

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the summary and discussion of the findings from the previous chapter. In addition, pedagogical implication for English teaching and some suggestions for further studies are described at the end of the chapter.

#### Summary of the Study

This study was conducted to investigate refusal strategies used by English-major undergraduate students -in the first and fourth years- at Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand, and to examine the differences between refusal strategies used by these two student groups in order to determine whether or not the number of study years has an impact on refusal strategies used.

In short, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the refusal strategies used by the English-major students in the first and fourth years?

2. Is there any significant difference between refusal strategies used by first year students and fourth year students, whose major is English?

The subjects in this study were fifty first-year and fifty fourth-year students, whose major is English, at Naresuan University, Phitsanulok. The research instrument employed in this study was a discourse completion test (DCT). It was a modified version of Beebe et al.'s (1990) DCT, which was adapted by Mumsam in 2009. The DCT contained 12 request scenarios where the students were required to write responses in English as they would produce verbally in real situations by making refusals after "You will refuse by saying...". The DCT was reviewed and assessed to check its content validity and reliability by three experts, who were instructors of English at Naresuan University, Phitsanulok. To assess the appropriateness of the questionnaire, relevance of its content, clarity of its instructions/ situations, ease of completion, and time required for completion, the DCT was piloted with 30 first-year and 30 fourth-year English majors in academic year 2011 at Naresuan University,

Phitsanulok. The improved DCT were then given to the participants in the first semester of the 2012 academic year. The DCT data were later analyzed and coded into seventeen categories of refusal strategies based on Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification by two American English native speakers. Before doing the coding, the coders were trained to understand what the study aimed to investigate and how to investigate them. In order to verify that the data coding was valid, the coders independently classified the responses, based on Beebe et al.'s (1990) refusal strategies, and entered classification codes. To confirm that the data coding was reliable, intercoder reliability was used. Then, the researcher computed the frequencies of all analyzed data and calculated them into percentages. After that, Chi-square tests were utilized in finding any significant differences between the use of refusal strategies by students in the two groups.

The results were presented in tables with frequencies, percentages, chi-square values, and significance results. The major findings of this study are summarized as follows:

1. The first-year students used 15 refusal strategies for the total number of 1,529 times. The findings on using refusal strategies revealed that offering "reason" was the most frequently employed refusal strategies (29.89%). In contrast, "performative verb" and "gratitude" were used at the lowest percentage (0.07%). It was also found that the first-year students avoided using "wish" and "statement of philosophy" in making refusal speech acts.
2. The fourth-year students used 17 refusal strategies for the total number of 1,597 times. Offering "reason" had the highest frequency (27.78%) whereas "wish" had the lowest frequency (0.06%).
3. Since the first-year students used 15 refusal strategies while the fourth-year students used 17 refusal strategies, the fourth-year students had a larger number of refusal strategies and a higher frequency of the use of refusal strategies (1,597 times) than the first-year students did (1,529 times).
4. The Chi-square value of the significant difference between overall refusal strategies in 12 request situations employed by the first- and the fourth-year students was 0.007 ( $\chi^2 = 19.549$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), meaning that there was a significant difference between the first- and the fourth-year students in using refusal strategies.

## **Discussions of the Findings**

The findings of the study on refusal strategies in English employed by the first- and the fourth-year English major students are discussed as follows.

### **Discussions of Finding One**

The first important finding with regard to the use of refusal strategies toward 12 request situations was that the first-year students used 15 refusal strategies for the total number of 1,529 times whereas the fourth-year students used 17 refusal strategies for the total number of 1,597 times. This means that the fourth-year students had a larger number of strategies and a higher frequency of the use of refusal strategies than the first-year students did. This implies that the fourth-year students had a border understanding to produce refusals in English and cross-cultural knowledge than the first-year students did.

Furthermore, offering reason and making non-performative statement were the two most frequently used refusal strategies for the first-year students whereas offering reason and giving statement of regret were the two most frequently used refusal strategies for the fourth-year students. As reason was the most frequently used refusal strategy in response to requests between the two subject groups, it corresponded with the findings of the studies conducted by Ikoma and Shimura (1993; Xiaoning, 2004; Thammo, 2005 and Mumsam, 2009). Moreover, it seemed to support the findings of Bardovi-Hartford (1991; Sairhun, 1999; Promsrimas, 2000 and Mumsam, 2009), stating that statement of regret are universal refusals and offering reason often comes with statement of regret. It was also the same with the studies of Liao and Bresnahan (1996; Nugroho, 2000; Nelson, et al., 2002; Felix-Brasdefer, 2003; Wannaruk, 2008 and Mumsam, 2009), which found that offering reason or excuse and giving statement of regret or apology were frequently used by every subject group in their studies.

Although the first- and the fourth-year students used reason the most when refusing requests, it was found that the first-year students did not provide specific reasons as much as the fourth-year students did. For example, the first-year students performed, "I can't because I've to go now." or "Oh! I have an appointment." whereas the fourth-year students produced, "I can't give my money to you because I have to save it for my next semester's tuition.", or "I'm sorry. I've to drive it for

**my work this evening too**". Interestingly, Wannaruk (2008) also found that American English native speakers in her study usually gave specific reasons such as "I have to be at the library tomorrow." or "I have a doctor's appointment.", in refusing requests. There may be some reasons why the first-year students expressed specific reasons less frequently than the fourth-year students. First, they might have limited English knowledge so they avoided producing specific reasons. This type of reason, which other researchers have referred to as a 'white lie', seems to require a higher level of language proficiency since they are required to elaborate responses and explanations (Felix – Brasdefer, 2003). This was in consonance with Wannaruk's (2008) study which found that EFL learners with higher English proficiency were more capable of giving clear and specific explanations than those with lower language proficiency. Second, it might depend on the status or role of their interlocutors as well as the context in which the request occurs. In other words, certain strategies used will depend on the relationship between the speaker and the listener (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This was inconsistent with Liao and Bresnahan's (1996) study which found that their Chinese subjects usually gave more specific reasons to reject persons of higher status. Additionally, it was surprising to find that the fourth-year students employed the two most frequently used refusal strategies like American English native speakers in Mumsam (2009)'s study. This finding implies that the fourth-year students might be more familiar with employing refusal strategies in terms of American perceptions and/or western culture than the first-year students.

One of the interesting findings of this study was that the first-year students did not use wish and statement of philosophy in making refusals. Likewise, the fourth-year students employed wish at the lowest percentage (0.06%) and statement of philosophy at a very low percentage (0.19%). With regard to the use of wish, the researcher's supposition is that the students might know only "sorry" in performing a refusal. This may be because statement of regret, particularly the formulaic expression "I'm sorry.", was found in both subject groups at a high level of frequency (23.22% for the first-year students and 23.81% for the fourth-year students). This corresponded with Promsimas (2000) who found that Thai students rarely used wish in making a refusal responding to request situations. She stated that the only one situation that Thai students preferred to use this strategy in making the refusal was the invitation. As for

the use of statement of philosophy, the researcher supposes that the students might not be familiar with western philosophy. Indeed, they might be familiar only with Thai philosophy. Consequently, they preferred employing other strategies to avoid confusion and/or misunderstanding since their interlocutors were English native speakers or westerners.

According to the finding mentioned above, although the fourth-year students used those two refusal strategies at a low percentage, it was interesting to find that they were able to use such strategies whereas the first-year students never utilized them. This finding reveals that the English proficiency level or the lengths of exposure to English instruction in an undergraduate program of the fourth-year students might allow them to use refusal strategies that required knowledge of cross-culture, whereas such strategies were not available to the first-year students due to their limited cross-culture knowledge. This could be seen that the higher English proficiency level of the fourth-year students gave them an advantage over the first-year students.

Another interesting finding with regard to the infrequent use of refusal strategies was that gratitude and performative verb were employed by both subject groups at a low percentage (0.07% for the first-year students and 0.19% for the fourth-year students). Concerning the use of gratitude, the researcher assumes that the students might think it was unnecessary to thank the interlocutors for asking them to do something. According to Wannaruk (2008), her finding also showed that gratitude was not used in any requests but it was frequently used in invitations and offers. Similarly, Mumsam (2009) found that gratitude was not used by any subject groups in her study. This was consistent with Cooper and Cooper (1996 as cited in Wannaruk, 2008), stating that "thank you" is rarely used as part of a refusal in Thailand compared with its use in western countries. In the case of the use of performative verb, the researcher's assumption is that the students might be more familiar with the use of non-performative statement than performative verb. This was probably due to the finding that both subject groups employed non-performative statement at a high level of frequency (23.81% for the first-year students and 23.22% for the fourth-year students). This finding was in accordance with the study of Mumsam (2009), which found that Thai students employed performative verb at a low frequency (0.39%). The other assumption is that the formulaic expression "I refuse." or "I deny." seems to be

the expressions that deeply hurt the interlocutor's feeling as well as make the interlocutor shocked or embarrassed. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework of politeness strategies, giving a strong or unambiguous refusal might not only make the interlocutor lose face but might also be interpreted as impolite. Possibly for this reason, the students chose to employ other strategies to avoid such effects. Frequent use of non-performative statements may be related to classroom instruction since their primary school years. That is to say, non-performative statements or negative forms of modal verbs such as "I can't..." and "I don't..." are often introduced as common patterns to express disagreement. An explanation of this phenomenon can be seen in the fact that Ministry of Education (2001 as cited in Mumsam, 2009) emphasized that "non-performative statements or modal verbs be taught as grammatical knowledge about disagreement and refusals in a list of communicative functions in the Foreign Language Teaching Curriculum Handbook. (p.60)"

#### **Discussions of Finding Two**

In terms of the findings from the Chi-square test, there was a significant difference between the first- and the fourth-year English major students in using refusal strategies in request situations at 0.01 level.

The differences in using refusal strategies may again relate to the students' length of exposure to English instruction in an undergraduate program or their year level. That is, according to the data collection time, the first-year students had a 0-year period of study while the fourth-year students had a 3-year period. In other words, the first-year students had 3 years less of English instruction than the fourth-year students. The fourth-year students had taken the courses "Basic Oral Skills" and "Conversation and Discussion". Provided with essential skills in these courses, the students participated in various activities emphasizing practice in using English in real-life situations. The activities included storytelling, dialogs, discussing news and reports, documentaries, movies and other areas that promoted successful communication with native speakers. Thus, the first-year students may have less cross-cultural knowledge as well as practice than the fourth-year students. These limitations may influence their choice of refusal strategies.

### **Recommendations for Further Studies**

The findings from this study would be beneficial for further studies. However, due to the limitations of the present study, some recommendations are suggested for further studies as follows:

According to the previous discussion, further studies should be conducted on other populations such as non-English majors or English majors at different levels, for example, in a graduate level. Moreover, some investigation about refusal strategies responding to other types of speech acts such as offers, suggestions, and invitations should be done. Furthermore, if time is available, the longitudinal approach should be applied in order to generalize the result. Last but not least, the use of refusals can be explored via immediate responses such as speaking.

### **Pedagogical Implication for English Teaching and Learning**

According to the findings of this study, there was a significant difference in six of seventeen refusal strategies. These are "statement of alternative", "set condition for future or past acceptance", "statement of principle", "attempts to dissuade the interlocutor", "statement of positive opinion/feelings or agreement" and "pause filler". Moreover, it was shown that none of the first-year students and a few of the fourth-year students used "wish" and "statement of philosophy" in making refusals. This indicates the weakness of the students in using the English language for cross-cultural communication. Therefore, some recommendations and classroom activities for English teachers to help improve the students' efficiency in making such refusal strategies are presented below.

With regard to the use of the refusal strategy "wish" in request situations, none of the first-year students used "wish" to make a refusal whereas the fourth-year students employed this strategy only 1 time. This was possibly due to the fact that the students lacked knowledge about expressing feeling by using the verbs or adjective such as "wish," "unfortunately," and so forth. Indeed, they might know only "sorry" to perform a refusal. Since the students had limited knowledge about expression of willingness to comply, EFL teachers are recommended to encourage students to use a variety of vocabulary similar to the meaning of "wish" or "willingness to comply". One of various excellent ways for teachers to persuade the students to use other words

related to a target word could be word relations. To be precise, if the target word is “wish”, the related words such as “prefer”, “hope”, “desire”, “love to” should be introduced to the students. Importantly, the teachers should use uncomplicated words while explaining the meaning of the target words. In addition, the teachers should illustrate the functions of those words and provide the students with meaningful activities that facilitate them to practice such words. Some of these are, for example, problem-solving tasks which students are required to repeatedly use the target words when they are trying to solve the problem.

In terms of the use of the refusal strategy of “statement of alternative”, the first-year students used this strategy to make refusal speech acts less frequently than the fourth-year students. This may be because the students had limited knowledge of the English language. Therefore, they were afraid to offer another option to the requesters. Explaining language forms and functions such as “I can do X instead of Y” or “why don't you do X instead of Y” seems insufficient to encourage students to express Statement of alternatives. Thus, teachers should design challenging and fun activities that could be used to develop the students' ability in the target language. An example of these activities would be having students share and discuss short stories. In this activity, students are given a set of questions designed to elicit the target statements and asked to share their opinion. Some of those questions might be, for example, “What would you do as a mother in this situation?”, “What words of advice would you offer if you are in this situation?”, and “Who do you think would help you and your friend in this situation?”.

According to “set condition for future or past acceptance”, the first-year students used this strategy less often than the fourth-year students. This may be because the students were not familiar with using English with conditional sentences. Since conditional sentences, which are sometimes referred to as conditional clauses or if-clauses, are the main form of this refusal strategy, the structures of these sentences may sometimes be complicated for the students. To make the students more familiar with this grammatical aspect, teachers should carefully present this aspect as well as provide students with meaningful activities. Sharing and discussing short stories could again be one of possible activities that may help students learn to achieve this goal. Teachers can reinforce the concept of this aspect by telling a short story and asking the

students to write or express their opinions by using if-clauses. Employing this activity, teachers could check students' understanding of this grammatical aspect. Another enjoyable and/or creative way that could be used to encourage students to practice this aspect may be asking students to do wishful thinking or daydreaming.

As shown in the findings, the first-year students employed "statement of principle" in refusing requests less frequently than the fourth-year students. The reason for this may be that the students were influenced by their culture. That is to say, Thai culture emphasizes group relationships, associations, family, and work group goals in addition to maintaining relationships with others (Mumsam, 2009). The Global Oneness Commitment (2004 as cited in Mumsam, 2009) considered this characteristic of Thai culture as collective culture. This characteristic was opposite to American culture that was considered an individual culture. Thus, to improve the use of statement of principle in refusal with the native speakers, teachers should encourage students to learn the target culture as individual culture. However, offering only information about collective and individual cultures seems insufficient to help students make a refusal similar to what the native speakers do. Thus, teachers should provide opportunities for students to produce and practice the refusal strategy of Statement of principle in various situations. Some of these are, for example, role plays (including drama, simulation, etc.). Before doing a role play, teachers may ask the students some questions, for example, "How would you refuse your professor in this situation?" and "Could the student have refused it another way?". This would encourage students to use Statement of principle in the role play.

With regard to the use of the refusal strategy "statement of philosophy", the first-year students did not use this strategy to make refusals. Likewise, the fourth-year students employed this strategy only once. This may be because they had limited cross-cultural language and worried about expressing western philosophy with westerners (Mumsam, 2009). Thus, to improve using statement of philosophy in refusal with westerners, teachers should provide knowledge about western culture and English conversation regarding philosophy. In addition, teachers should design a variety of creative exercises and/or activities to spark students' interest in western philosophy. Since philosophy is referred to ideas and beliefs about the meaning of life, providing students with various dialogues and asking them to identify the philosophy

from the contexts could be an excellent way to motivate students to learn western philosophy. Matching pairs, in which the philosophy of western culture are placed in one set and their meaning are in the other, could be another possible exercise to check students' understanding about philosophy of western culture.

According to "attempts to dissuade the interlocutor", the first-year students used this strategy less frequently than the fourth-year students. Since attempt to dissuade the interlocutor was used in order to persuade the interlocutor to stop an action plan, the students might think that making the interlocutor feel guilty, criticizing the interlocutor, letting the interlocutor off the hook, and using statement of self-defense hurt the interlocutor's feeling. This differed from American native speakers who often made direct mention of their feelings (Mumsam, 2009). Therefore, teachers are recommended to use drills for facilitating students to express this strategy in different situations. When presenting drills, teachers should use pictures or conversation cards to provide meaning and some common expressions regarding attempts to dissuade the interlocutor. Some of those expressions should be, for example, "That's right but...", "I'm okay but...", or "Okay it's alright but...". In order to make drills more meaningful, teachers should give students choices in their replies. In other words, teachers should allow students to add something personal to their responses. Moreover, teachers could do a follow-up by having each student write the drill as a dialogue.

As revealed in the findings, "statement of positive opinion/feelings or agreement" was less frequently used by the first-year students than by the fourth-year students. The reason for this may be that the students were unfamiliar with this strategy. Thus, instead of only learning this strategy in textbooks, teachers should teach this strategy through audiovisual materials or films in the following steps. Firstly, teachers should launch a movie scene containing statement of positive opinion/feelings or agreement in order to draw the students' attentions to the contents. Then, teachers should ask some questions about the details in the scene, such as "What kind of situation is there in that scene?", "Is the situation good or bad?", "How do the character feel?", "How about their facial expressions?" and "How about their tone of voice?". After that, teachers should distribute the scripts of the scene to the students and explain the situation in the scene. At this time, teacher should point out Statement

of positive opinion/feelings or agreement in the contexts. Additionally, teachers should replay the scene again. This is to help students become more aware of what statements they should select to make a polite refusal when faced with native speakers.

In terms of the use of the refusal strategy of “pause fillers”, the first-year students employed this strategy more frequently than the fourth-year students. One possible explanation is that this strategy does not require a higher level of linguistic competence to use and does not involve any grammatical aspect. Thus, it was favored by the first-year students. However, the first-year students seemed to have a problem in using this strategy. That is, most of them used “Oh” at a high percentage while the fourth-year students employed various pause fillers, such as “Uhh”, “Well”, “Umm” to buy time or delay and soften his/her refusal. To improve the use of other pause fillers, the teachers should firstly provide the students with western culture knowledge regarding pause fillers and introduce various pause fillers that occur in everyday conversation to the students. Utilizing segments of movies, cartoons, taped television/radio broadcasts as a teaching tool may prove to be an excellent way to expose the students to the target culture. To reinforce the use of such pause fillers, the teachers should let students practice what they have learned as much as possible through exercises and/or conversation.

As illustrated in the early section, EFL teachers should apply those activities in their classroom as well as take some recommendations into account. In order to help the first- and the fourth- year students to communicate effectively in the target language, teachers should introduce the strategies which were used most frequently by native speakers as well as the rules for implementing such strategies. Moreover, the cross-cultural information of the target community should be integrated into language curricula and textbooks in order to make the students have a very clear picture of the differences between the target culture and their native culture. Importantly, teachers should design task-based activities (as illustrated in the above section) to enhance the students’ competencies and abilities in the target language. If possible, creating some opportunities for communication with native speakers should be provided for the students to make them practice in a real situation.

In conclusion, both language and culture should be taught together because they are inseparable. As we all know, native speakers can distinguish between what is appropriate and inappropriate in their own native language and/or culture. Thus, in order to become more efficient and fluent in the target language, non-native speakers should be alert to learn not only the target language but also the culture of the target language. In fact, the learning of the target culture is as important as the learning of the target language.

