CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

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

Summary of the Study

This study was conducted to investigate the use of refusal strategies in request situations and compare the differences between the refusal strategies implemented by American native speakers and Thai EFL students. The research questions were as follows:

1. What were the refusal strategies used by Thai students of English and native American - English speakers?

2. Was there a significant difference between refusal strategies in request situations used by Thai students and those used by native speakers of American English?

The subjects in this study were 50 English major students in their senior year at Udonthani Rajabhat University and 50 native speakers of American English living in Washington D.C. The research instrument employed in this study was a discourse completion test (DCT) which was a modified version of Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990; Liao and Bresnahan, 1996; Nelson, et al., 2002; Chen, 2007). The test contained 12 request situations that required the subjects to use refusal strategies. The subjects were instructed to write down what they would like to say in a real-life situation after "You will refuse by saying". Then, the questionnaires were distributed, collected, reviewed and assessed by a panel of experts and a thesis committee for reliability and validity. The data were collected during the 2008 academic year. After that, the data from the completed questionnaires of Thai subjects and American subjects were analyzed and classified into 17 categories of refusal strategies based on

Beebe, L.M., Takahashi, T., and Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Then, the researcher computed and analyzed these data using Pearson Chi-square.

The results were presented in tables with frequency, percentage and statistically significant results. The findings of this study can be discussed as follows:

1. The American English native speakers used 16 refusal strategies for the total number of 1,428 times. The findings on using refusal strategies revealed that offering "reason" had the highest frequency (28.09%). On the contrary, "acceptance that functions as a refusal" had the lowest frequency of use (0.21%).

2. The Thai students used 15 refusal strategies for the total number of 1,555 times. Offering "reason" was the most frequently employed refusal strategies (31.20%). On the other hand, "statement of philosophy" and "promise of future acceptance" were used at the lowest percentage (0.06%).

3. The finding on the use of refusal strategies of Thai students did not show expressions of wish or gratitude in refusing the request. On the contrary, native speakers of American English also avoided using gratitude in making refusal speech acts.

4. However, the Thai students used 15 refusal strategies whereas the American subjects used 16 refusal strategies. The Thai speakers had a higher level of frequency of the use of refusal strategies (1,555 times) than native speakers of American English did (1,428 times).

5. The Pearson chi-square value of the significant difference between overall refusal strategies in request situations used by Thai students and native speakers of American English was 0.275, meaning that there was no significant difference between American and Thai subjects in using refusal strategies in 12 request situations at the 0.05 level.

Discussions of the Findings

Below are the result of the study of refusal strategies in English used by Thai students and native speakers of American English.

In general, the American English native speakers and Thai students participating in this study employed various kinds of refusal strategies toward 12 request situations. Besides, the Thai speakers had a higher frequency of the use of

refusal strategies (1,555 times) than native speakers of American English (1,428 times). This finding indicates that English major senior students had good cross-cultural knowledge and understanding in producing speech acts of refusal in English when compared to the American English native speakers.

Offering reason and giving statement of regret were the most frequently-used refusal strategies for Thai students and American English native speakers in the 12 request situations. This finding supported the studies of several researchers (Bardovi-Harling and Hartford, 1991 cited in Thammo, 2005; Sairhun, 1999; Promsrimas, 2000) in that statements of regret are universal refusals to save the interlocutor's face and that offering a reason comes with the statements of regret. These findings are in accordance with Wannaruk (2005) who discovered that all groups in her study usually used offering reasons, though the content of the reasons varied. Statements of regret, "Sorry" or "I'm sorry" usually occurred along with offering a reason in refusing a request.

On the contrary, Thai students generally used statements of philosophy in making refusals at the lowest percentage (0.06%). This strategy refers to the philosophy as ideas and beliefs about the meaning of life. Thus, this low frequency of usage was probably due to the fact that Thai students were not familiar with this strategy and avoided using it with the interlocutor who was a westerner. In this case the researcher's supposition is that the Thai students might have been familiar only with the Thai philosophy which was not commonly used to make a refusal from the Western point of view i.e. the Thai students chose to employ other strategies rather than statements of philosophy to avoid misunderstanding and offense.

Furthermore, the American English native speakers generally employed acceptance that functioned as refusals and performative verbs at the lower level of frequency (0.21% and 0.28%). This finding resembled the findings of the study of Arabic and US English communication style conducted by Nelson, et al. (2002). In selecting refusal strategies, Nelson, et al. (2002) revealed that some of the US respondents stated expressions of performative verbs in 23% of all the refusal strategies, thus indicating that refusing by the performative verbs such as "refuse" or "deny" was rarely employed by US respondents. This result was similar to the use of performative verbs by Thai students in this study as they also employed this strategy at

a low frequency (0.39%). Therefore, this finding can be discussed in 2 aspects. First, the Thai students did not want to hurt the interlocutor' feelings or insult people by saying "I refuse". Second, they might have been more familiar with the use of non-performative statements than performative verbs. This fact may infer that the Thai students had learned about non-performative statements i.e. "modal verbs" from the primary school to the university level. This could be perceived in the fact that the Ministry of Education (2001) emphasized that non-performative statements or modal verbs be taught as grammatical knowledge about disagreement and refusal in a list of communicative functions in the Foreign Language Teaching Curriculum Handbook.

Furthermore, there was no significant difference between the American and Thai subjects at the 0.05 level. This corresponds with the findings of Nelson et al (2002), who discovered that the frequency of refusal strategies used among American native speakers and that of Egyptian speakers were approximately the same. The similarity of using refusal strategies was also in line with the study of Stevens (1993) as both groups employed similar strategies when making refusals and many were employed with equal degrees of frequency.

This finding, however, was opposed to those of the studies by Sairhun, 1999, Songsukrujiroad, 2005, and Promsrimas, 2005 which presented the notion that American culture was expressed in communication style as directness and Thai culture was expressed in communication style as indirectness. Moreover, those studies are in contrast with current EFL learning; the office of the basic Education Commission (2008) has revealed that Thai students are given more than 10 years to study basic knowledge of the English language, including refusal strategies such as "I can't", "I don't", "No", etc. At present, many rural and urban schools have foreign teachers stationed in English communication courses. These teachers aim to focus on task-based activities in order to practice and teach students how to make appropriate responses such as refusals in L2. This approach, however, is probably due to the assumption that Thai students have better knowledge about speech acts such as refusals and cross-cultural strategies than in previous years. In general, however, both Thai and American groups employed similar strategies. That is, Thai students might be familiar with employing refusal strategies in terms of American perceptions and Western culture. But there were some differences in offering reasons i.e. many

American English native speakers employed the strategy of offering unspecific reasons, such as "I have something to do" and "I have some errands for today". On the other hand, most of the responses by Thai students provided specific explanations. They usually mentioned important business related to a third person. For instance, "I have a doctor's appointment" and "I can't give my money to you because I have plans to travel with my friend." This was probably due to the fact that using a third person to make a refusal speech act was viewed as a credible reason. In addition, Thai culture might have an influence on selecting reasons related to a third person in making refusals because Thai students seemed to be shy and nervous about expressing their actual reasons.

As mentioned above, Thai students produced speech acts of refusal that were similar to those of native speakers. This fact was inconsistent with the study of Sairhun (1999), who illustrated that Thai students had a problem with using refusal strategies and needed to improve. One possible reason why this study revealed different results from other studies might be that Thai students now have many opportunities to learn about American/Western culture and cross-cultural communication from various media such as movies and songs. Moreover, there are many teaching materials to enhance students' speaking skills e.g. VCDs and E-learning.

In addition, when the data were collected in the 2008 academic year, the Thai students had taken the course Professional Skills for Internship. This course provided essential skills emphasizing social and business ethics, social manners and practice in using English in real-life situations in the government and private sectors and other areas that promoted successful communication with native speakers. Therefore, the results from this study could not be generalized to all Thai fourth-year students.

The last interesting observation in this study is that the frequency of refusal strategies used among American native speakers and that of Thai students were not statistically different. This implies that Thai students with a bachelor's degree can communicate appropriately in real-life situation, like working Americans who obtained a bachelor's degree.

Recommendations for Further Studies

The findings from the study of refusal strategies used by native speakers of American English and Thai English major students in their senior year at Udonthani Rajabhat University will be beneficial for further studies. Thus, recommendations for further studies are shown as follows:

According to the above discussion, further studies should be carried out on other populations e.g. hotel staffs, AFS students or students who are trainees abroad. As mentioned in the methodology, this study had the classification of refusal strategies based on Beebe, et al. (1990; Nelson, et al., 2001), further studies should employ classification strategies proposed by different researchers such as Sairhun (1999) or Thammo (2005). This will be beneficial for other researchers to apply and find out whether the use of classification of refusal strategies from Promsrimas (1999) or Thammo (2005) tends to obtain different results or they may discover a weakness in the use of refusal strategies by non-native speakers.

According to the findings of this study, although Thai students had good sociolinguistic ability regarding refusal speech acts, they still needed an improvement in the area of refusal in other situations such as invitations, suggestions, and offers.

Furthermore, this study employed a questionnaire in the form of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Further studies could be conducted using interviews, telephone surveys or observations in actual situations in order to obtain more data on real-life use for English refusals.

Pedagogical Implication for English teachers

With regard to the findings of this study, there was a significant difference in using seven refusal strategies: wish, set condition for future or past acceptance, promise of future acceptance, statement of principles, attempts to dissuade the interlocutor, statements of positive opinions/feelings or agreements, and pause fillers. This means these refusal strategies indicated the weakness of Thai students in using English language and cross-cultural communication. Below were some recommendations and classroom activities for English teachers to improve Thai students' efficiency in making seven refusal strategies.

According to the different usage of the refusal strategy "wish" in request situations between Thai students and American native speakers, none of the Thai subjects used "wish" in making refusal speech acts, whereas the American speakers employed this strategy. This was possibly because the Thai students lacked knowledge about expression of willingness to comply. Thus, it is recommended that teachers should increase their students vocabulary knowledge and teach them vocabulary similar to the meaning of "wish" or "willingness to comply".

As previously mentioned, many Thai students failed to learn sufficient vocabulary terms, so "word relations" could be a good way for teachers to present other words related and similar in meaning to a target word. For example, if the target word is "wish", the related words include "desire", "love to", "hope", "prefer", etc. Moreover, the main caution regarding the use of related words is that teachers should explain and illustrate the functions of those vocabulary terms that can be used as soft refusals and pre-refusals to prepare the listener for the upcoming refusal. Additionally, any words used to explain the meaning of the target word should not be more difficult than the target words. In some sense, the teacher can consider increasing the vocabulary term "wish" by telling a short story or by having the students imagine a set of circumstances.

According to the refusal strategies of set condition for future or past acceptance, the difference between Thai students and native speakers of American English was possibly due to unfamiliarity in using a second language with conditional sentences (if-clauses). It is obvious that conditional sentences are the main form of use for the refusal strategies of set condition for future or past acceptance. Sometimes, the structures of conditional sentences are confusing for learners of English. EFL or ESL teachers, therefore, should design activities to practice this grammatical aspect. "Discussion plans" can be one of many activities wherein teachers should control the content and the topic in the form of conditionals. "Matching pairs" is another possible exercise for checking if-clause comprehension wherein the dependent clauses are placed in one set; and the main clauses are in the other.

Next, in making refusal speech acts, Thai students used promises of future acceptance differently from the native speakers because Thai students were influenced by their culture; thus, they cared for the interlocutor's face and feelings. In The Global

Oneness Commitment (2004), it was indicated that Thai culture was grouped under the category of "collective culture". Thai culture was opposite to American culture which was grouped as "individual culture". Collective culture usually holds the group as primary and foremost, emphasizing group relationships, associations, family and work group goals in addition to maintaining relationships with others. This characteristic may be one reason Thai students avoided using promises of future acceptance because they cared about the requester. If they had made a promise, it might have led to a bad relationship when they broke the promise. Also, they were not sure of the time to comply with the interlocutor's request. Thus, to improve using "promise of future acceptance" in refusal with the native speakers, teachers need to motivate students to learn the different cultures of the target speakers as individualist cultures. In the same way, teachers should design "short passages/stories" on "individualist and collectivist cultures" and provide explanations of the different points of the two cultures. For example, American, Canadian, and Western European cultures veer toward individualism, as opposed to Asians which tend to be collectivists. Next, teachers should lead the students to lesson plans about the differences in making refusal between native speakers (individualist cultures) and non-native speaker (collectivist cultures).

In the findings of this study, there was a significant difference in using "statements of principle strategy" between Thai students and native speakers of American English. The lower percentage use of statements of principle among Thai students was also influenced by Thai culture. For example, "promises of future acceptance" is used in order to save the listener's face when the speaker felt it embarrassing for the requester to receive refusal. When they used statements of principle, the listener may have felt that the refuser used this strategy to complain to him/her i.e. offering information about "collectivist and individualist cultures" may not be sufficient to make a refusal speech act similar to that of a native speaker. Therefore, teachers should provide a "role play" and "drama" to encourage students to make refusals in a variety of situations. For example, the teacher may ask questions such as, "How would you refuse your boss in this situation?" After that, teachers might ask the students, "Could the employee have refused it another way?" This way of introducing "statements of principle strategy" instills the students with greater confidence in acting

out a role play. This will be beneficial for Thai students to recognize and apply cross-cultural references to improve their refusals. In addition, thinking and creativity are encouraged. This activity allows Thai students to develop and practice using refusal strategies as statement principles. In some cases, the teacher should have the students write the role-plays or dramas about refusals on their own.

With regard to "attempts to dissuade the interlocutor", Thai students employed this strategy less frequently than the American subjects in their efforts to avoid this strategy because strategies such as letting the interlocutor off the hook, using statements of self-defense, criticizing the interlocutor and making the interlocutor feel guilty might hurt or create a great confrontation between the refuser and the interlocutor. This point, however, differed among the target speakers. American native speakers made direct mention of their feelings. Thus, teachers should use "conversation cards" containing some common expressions to help the learners express refusals, such as "I'm okay but………."or "That's right but…………". This would be beneficial for Thai students when they cannot avoid using refusal strategies with native speakers. This would be a more appropriate form of refusal with native speakers (requesters) than expressing "Don't worry about it" in the Thai style.

According to the findings, it was indicated that using statements of positive opinions/feelings or agreement influenced Thai culture because Thai students tried to express more polite refusals than the American native English speakers. For instance, **"You are the best child**, but I don't think we have time". To make a refusal similar to that of a native speaker, EFL/ESL teachers should insert examples of statements of positive opinions/feelings or agreement with "learning dialogue". In the same way, textbooks are usually filled with situation dialogues. Learning statements of opinions/feelings or agreements in textbooks can also help Thai students learn to make refusals in real-life situations. "Listening to the conversation" is one of the activities that may help Thai students become more aware of what statements they should select to make a polite refusal when faced with American native speakers. Additionally, teachers should present "statement of positive opinion/ feeling or agreement" such as "I'd love to", "I need to do that" or "That sounds interesting" into a discussion activity in class. Some students have opinions, but are worried about how to begin to talk

about them. This activity will be beneficial for teachers to train the students to use statement of opinion/ feeling/ agreement appropriately for refusing native speakers.

With regard to "pause fillers" shown in the findings, Thais had a problem in using this strategy in that most of them used "oh" to dissuade for a time. Other pause fillers such as Uhh/ Well/ Uhm were used at lower percentages whereas, the American subjects used various interjections. To solve the problem, the teacher should understand that students still use "Oh" because they have a limited experience of the English language. Thus, the teacher should provide knowledge about western culture and English conversation regarding pause fillers. At this point, the teacher should use "fill in the blank exercises" or "match the interjections with pictures or sentences". Moreover, the teacher should add more interjections (e.g. cool/hey/wow) in the text book. In addition, one way to improve the use of refusal strategies among Thai students could involve getting as many speaking opportunities as possible.

As illustrated in the section above, English teachers should emphasize those activities in their classroom in order to bridge the gap of differences in the use of refusal strategies by Thai students and those by the American English native speakers. On the other hand, in terms of the similarity for using refusal strategies in both groups, it could still be helpful for EFL/ESL teachers to engage in existing older approaches or activities that improve and conduct the efficiency of Thai students' skills. Thus, language teachers should bridge the gab between older approach/activity and new approach/activity.

However, it is likely that these recommendations may not prove sufficient for English teachers in teaching refusal speech acts today. Below are more recommendations for EFL/ESL teachers, especially those who teach English as a specific purpose course, e.g. English for Hotel business and tourism.

As the Thai environment is a limitation to learning and speaking the English language, the teacher should give students opportunities to learn refusal speech acts in English from various media: videos, CDs, VCDs, TV, etc. and various content types: news, songs, talk shows, etc. In the classroom, teachers should guide students to understand culture – based communication in a culturally appropriate way because learning cultural differences is important knowledge which needs specific practices to increase the performance. Thus, to design task – based activities and to give input of

sociolinguistic knowledge in an English test are also necessary to enhance Thai students' actual sociolinguistic ability in the target language. Furthermore, EFL teachers or all English language teachers should be aware of the language preparation of non-native students. These teachers should prepare non-native students not only for the domestic workplaces and society but also for overseas workplaces. Fitzgerald, 1999 as cited in Nugroho, 2000 suggested that the world is shrinking and the possibility of many EFL students working abroad, or even at home with foreigners is much greater than before. Besides, some EFL students are very likely to need to communicate with both native and non-native speakers of English.