphasis ours), and, "after 10 years, nonnative speakers tend to exhibit almost native like tolerance for positive politeness strategies while continuing to maintain their tolerance for conventional indirectness" (318, underline emphasis ours). Takahashi and Beebe (1987) found that learners in an ESL environment showed less negative transfer than learners in an EFL environment. In other words, learners in the ESL environment were less influenced by L1 norms. So, it seems that length of stay in an second language environment is beneficial for acquiring sociolinguistic competence but insufficient and time-consuming.

A few studies related to classroom language instruction and the development of sociolinguistic competence have also been done. These studies have show that

classroom SL/FL instruction is not sufficient for the development of sociolinguistic competence (Allen, Swain, Harley & Cummins, 1990; Ellis, 1991; Ellis, 1992). In other words, explicit teaching of appropriate speech act realizations and situational features seems to be necessary.

Two studies have looked at the potential for developing appropriate speech act use through instruction. Olshtain and Cohen (1988) considered the effect of instruction on NNS apologies. They looked at several features of the speech act realization and instruction: number and type of semantic formulas, average length of responses, use of intensifiers, a comparison of NS/NNS appropriacy judgements, and students' evaluations of teaching materials which explicitly teach speech act behavior. Pre and post test results (using a discourse questionnaire) indicated some effect of instruction in the type of semantic formula, average length of response, and use of intensifiers.

They concluded that "fine points of speech act behavior such as (1) types of intensification and downgrading, (2) subtle differences between strategy realizations, and (3) consideration of situational features, can and should be taught in the second and foreign language classrooms" (20). However, they did not believe, based on their findings, that overall proficiency (with its concomitant change in behavior) could be attained based on a short period of study.

In a study on the effect of instruction biased toward the explicit formalization of rules for complimenting behavior, Billmyer considered learner production of compliments and replies to compliments (1990:8). Using a natural data collection instrument (conversation partner exchanges), she was able to judge not only learner *intuitions*, as would be revealed by a discourse completion test (DCT) (see Wolfson, 1976; Beebe & Cummings, 1985), but also *production* in face-to-face encounters.

Billmyer found that while uninstructed and instructed learners were able to perform "in roughly equivalent ways on several measures of sociolinguistic appropriateness" (320) and had similarly high levels of linguistic well-formedness, instructed learners showed treatment effects in several ways. They used a greater number of compliments with more variety in the adjectival lexicon and their production of compliments seemed more spontaneous. Their responses to compliments were longer, more closely approximated native speaker norms, and were more similar to a native speaker response profile (318-19).

Another important finding of this study was that there appeared to be an interaction between instruction and proficiency, with higher level learners showing more effect of instruction than lower level learners. However, as Billmyer notes, "This

finding is somewhat speculative due to the fact that only two variables (proficiency and instruction) were examined, and only two measures of performance reanalyzed" (319).

Refusals have been characterized as a "major cross-cultural sticking point for ESL students" (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987:133) which can lead to unintended offense and a breakdown in communication. They are also complex, requiring negotiation and different responses according to the eliciting speech act—invitation, request, offer, or suggestion (Beebe et al., 1990:56). Rubin's comment is to the point:

One of the more important communicative tasks that confronts a traveler is the recognition of when a speaker has said "no." That is, one needs to be able to recognize that a respondent has refused or denied that which the speaker has demanded, solicited, or offered. Equally, one needs to acquire the appropriate manner in which to respond in the negative when offered, solicited, or demanded something (1983:10).

Thus, refusals merit the attention of teachers and learners.

Several studies have been conducted on refusal strategies (Beebe & Cummings, 1985; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Beebe et. al, 1990). They have identified several important characteristics of American English native speaker refusal strategies. As noted above, two important characteristics of refusals are their variability based on the eliciting speech and their complexity. Refusals are complex because they are made up of a set of strategies and have a certain canonical shape reflected in the order, frequency, and content of semantic formulas. Several of these studies described American English refusal strategies by making cross-cultural comparisons.

Study Design

A quasi-experimental design with a pre and a post test was used to investigate the effects of instruction on ESL learners' acquisition of refusal strategies. Of interest was whether instruction on NS ways of refusing and factors affecting refusals such as status and role relationship would result in differences on discourse questionnaires and in telephone interviews.

The study was limited to instruction of refusals to requests and invitations. Data from Beebe et al. (1990) allowed for the description of refusals to requests (Table 1) and invitations (Table 2). However, there was insufficient information in the literature on refusals to offers and suggestions to provide an adequate description. Additionally, it was thought that both the instructional component and the instrumentation would become too unwieldy if situations covering all four elicitation acts and various

dimensions of social distance were included. Therefore, refusals to offers and suggestions were eliminated from the study.

Table 1: Shape of Refusals to Requests

Equal	Unequal
1. (adjunct)	1. adjunct of positive opinion
2. regret or apology	2. expression of regret ("I'm sorry" with lower status interlocutor)
3. excuse	3. excuse

() indicates optional

Table 2: Shape of Refusals to Invitations

Equal	Unequal
1. adjunct (not "Thank you")	1. adjunct
2. regret	2. regret
3. excuse	3. excuse
4. "Thank you"	4. 0

Olshtain and Cohen (1988) and Billmyer (1990) showed that there was some effect of instruction on learners' intuitions and productions of appropriate speech act behavior. Evidence from Beebe and Cummings (1985) indicated that refusals on discourse completion tests (DCTs) and in telephone interviews differ in important ways. These considerations motivated four general research questions:

1. Will refusals on pre and post test DQs show effect of instruction? In what ways?
2. Will production of refusals in telephone interviews show effect of instruction? In what ways?
3. How will refusals given on the DQs differ from those elicited in the telephone interviews?
4. In general, what refusal strategies will NNSs employ?

Research Methodology

The participants were six intermediate level NNSs studying at a university English language center in Philadelphia. Three were women and three were men.

They ranged in age from 19-27, and their length of stay in the U.S. ranged from one month to two years. Their native languages were: Japanese (4), Spanish (1), and Greek (1) (Appendix 1).

Students' schedules included three required courses: Spoken English, Written English, and an elective. The instructional component for this study was conducted in a classroom at the students' university from 3:15-4:45 PM, after regular classes were finished for the day.

Students were determined to be at "intermediate" level based on placement interviews conducted at the beginning of the term. In addition, the study was conducted after mid-term when there had been an opportunity to move students to other levels if the current level seemed inappropriate. This gave us some confidence that students were at a similar proficiency level relative to other groups of students studying at the language center.

Intermediate students were chosen for several reasons. Because this was the largest group of students attending the language center, the selection of intermediate students gave us the largest group to draw from. While some researchers have proposed that advanced learners benefit more from this type of instruction (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Billmyer, 1990), this does not preclude benefit of instruction for intermediate level students. In addition, based on discussions with students, we found that students at intermediate level have a strong desire to talk to Americans, and experience frustration in trying to do so. Students often seem to "get stuck" at intermediate level, remaining at this level longer than at a lower level (where they make rapid progress) or a higher level (where they begin to enter university courses). We believed that any instruction which might help them open the door to further interactions with Americans would be appreciated and helpful. Thus, the choice of intermediate level was based largely on practical and pedagogical reasons.

Participants were mixed to the extent possible so that neither the control group nor the treatment group was dominated by students from the same Spoken class. In addition, they were mixed according to native language/country and length of time in the U.S. We chose to make each group (treatment and control) as varied as possible, rather than focusing on one national/language group, to encourage as much participation as possible for the pilot study.

A questionnaire was distributed among the intermediate level classes to establish native language, native country, and length of time in the U.S. Information from the questionnaire was used to divide students into two groups: treatment and control. The students were invited to participate in a free conversation class having to

do with "speaking to Americans." Both the topic and the class label "conversation" were intended to cater to student interests. Prior to this time, students had frequently talked about wanting more time "to just talk," wanting to have more opportunities to talk to Americans, and finding it difficult to start conversations with Americans. Students signed up for the conversation class in advance. Classroom teachers encouraged participation, but it was made clear that there was no connection between the "conversation class" and the regular spoken class (especially in terms of evaluations, etc.). Participation was voluntary on the part of the students.

A discourse questionnaire (DQ) was administered at the beginning of the conversation class as a pre test. Students understood that they were participating in a research project and that the DQ was part of that project. They were not told that the instructional component itself was also part of the project. The conversation class was presented as a kind of payment for participation in the research project.

Following administration of the DQ, the six participants were placed into treatment and control groups, and directed to the appropriate classroom. The control group took part in a conversation class focusing on getting to know Americans as friends and using small talk topics to begin conversations. The treatment group looked at how sociolinguistic variables affect conversation, focusing on refusals.

One full week after the treatment, a post test (the same DQ with items reordered) was administered during the students' regular Written English classes. Approximately two weeks after the post test, a follow-up telephone call was made to each student. The caller attempted to elicit refusals over the telephone by asking students to participate in a burdensome activity at a time which was known to conflict with their class schedule.

Responses to pre test, post test, and follow-up telephone call were analyzed for effect of instruction and to ascertain what refusal strategies students employed.

The DQ (Appendix 2) consisted of brief descriptions of various situations, each followed by an uncompleted dialogue. Participants were instructed to place themselves in the situation and respond as they would in actual conversation. Of the six situations designed to elicit refusals, three requests, and three invitations were made by interlocutors of equal, lower, and higher status (Table 3).

The DCT has been used widely in studies of cross-cultural variation of speech act realization (Beebe & Takahashi, 1987; Beebe et al., 1990; Blum-Kulka, 1982). The present study's instrument was based on the DCT used by Beebe et. al in their study of pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals (1990).

Table 3: Description of Discourse Questionnaire

Situation No.		Situation Type	Participant Status	Social Distance
Pre	Post			
6	7	request	higher	acquaintance
7	2		equal	stranger
1	9		lower	acquaintance
4	3	invitation	higher	acquaintance
2	6		equal	friend
9	4		lower	acquaintance

Several modifications were made to adapt the DCT to the needs of the present study. The dialogues and descriptions of the situations were shortened and simplified to make the test more readily understandable for intermediate ESL participants. Nonessential details and wording were removed to minimize the potential reactive effects of the participants using the language of the test that was not in their own interlanguage (Cohen & Olshtain, 1992).

The situation descriptions contained all the information necessary to determine the appropriate sociolinguistic response. Written responses to the participants' refusals (or acceptances) were omitted. Thus, the correct response was not contingent upon the requester's rejoinder which followed the participant's response. Cohen has noted the difference between a written role play with a rejoinder, known as a DCT, and one without a fixed response (personal communication, 1992). A completion test without a rejoinder is best referred to as a discourse questionnaire. The researchers believed that elimination of the rejoinder from the test would both simplify the task for the participants and prevent responses from being "framed" within the dialogue (thus limiting the range of responses to those which fit the rejoinder).

The questionnaire was first trialled by NNSs who were at a slightly more proficient level than the study's participants. A higher level was used because the difference in proficiency between intermediate (the level of the study's participants) and high intermediate (the level of the preliminary test takers) was much less than the difference between intermediate and low intermediate. As an additional check, the questionnaire was read by two instructors of the low intermediate class. They reported that they believed the questionnaire would be comprehensible to students in the low intermediate group. Wording which proved to be problematic was altered and some situations were replaced. The final version of the DQ consisted of six refusals to equal,

lower, and higher status interlocutors—four of which were directed to acquaintances, one to a stranger, and one to an intimate or friend. Three similar situations designed to elicit acceptances were included as distractors. The post test was identical to the pre test; only the ordering of the situations was altered.

In their review of data collection methods, Beebe and Cummings found the DCT to be a useful measure for determining the perceived requirements for appropriate refusals in different situations and their canonical shape in the minds of the refusers. Beebe and Cummings point out, however, that DCTs "are not natural speech and do *not* accurately reflect natural speech or even unconscious, elicited speech" (1985:13). They found DCT responses to differ from speech in actual interaction in a variety of ways. The amount of talk, the number of turns, the number of repetitions and elaborations, and the variety of responses was greater in real interaction than in the written responses. This aspect of their findings supports the work of those who insist that DCTs can not replace natural speech in investigations of language use (Wolfson, 1989; Wolfson, Marmor & Jones, 1989).

To gauge the effect of treatment on the refusals provided in actual interaction, participants were contacted by telephone approximately two weeks following the instruction. The researcher identified herself as an employee of the university's Office of Student Life. (No such office exists.) Participants were first asked to answer a few questions about their experiences at the university and in their English language program. This was done in order to form a connection between the caller and participants. It was reasoned that known membership in the same academic community would decrease social distance between the researcher and participants and would increase participants' investment in the call and sense of obligation to the caller. In other words, it was believed that after a brief conversation with someone they thought to be part of their academic network, they would be less likely to hang up upon hearing the request and more inclined to engage in some form of negotiation. Beebe and Cummings (1985) used a similar tactic (the caller identified herself as a member of the same professional organization) to decrease social distance between caller and participant in their study of data collection methods.

Two requests were made of the participants: both were explained to be part of an international fair at the university (a fictitious event). Participants were first asked to give a speech to an American audience at a time during which they were known to have English class. The requests were all phrased in the same manner:

"I was wondering if you would like to speak to the audience for a half hour about your perspective as an international student at Drexel."

Participants were also asked to set up a table on the day of their final exam:

"Would you be able to set up a table with food and information about your country's customs, culture, and stuff like that?"

Participants who gave noncommittal answers received follow-up calls until they explicitly accepted or refused. These requests were selected not only because they conflicted with the participants' schedules but because they were considered to be extremely burdensome tasks. The requests also seemed to be the same sort made frequently of foreigners. Students have reported being asked to play the piano at their host family's church or speak about their country at a community meeting. They have also reported not knowing how to refuse these types of requests.

Instructional Component

Promoting *awareness* as a means of aiding language acquisition has been proposed by Thomas (1983), Sharwood-Smith (1988), Schmidt and Frota (1986), and Schmidt (1990). Schmidt states that "intake is what learners consciously notice. This requirement of noticing is meant to apply equally to all aspects of language (lexicon, phonology, grammatical form, pragmatics), and can be incorporated into many different theories of second language acquisition" (149).

Olshtain and Cohen maintain that sociolinguistic awareness is an essential first step to further development:

It is therefore a level of residual awareness that we wish to promote as the objective of any explicit course of study. We believe that once such awareness is established, the learners will be less prone to commit pragmatic failures both as producers and receivers of speech act behavior, and that this awareness might ultimately speed up their approximation of native behavior (1988:21).

Thomas believes that a student's metapragmatic ability, "the ability to analyse language use in a conscious manner," (1983:98) must be developed in order to avoid pragmatic failure (which comes about when students are unaware of the relationship between the surface structure and pragmatic force of an utterance).

According to Takahashi and Beebe, awareness of cross-cultural differences is particularly important:

We believe that *awareness* of cross-cultural differences in the rules of speaking will greatly improve a student's sociolinguistic competence. If the student is made aware, for example, that the refusal of a piece of cake can be as simple as "No thanks," he or she may avoid refusing, as one Japanese student did, by warning, "If I eat any more, my belly will stick out" (1986:178).

Thus awareness at various levels was seen to be an important part of the classroom component: awareness of cross-cultural differences; awareness of sociolinguistic factors which affect speech act realization choice (setting, status, social distance, etc.); awareness which would foster further learning.

Billmyer summarized necessary teaching/learning conditions as follows: comprehensible input containing the speech act forms; explicit teaching of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic features; ample opportunity for self-discovery in a data-rich environment (implicit teaching); and, practice opportunities to achieve "fluency" (1990:108-9). In addition, materials must be based on accurate descriptions of native speaker baseline data.

While materials writers are beginning to produce materials which are sensitive to sociolinguistic and pragmatic needs as well as linguistic, most of these texts are dependent on illustrative dialogues (non-authentic) and lists of "useful" phrases (Billmyer, Jakar & Lee, 1989). Explicit teaching of the speech act and of important sociolinguistic features is less common. Taking these facts into account, we designed our own materials for the lesson.

Description

Both treatment and control groups had similar activities in the instructional component: discussion of personal experiences, reading and analysis of dialogues, explicit teaching, and role play practices. Both classes had an initial warm-up with a general question about student experiences in the U.S. Originally, we had hoped to use audiotaped authentic conversations (NS-NS and NS-NNS) for input, but this proved impossible for practical reasons. While classes were planned for 90 minutes, both were changed to 70 minutes due to late arrival of students.

Each lesson began with an introduction to the lesson topic and a warm-up discussion using a teacher question/elicitation structure. This segment of the lesson focused on eliciting responses from students based on their own experiences. This was included to get the students personally involved in the topic, and to establish a connection between the lesson and students' lives. The two lessons also had similar

closings: there was a brief discussion of possible ways to apply the information to their daily lives and an "optional homework" assignment was given.¹

Control

This lesson was based on excerpts from *Talking With Americans* (Sharpe, 1984). In order to avoid unintentional instruction which might overlap with the treatment group, the control group teacher was informed of the purpose of the study and was asked to follow the lesson plan carefully.

The control group lesson was divided into four segments: an introduction (as discussed above), a discussion, practice activities, and a closing (as discussed above). The "discussion" segment included a short reading on "small talk" followed by discussion of using small talk to begin conversations with Americans. The practice segment included several activities: oral dialogue reading, comparative analysis and evaluation of two dialogues, a look at possible small talk topics, four "What can you say?" situations (read the situation and respond), and several role plays. Authentic input and opportunities for implicit learning were not included.

Treatment

The treatment lesson was also divided into four segments: the introduction and closing (as described above), a cross-cultural comparison segment, and an explicit teaching segment. The majority of the lesson was spent on awareness building and explicit teaching. There were some practice activities, but these were limited. Authentic input and opportunities for implicit learning were not included.

The cross-cultural comparisons segment included several activities for building awareness and practice. The first encouraged students to consider a variety of situations and imagine what they would do or say. This was followed by a discussion of what each student would do or say in the native country/language. This activity was intended to build awareness about what factors influence language (social status, setting, etc.) and about possible cultural differences. It also provided an opportunity for the teacher to gauge students' existing knowledge about useful refusal phrases. Two dialogue practice activities followed: a jigsaw dialogue and a dialogue to read aloud. (This was useful in the next segment, explicit teaching. Phrases the students already knew didn't need to be taught and could be referred to in the discussion.)

Because we were unable to obtain authentic data in time for the lesson,² "created" dialogues were used. This also eliminated the possibility of an authentic listening component which we believe would have been optimal. As a kind of

mitigating force against the artificiality of the dialogues, and as a further awareness activity, students were asked to analyze the dialogues. Finally, students brainstormed about factors which might influence what they would say in each situation. The purpose of this activity was both to check and to raise awareness of sociolinguistic factors influencing language.

The third segment of the lesson focused on explicit teaching of refusals to requests and invitations. A very limited set of data and a simplified explanation of refusal strategies was selected for explicit teaching based on the available time and student level. A chart of refusal strategies for requests and invitations was sketched on the board and discussed (Table 4).

Table 4: Refusal Strategies

Requests	Invitations
statement of positive opinion (say something to make the person feel good)	some kind of filler such as a "Well," "hmm," "Let me see" (a 'starter')
a regret is optional	express regret
excuse	excuse

In particular, the following were taught:

it is best to "say something to make the person feel good" (a statement of positive opinion) before refusing when there is a request. Suggested possibilities were, "That's a good idea," or, "I'd love to...";

before refusing an invitation, we often use some kind of "starter" such as "Well," "Hmm," or, "Let me see";

"I'm sorry" is often overused by NNSs. "That's too bad" was discussed as a possible substitute;

excuses are essential elements in refusals; excuses should be specific; and, excuses to friends are often more detailed.

A set of discussion questions with situations for refusing was handed out and each situation was discussed. These situations were intended to reinforce the explicit instruction. Due to time constraints, the last activity in this segment (practice and roleplay of the original situations) was omitted.

Data Analysis

The DQ and telephone interview responses were coded using a modified version of the classification scheme for refusal strategies used by Beebe et al. (1990) (Appendix 3). For example, if a participant responded to a professor's invitation to a dinner party by saying, "Yes, I would like to go to your dinner party. But this Saturday I'm busy. I'm so sorry. I'm not able to attend," this was coded as: [adjunct: statement of positive opinion] [excuse, reason, or explanation] [statement of regret] [statement of negative willingness/ability].

Interrater reliability was established by first using the trial questionnaire to discuss categories and establish agreement on coding. Next, the two raters coded sample questionnaires from the trial group independently. These coded responses were discussed to verify agreement on the coding categories and to consider any changes necessary to the coding system (discussed below). All responses from the DQs and the telephone transcripts were then coded independently by each rater. The coded responses were checked for any discrepancies in coding. Discrepancies were reconciled by discussion between the two raters until consensus was reached. Discussion was conducted with reference to how other responses on the questionnaires and in the telephone transcripts had been coded. In each case, several previously coded responses were considered to establish reliability across the data.

It was impossible to fully account for each response using the original version of the coding system (Beebe et al., 1990). The revised system divides responses into four broad categories: acceptances, direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjuncts to refusals. Several additions were made to the system in order to describe all of the strategies employed by participants. The category "true postponement" was created for responses whose intent was not to refuse but to put off the event to a specific time in the future. These strategies differed from "acceptances that function as refusals," such as "I guess" and also from "promises of future acceptance" such as "maybe next time." To account for the telephone interview responses, the categories, "request information" and "acceptance" were added. A category for a questionnaire strategy which "question(ed) validity of the request," was also added. The category, "acceptance that functions as a refusal," was collapsed when no difference was discernible in the data between its sub-categories: "unspecific or indefinite reply" and "lack of enthusiasm."

Exceptional strategies which were linguistically comprehensible but were clearly not appropriate to the situation and/or did not fit the coding scheme were coded as "inappropriate or uncodable." Refusing to sign a petition by saying "ask me something easier," or, "ask somebody else," are examples of responses which fall into this category. Responses which were linguistically incomprehensible or uninterpretable from the telephone transcriptions were coded as "ambiguous."

In the analysis of the written responses, a quantitative comparison was made of the treatment and control groups' differences between pre and post tests. A qualitative analysis of the frequency and specificity of excuses in different situations was then performed. The various strategies employed on specific questions were examined. In analyzing the spoken data, responses from treatment and control groups were compared. The strategies employed by participants on the telephone were compared with their written responses to the most similar questionnaire situation (situation six).

Discourse Questionnaire

Frequency Counts

Following Beebe et al. (1990) a frequency count of coded responses for treatment and control groups was performed (Appendix 4). Analysis of the frequency count revealed little variation in the number or range of strategies employed by participants in the treatment and control groups. However, response differences were found in two areas: excuse production and situation context. The number of excuses provided from pre to post tests by respondents in treatment and control groups differed slightly. Trends in the data suggest that participants may have been sensitive to some situational variables in the questionnaire. Due to the small number of participants, differences could not be measured statistically. Subsequently, a qualitative analysis of the data was performed.

Overall Number of Excuses

Prior research has shown that excuses are an important component of American English refusals. Beebe et al. (1990) reports that 100% of American English refusals to requests made by a status equals contained an excuse. Thus, excuses appear to be a crucial part of refusals. The importance of providing an excuse in refusals to invitations and requests was emphasized in the treatment class. Only 68% of the refusals provided by participants on the pre test contained excuses; an increase in the number of excuses provided by the treatment group from pre to post test would suggest that instruction was effective. Of course, the *quantity of excuses* does not

reflect the overall *appropriateness of the refusals*. However, in light of our desire to remain consistent with Beebe et al. (1990) and due to the lack of full descriptions of NS refusals, this seemed the most viable method of analysis.

Comparison of the overall number of excuses indicated that treatment may have had an effect: across all questionnaire situations, participants in the treatment group used two more excuses in their post tests than in their pre tests; the control group provided four fewer excuses in their post tests than in their pre tests. It is important to note that the student who was considered to be "most advanced" by his teachers, Yuki, was responsible for the treatment group increase. The other participants in the treatment group did not alter the total number of excuses employed from pre to post test.

Number of Excuses in Specific Situations

An examination of the responses to specific situations showed that there was one situation where the difference in the number of excuses provided by the treatment and control groups from pre to post test was greatest. Responses to Situation 2/6, an invitation to study at the house of a "friend," showed a slight increase in the number of excuses provided by the treatment group (+2) from pre to post test, and the largest decrease of excuses from pre to post test for control group responses (-4) across all situations (Table 5).

The meaning of "friend" as inalienable friend, casual friend, expedient friend, or close friend³ was not discussed in the treatment or control classes. In the treatment class, the different meanings of "friend" were not distinguished by the teacher or by the participants during the discussion of the necessity or specificity of the excuses. One student did show awareness of the fact that responses varied according to intimacy by asking, "A good friend or just a friend?" when taking the pre test. All of the participants said they thought less detailed excuses were required for "good friends" than "acquaintances," again reflecting an understanding of the effect of intimacy on responses. (They felt lengthy explanations were unnecessary because "a friend would know.") Despite this lack of clarification about the *meaning* of "friend," the teacher emphasized the importance of giving detailed excuses to "friends."⁴ The increase in number of excuses from pre to post in the responses to this situation may be the result of the importance placed on giving specific excuses to friends in the treatment class and would then be evidence of the effect of treatment.

Table 5: Number of Excuses per Response by Situation

Control

Situation	Pre	Post	Difference
1/9	2	2	0
2/6	4	1	-3
4/3	1	2	+1
6/7	2	2	0
7/2	1	0	-1
9/4	2	1	-1
Totals	12	8	-4

Treatment

Situation	Pre	Post	Difference
1/9	3	3	0
2/6	3	4	+1
4/3	1	3	+2
6/7	3	2	-1
7/2	2	2	0
9/3	3	3	0
Totals	15	17	+2

Content of Excuses

It is possible to gauge the effectiveness of the treatment not only by analyzing the numbers of excuses in the refusals, but also the content and specificity of the excuses. Beebe et al. suggest that "excuses are perhaps the most promising area for content analysis" (1990:66). The researchers' personal experience indicates that content and specificity of excuses is important, but problematic for NNSs. Students are frequently unsure about the amount of detail required in their excuses, often supplying not enough or too much. Since the importance of giving specific excuses to friends was stressed in the treatment group, a change in the content or specificity of the excuses provided by the treatment group might signify that treatment was effective.

Excuses were rated for specificity using a three point scale. General, non-specific excuses such as "I am very busy this week," or "I have no extra time," were coded as +1. Excuses which had one element of specificity by naming a person, place or activity were coded as +2 for example, "I have *an appointment* at that time." Excuses which named two elements, such as "I have to see with *my friend to have a dinner*," were coded as +3.

In situations where excuses were provided in both pre and post tests, there was very little overall variation in the level of specificity for treatment and control groups. One member of the treatment group greatly increased the specificity of his excuse from pre to post test.

Teru - pre test: (specificity +1)

Yes, I would like to go to your dinner party. but this Saturday, *I am very busy*, I'm so sorry. I'm not able to attend.

Teru - post test: (specificity +3)

Yeah. I want to go to your house for dinner this Saturday, *but I have some appointment with my friends*. I'm so sorry I can't go.

While there are no such examples in the control group, this single example of increase in specificity cannot be taken as an indication of effect of treatment. The overall constant level of excuse specificity from pre to post tests across groups indicates little effect of instruction.

Unusual Responses and Situational Variables

Certain questionnaire situations consistently elicited refusal strategies which were not found in responses to other situations. Refusal strategies which provided a "(true) postponement," "statement of (an) alternative," or which "set (a) condition for future or past acceptance" were considered to be unusual because they appeared in only three situations (1/9, 6/7, and 9/4).

The three unusual refusal strategies occurred in responses to situations which contained status differences. Two of the three situations which elicited unusual responses were set in a context familiar to the participants, a school or university setting. It seems that all three of these situations were *high obligation* situations in which the participants felt standard refusal strategies were inappropriate or not sufficient.

Strategies which were coded as "true postponements" appeared six times in response to Situation 1/9 and twice in responses to Situation 6/7.

1/9. You are a very busy professor. A student wants to speak with you about an assignment, but you do not have any time this week.

Student: Could I meet with you tomorrow morning to discuss my assignment?