

**Yukiko - pre test:**

I'm sorry I have no time to meet you this week, because I'm very busy. *If you are not in a hurry, I can meet you next week.*

**Rina - post test:**

I'm sorry. I don't have any time this week. *Could you ask me that next week? I'm going to find out when I can make it.*

**Maria - pre test:**

Sure, but I don't have much time. *If you come here tomorrow at 10:00 am, we can talk about 15 minutes.*

This situation held certain expectations because of the role relationship and because it was familiar. The high number of "(true) postponements" may be reflective of the students' perceptions of the obligation involved. The students who trialled the DQ gave responses which also showed high numbers of true postponements to this situation. When asked about this, there was agreement among them that the teacher had an obligation to meet with students, that it was the teacher's job. We concluded that the amount of obligation induced by the situation was an important factor in the determining the response. The "(true) postponement" seems to be a way of refusing without refusing, by offering an alternative time.

One participant was responsible for both "(true) postponements" in Situation 6/7:

**6/7.** Your professor wants you to help plan a class party. But you are very busy this week.

Professor: We need some people to plan the class party. Do you think you can help?

**Rina - pre test:**

I'm sorry. I don't think so, but may be next week I can help you. *If you still need a help next week, please tell me. I'll help you.*

**Rina - post test:**

Well. actually I don't think so. I'm afraid I'm very busy this week. I'm so sorry *but if you need a help next week, too, please let me know. I'll help you.*

That she was the only participant to use this strategy in this situation may be attributable to her different interpretation of the time frame involved. While the other

participants seem to have conceptualized the help as being needed immediately (this week), Rina obviously did not. Regardless, her postponement reflects a strong desire to meet the request made of her and to avoid refusing her teacher.

Responses containing strategies which "set (a) condition for future or past acceptance" appeared two times in responses to Situations 1/9 and three times in responses to Situation 9/4. Two examples are representative of these responses:

**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?

**Teru - post test:**

I'm sorry, I don't have enough time this week. *But I will effort to make a time next week.*

**9/4** You are the boss of a big corporation and one of your employees is having a big party. You will not be able to attend.

Employee: I am having a party on Saturday night. I was wondering if you would like to come.

**Yiannis - pre test:**

Sorry, I want but I can't this Saturday. *Why you didn't tell me before?* I make schedule for this Saturday. Thank you a lot but I can't.

In both of these situations the participant is being invited or requested to do something by a lower status interlocutor. It was reasoned that in these situations participants felt obligated to accept but also had the authority to defer responsibility for meeting the obligation.

Refusals which contained a "statement of (an) alternative" occurred only in the responses to two situations. In Situation 6/7, where the refuser is of lower status, the statement suggests an alternative that the *refuser* could do.

**6/7.** Your professor wants you to help plan a class party. But you are very busy this week.

Professor: We need some people to plan the class party. Do you think you can help?

**Teru - pre test:**

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm very busy this week, so I can't help you. *If I met some my friends, I will tell my friends about this.*

**Teru - post test:**

I'm sorry, I want to help you, but I'm so busy this week. *If you need some people, I will ask my friends.*

A "statement of (an) alternative" in which the refuser suggests the *requester* do something was only produced by one participant for Situation 1/9; this occurred in both the pre and post test. One interpretation of this is that when the refuser is of higher status, it is possible to suggest an alternative action for the requester, in this case the student, to perform.

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?

**Yiannis - pre test:**

Really sorry, I can't this week, *please tell with someone from the class*, but I will try to find little bit time this week or next week.

**Yiannis - post test:**

Sorry I can't this week. *Please discuss with some classmate*, and if you have any questions ask me, next week. But I'll try to find time this week, sorry but.

The small number of participants make the data susceptible to one individual's response preferences. It is important to note that one participant was responsible for almost half of the responses coded as "statement of alternative" or "postponement." It unclear whether she was exceptionally sensitive to obligations, or if certain situations were obligation inducing.

Exceptions in the Data

Two utterances<sup>5</sup> on the questionnaire were coded as ambiguous. Three strategies were coded as "inappropriate or uncodable." Two of these were judged to be inappropriate attempts to "repair" the damage done by the refusal. Both of these repair attempts occurred in the responses to Situation 9/4 in which a boss is refusing a party invitation from an employee. One participant ended his response with "Please

have a good day," the other by saying, "I hope you'll have a great time." It is interesting that both of these unusual uses of formulaic responses are found in the situation and role, "boss of a big corporation," which was unfamiliar to the participants.

### Telephone Interviews

The strategies employed in the responses to the researcher's request to give a speech or set up a table differed greatly from those used on the questionnaire and also varied widely among participants. No consistent differences between the treatment and control groups' responses were found, indicating that the effect of treatment was not measurable using this instrument, not transferable to a setting outside the classroom, or non-existent.

Overall, participants employed infrequently the strategies which were commonly used in the DQ. "Excuses, reasons, explanations," and, "statements of regret," while used frequently and appropriately on the questionnaire, were rarely employed on the telephone. For all participants there seemed to be a gap between their demonstrated knowledge on the questionnaire and their production on the telephone. This gap was not bridged by instruction.

The percentage of excuses per total number of strategies employed by each participant in the pre test, post test, and telephone interview demonstrates this gap (Table 6). A slight increase in the percentage of excuses is noticeable from pre to post test for the treatment group; there is a slight decrease in the post test percentages of the control group. By far the greatest difference is the drop in the percentage of excuses provided from questionnaire to telephone responses for both groups. Maria, the exception, only had six conversational turns, three of which were excuses.

**Table 6: Percent of Excuses/Total Number of Strategies by Participant**

| <u>Participant</u> | <u>Pre test</u> | <u>Post test</u> | <u>Telephone</u> |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Treatment</b>   |                 |                  |                  |
| Maria              | 25              | 22               | 50               |
| Teru               | 30              | 32               | 0                |
| Yuki               | 18              | 32               | 19               |
| <b>Control</b>     |                 |                  |                  |
| Rina               | 12              | 19               | 05               |
| Yiannis            | 17              | 09               | 0                |
| Yukiko             | 21              | 13               | 10               |

A drop in the percentage of regrets per total number of strategies from the questionnaire responses to the telephone responses is also visible (Table 7). Again, a pattern which indicates that the participants were not able to produce orally what they were clearly capable of forming on their written tests is apparent.

The participants' overall reactions to the caller's requests fell evenly into one of three categories. Two subjects were judged as having refused appropriately (Yukiko and Maria); two participants accepted, one with enthusiasm (Yuki) and one with obvious reluctance (Yiannis); and two gave refusals which were clearly inadequate and inappropriate (Teru and Rina). Treatment and control group participants were equally present in each category, suggesting again that the treatment did not have an effect on the participants' telephone responses.

**Table 7: Percent of Regrets/Total Number of Strategies by Participant**

| <u>Participant</u> | <u>Pre test</u> | <u>Post test</u> | <u>Telephone</u> |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Treatment</b>   |                 |                  |                  |
| Maria              | 10              | 13               | 0                |
| Teru               | 30              | 32               | 0                |
| Yuki               | 18              | 0                | 0                |
| <b>Control</b>     |                 |                  |                  |
| Rina               | 16              | 24               | 10               |
| Yiannis            | 19              | 35               | 0                |
| Yukiko             | 29              | 40               | 16               |

The strategies employed by the participants on the telephone are best compared with responses to the most similar questionnaire situation. In Situation 6/7 a professor requests help with a class party: a higher status acquaintance makes a request of a lower status interlocutor. Because early in the telephone interview the researcher established that she and the participant belonged to the same academic community and then proceeded to engage in conversation, it is possible to consider them acquaintances. It was reasoned that the participants would assume the caller to be a teacher or someone of parallel status in the university; we can tentatively assume the caller held a higher status than the participants. Thus, both the researcher on the telephone and the teacher in the written questionnaire were higher status acquaintances who were associated with their university and making requests of the participants. Based on these contextual parallels, it is possible to make a rough comparison between the responses given in each situation.

Yukiko used some of the same strategies in her pre test, post test, and telephone response: "excuse, reason, explanation," "statement of regret," and, "negative willingness/ ability." Only on the telephone did she produce a "repetition of part of (a) request" and a "request (for) information," both of which seemed to be products of the actual interaction and negotiation:

*On the eighteenth, next Wednesday?...<sup>6</sup>  
speech?...  
Wednesday. ...*

She did use three of the same strategies across testing situations; the DQ seemed to reflect her oral responses fairly accurately.

Maria, mentioned above, used an excuse effectively three times in her telephone interview:

*I think that I am not prepared to speaking, to speak half an hour.  
My English is not enough now.  
I have class that day.*

In her written response, however, she offered two alternatives which she did not do on the telephone. In her post test she expressed regret, which she also did not do on the telephone. It seems either she was unable to employ these strategies in actual interaction or she felt less obligated to do so.

Yuki only employed one common strategy in both his written and oral responses: "excuse, reason, explanation." In his written responses he used "negative ability or willingness"; strategies which he did not use on the telephone. Because he accepted on the telephone, this difference is to be expected.

Yiannis employed entirely different strategies on his questionnaire and telephone responses. While he offered an "excuse, reason, explanation" and a "statement of alternative" in the questionnaire, he requested empathy on the telephone:

*What time I be gone, because it is difficult for me.  
Because it is difficult for me. I' m the only one from Greece. You want to know now?*

He did eventually accept the researcher's telephone request. It is unclear how much of his acceptance was due to his sense of obligation to assist the caller and what part of it was simply a result of not knowing how to manipulate the language adequately.

Rina expressed "regret" and used an "excuse, reason, explanation" in her pre test, post test, and telephone interview responses. But the percentage of both of these strategies fell considerably from the questionnaire to the telephone situation. In the DQ, she relied on a statement of "negative ability/willingness" but not on the telephone. In actual interaction, there was a greater number of strategies coded as "acceptance that functions as a refusal," suggesting an inability or unwillingness to refuse directly:

*(pause) little bit*  
*(pause) yea*  
*yea, maybe*  
*maybe I can do it*

Teru employed a range of strategies in his questionnaire responses: "statement or regret," "excuse, reason, explanation," "statement of negative ability," and "wish." None of these strategies, which he clearly was capable of producing on his questionnaire, were used in his telephone interviews:

*ahh..um...nothing specially*  
*yes, not really, nothing specially*

## Discussion

We found little effect for instruction on the post test. Across all questionnaire situations participants in the treatment group used two more excuses in their post tests than in their pre tests. Responses seemed to indicate a sensitivity to certain situational factors such as familiar versus unfamiliar and role relationship. Patterns of responses indicate that some situations induce a higher sense of obligation. No effect of instruction was observable in the telephone interactions. These findings agree with Cohen and Olshtain (1988).

The most surprising finding was the difference between the responses given in the telephone interview and on the DQs. While Beebe and Cummings' study with NSs (1985) found that telephone interactions caused more elaboration, more negotiations, and more total talk; our work with NNSs, and Olshtain and Cohen's study (1988), led us to expect less negotiation, less elaboration, and less total talk. We were, however, surprised at the *degree* of disparity.

### Methodological Considerations

There are several methodological considerations which need to be taken into account when reviewing this study. The small subject size was necessary for practical reasons and it proved valuable for doing a detailed analysis. However, the small sample size prohibited any statistical analysis and limits the generalizability of the study.

We solicited students from various national/linguistic backgrounds in an attempt to increase the number of participants; however, it might be more efficacious to control for this variable by including participants from only one national/linguistic background.

A more complete description of American English refusals is needed. Our baseline was derived from a cross-cultural study rather than a full description of the speech act in American English. In particular, there were few empirical guidelines to follow when deciding how to limit the description for the treatment lesson. Important considerations such as, "Which elements are most essential in a refusal?" and, "How significant is order?" could not adequately be taken into account. We did feel confident, however, in assuming excuses to be essential since they occur across all refusal situations.

There were several problems in data collection and analysis. Pausing might be an important strategy in spoken refusals; however, technical problems while recording the telephone interviews restricted this type of analysis. Follow-up interviews with the participants might have provided insights regarding their intent on the telephone. A closer match up between the telephone situation and the situation on the DQ might enable a more cogent comparison.

Testing situations varied slightly from pre to post test. While the pre test was administered at the beginning of the voluntary lesson, the post test was given during the participants' Written English class. All Written English class members took this test. One of the participants was absent; the Written class teacher gave him the post test the next day. Another participant brought her friend to the treatment group lesson. This "extra" participant was in a different class and was not available for post testing.

### Instructional Component

Much still remains unclear regarding the teaching component of the study. We still know nothing about which portion (if any) was most effective. It is possible that instruction was effective on a level not recognizable by the present study's measures.

In particular, if awareness activities are useful for facilitating and/or accelerating learning, it is likely that no effect would show up in the short term. On the other hand, it is equally possible that this type of instruction would not be effective. More direct teaching, more practice activities, use of authentic data and/or a listening component—any of these may have been more effective individually or together.

In addition, the amount of time for instruction may have been a problem. The total period of instruction was only 70 minutes. While there were practical reasons for this time limit, the time may have been insufficient for mastering this material. It is also possible that the "one-shot" lesson, which does not allow for review practice and recycling of concepts, is less effective than several shorter lessons would be.

A final problem in the instructional component is that inaccurate information may have been given in the teacher's instructions that "excuses to a friend are more explicit." This may have been a misinterpretation of the Beebe et al. (1990) study which used to term "friend" but did not define it.

### Implications

Possible effectiveness or ineffectiveness of awareness activities could not be determined; however, we believe they may be useful in the long term and might accelerate learning. We agree with Cohen and Olshtain's (1988) conclusions that "fine points of speech act behavior...can and should be taught in the second and foreign language classrooms" (20). Billmyer's findings (1990) also support this. Her study, which took place over a longer period of time, showed that compliments and compliment responses from instructed students more closely approximated native speaker norms (1990:319). However, as noted above, this can not be directly attributed to any portion of the instruction.

The student who wanted to know, "A good friend or just a friend?" when filling out the DQ gives evidence of sensitivity to sociolinguistic variables. Discussions during the lesson showed that students not only agreed with each other about what sociolinguistic factors influence linguistic choices, but also agreed with the teacher. Thus, it may be unnecessary to do extensive teaching about *which* factors influence linguistic choice; however, it is probably necessary to include instruction about the *interpretation* of those factors.<sup>7</sup> And in terms of teaching materials, responses to situations on the DQ and in the lesson, would indicate that familiar situations are more facilitative (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986)<sup>8</sup>.

The results of the present study direct us towards several paths of investigation. We consider the implications of the methodological and instructional weaknesses to be crucial. A more complete description of American English refusal strategies is required. Without this information, it is impossible to begin to design accurate lessons on American English refusals. In addition, information about the saliency of the constituents would be useful when considering what to teach. If we knew which elements of refusals were most salient to native speakers, instruction might focus on those elements. In addition, we need more information about the role(s) of direct teaching, amount of practice, awareness building, and level of English ability in developing pragmatic competence. We recognize that teachers and researchers continually question themselves about these same issues in all aspects of second language acquisition.

Methodologically, the usefulness of DQs and DCTs with NNSs needs to be investigated. Beebe, in her study of NNS-NS interactions concluded<sup>9</sup> that DCTs are "a highly effective means" for "studying the stereotypical perceived requirements for a socially appropriate (though not always polite) response," and for "ascertaining the canonical shape of refusals, apologies, partings, etc. in the minds of the speakers of that language," while acknowledging that they do not capture the "range of formulas and strategies used" or "the number of repetitions and elaborations that occur" (1985:10-11). Our data seems to indicate that the weaknesses of DQs and DCTs for data collection exist when they are used with NNSs, but the strengths do not necessarily hold. The realization of a "stereotypical perceived response" and the "canonical shape" may be limited by linguistic ability and perceived (or real) difficulty using a particular mode (telephone, for example). Much of what we know about speech act realization and pragmatic transfer has been ascertained using these measures. Their validity, especially for second language users, must be re-examined.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Since homework is usually not considered to be a fun, spare time activity, the researchers did not really expect the participants to do the optional homework assignments. It was included, however, to reinforce the idea that students could and should apply the instruction to their daily lives.

<sup>2</sup> In an effort to get data which was at least semi-authentic, approximately 10 hours of television programming was videotaped. The only refusals found were two direct refusals: both a refusal to answer a personal question from an interviewer. While it may be tempting to conclude from this that refusals are rarely offered in daily discourse, it seems more likely that this was due to the programs which were recorded and or a function of topics/settings/roles which are standard on television.

<sup>3</sup> These terms are based on Y. A. Cohen (1961), cited in *Talking with Americans* (Sharpe, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> It is unclear whether "friend" connotes intimate or acquaintance and thus whether refusals need to be brief or elaborated. In writing the discourse questionnaire the researchers' original aim was for this situation to gauge the shape of refusals to intimates (with reference to Wolfson, 1988). However, the DQ was based on the DCT of Beebe et al. (1990) which did not seem to use the term "friend" to indicate "intimate." The use of the word was problematic throughout the instructional component and in the interpretation of the literature.

<sup>5</sup> An utterance is a portion of the written response; it was termed as such because participants were instructed to write what they would say in actual speech.

<sup>6</sup> Each line is a participant's conversational turn. Interviewer responses have been omitted.

<sup>7</sup> See Thomas' (1983) discussion of the distinction between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure, and how these should be treated.

<sup>8</sup> See also discussion in Cohen & Olshtain (1993:47) concerning the use of known/unknown roles and situations in the data.

<sup>9</sup> Beebe includes several other specific conclusions concerning the problems with and effectiveness of DCTs.

<sup>10</sup> Presented at the International TESOL Conference (1993) in Atlanta, GA. Our thanks to Kristine Billmyer for her help with this project and her comments on the paper. Thanks also to Andrew Cohen for his responses to questions.

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### Appendix 1: Participant Profiles

| Name               | Age | L1       | Country of Origin | Length of Stay in U.S. |
|--------------------|-----|----------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Yiannis            | 22  | Greek    | Cyprus            | 8 mos.                 |
| Yukiko             | 26  | Japanese | Japan             | 2 mos.                 |
| Rina               | 24  | Japanese | Japan             | 10 mos.                |
| Maria              | 27  | Spanish  | Ecuador           | 1 mo.                  |
| Teruyuki<br>(Teru) | 19  | Japanese | Japan             | 18 mos.                |
| Yukihide<br>(Yuki) | 25  | Japanese | Japan             | 24 mos.                |

## Appendix 2: Discourse Questionnaire

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Please read the following situations. After each situation you will be asked to write a response in the blank after "you." Respond as you would in actual conversation.

1. 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?

You: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. You and your friend have one class together. Your friend invites you to study together at her/his house. You don't want to.

Your friend: Do you want to study tonight at my house?

You: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. After class one evening a student in your class offers you a ride home. It is cold and dark and you would be happy to get home quickly.

Student: I have my car here. Do you want a ride home?

You: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. A professor invites you to his/her house for a dinner party. But you are not able to attend.

Professor: I am having some people over to my house for dinner this Saturday. Would you like to come?

You: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Your boss invites you to eat lunch with her/him. You think that you should go with your boss to have lunch.

**Boss:** There are a few things I would like to discuss with you. Can you have lunch with me today?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Your professor wants you to help plan a class party. But you are very busy this week.

**Professor:** We need some people to plan the class party. Do you think you can help?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. A student at your school asks you to give your signature for a political cause. But you do not want to.

**Stranger:** Could you sign this petition please?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Your friend and classmate has been sick and not able to attend classes. S/he wants to borrow your class notes. You understand the situation and are willing to help by lending the notes.

**Friend:** I've missed an entire week of class. Would you mind giving me your notes to copy? I'll return them tomorrow.

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. You are the boss of a big corporation and one of your employees is having a big party. You will not be able to attend.

**Employee:** I am having a party on Saturday night. I was wondering if you would like to come.

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3: Coding Categories

#### I. Direct

- A. Performative verb
- B. Nonperformative statement
  - 1 "No"
  - 2 Negative ability/willingness

#### II. Indirect

- A. Regret
- B. Wish
- C. Excuse, reason, explanation
- D. Statement of alternative
  - 1. I can do X instead of Y
  - 2. Why don't you do ...
- E. Set condition for acceptance
- F. Promise of future acceptance
- G. Statement of principle
- H. Statement of philosophy
- I. Attempt to dissuade
  - 1. Threat
  - 2. Guilt trip
  - 3. Criticism
  - 4. Request empathy
  - 5. Let interlocutor off the hook
  - 6. Self-defense
  - 7. Question validity of request
- J. Acceptance functioning as a refusal
- K. Avoidance
  - 1. Non-Verbal
    - a. Silence
    - b. Hesitation
    - c. Do nothing
    - d. Physical departure
  - 2. Verbal
    - a. Topic switch
    - b. Joke
    - c. Repetition of part of request
    - d. Indefinite postponement
    - e. Hedge
    - f. Request information

#### III. Adjuncts to Refusal

- 1. Positive feeling/opinion
- 2. Statement of empathy
- 3. Pause filler
- 4. Gratitude

#### IV. Other

- 1. Inappropriate or uncodable
- 2. "True" Postponement
- 3. Acceptance
- 4. Ambiguous response