

REFUSING IN ENGLISH AND MARATHI: A STUDY IN CONTRASTIVE PRAGMATICS¹

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Abstract

The present research paper seeks to analyze the speech act of refusal performed by the Marathi speakers both in English and Marathi languages. For the purpose, the responses of 50 post-graduate students of Shivaji University to Discourse Completion Tests in English and Marathi are collected and analyzed using the model of speech act of Refusal proposed by Beebe and Cummings (1995). The focus of analysis is on the manner and nature of speech act, the semantic strategies in which the head act is realized, the organization structure of the response and the preferred supportive moves. The analysis and the resultant conclusions are presented in terms of comparison between English and Marathi Refusals.

Keywords: Speech act of Refusal, Marathi, English, Head Act, Organization Structure, etc.

Introduction

Generally, it is hardly possible for anybody to accept and say 'yes' to all the demands and proposals made by the others. Many a times, we have to say 'no' to people. In Pragmatics, saying 'no' is considered as 'Speech Act of Refusal'. Therefore, by its very nature, the speech act of refusal is dis-preferred (i.e. a response which goes contrary to the expected response). However, the use of the plain word 'no' will definitely lead to the breach in human relations, which is not expected in normal social discourse. Therefore, the speaker has to rely on different ways and strategies to do so in an indirect manner. Since this is a dis-preferred response, it is also a face-threatening speech act par excellence. That is to say, in performing this speech act, there is always a possibility of violating the face demands of the others. In its production, the public self-image of the addressee is at stock. Therefore, while performing this speech act, the speaker must take into account, the public self-image and face demands of the addressee. It is generally observed that the speakers of Marathi language, in particular and of other Indian languages in general, do not use sufficient politeness

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maneuvers in their speech. It is out of this assumption that the present paper makes an attempt to study the realization of speech act of refusal in English and Marathi, focusing particularly the manner and the nature of the speech act, the semantic strategies in which the head acts are realized, the organization structure and the preferred supportive moves in the refusal responses.

Review of Literature

Though refusal has been considered as one of the most important face-threatening speech acts, only a few studies have been carried out to reveal its nature and realization pattern. Still there are some studies that have revealed the nature of the speech act of refusal, the semantic strategies used for its realization and the supportive moves that can accompany the head act of refusal. For example, Houck and Gass consider the speech act of refusal as highly complex, 'because they often involve lengthy negotiations as well as face saving maneuvers to accommodate the non-complaint nature of the speech act' (1995:49). The complexity of the speech act makes the speaker to use more number of utterances for its realization. The addresser tends to employ many semantic strategies so that the public self-image of the addressee does not get disturbed.

The refusals produced by American English speakers and Japanese EFL learners to an invitation are studied by Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990). Their study shows that the speech act of refusal consists of three parts – (1) an expression of regret, (2) an excuse and (3) it ends with an offer of alternative. The study shows that there is no difference in the selection of the semantic formulae selected by the native and non-native speakers, but their responses mark differences in frequency of the formulae and their content.

Refusal response to an invitation, an offer, a request and a suggestion of American and Chinese speakers of English are studied by Chen (1996) in which she notes that none of her respondents has used direct refusal (i.e. the blunt 'No').

Sarawade (2010) studies the performance of speech act of refusal to a request, an invitation and an obligation by the Indian learners of English. He shows that a single utterance response is considered inappropriate by the respondents. The supportive moves like 'excuse/reason', 'apology/regret', and 'promise' are prominently used by the learners and that no learner uses the 'Direct: No' response for refusal.

Data Collection and Model of Analysis

All the above studies have relied upon the model of speech act of refusal proposed by Beebe and Cummings (1995) in which they have classified the semantic strategies in three categories – Direct, Indirect and Adjunct to refusal in the following manner:

Direct: performative verb, 'no', and negative ability/willingness

Indirect: regret, wish, excuse/reason, alternative (offer, suggest), condition for acceptance, promise, principle, philosophy, request for empathy, avoidance, etc.

Adjunct to Refusals: positive feelings/opinions, empathy, gratitude, self-defense

For the present study too the same model is used. For the collection of the data, two Discourse Completion Tests – one in English and one in Marathi – each consisting of three situations demanding the response of speech act of refusal are used. The DCTs are administered to 50 Marathi learners of English randomly selected from post-graduate departments of Shivaji University. The situations in both the DCTs are same. However, the DCT in English is administered first and, after the gap of a month, the second DCT in Marathi is administered to the same students. The purpose was to minimize the unnecessary variation caused due to individuality. The collected responses of the respondents are analyzed for the manner and the nature of the speech act, the semantic strategies in which the head act of the response is realized and the organization structure of the response with preference of supportive moves. The following is the discussion of the analysis.

Refusal in English

Let us club all the three situations of refusal together and see the preference given by the respondents to the nature of the speech act, the semantic strategy for the realization and the organization structure of the responses. Table 1 provides the details regarding the nature of the speech act used across the three situations.

Nature	Situation			Total
	Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	
Direct	1	44	41	86
Conventionally Indirect	42	5	5	52
Inappropriate Response	5	1	3	9
No response	2	0	1	3
Total	50	50	50	150

Table 1: Nature of Speech Act of Refusal (all Situations)

Very striking feature that can be easily noticed in the table is that for situation 1, almost all the respondents have used conventionally indirect nature of the speech act. This is the situation where the addresser has to refuse the request of his/her classmate. The following responses show this tendency:

1. I am really sorry. The book is not yet finished and I have to read it. I will give you the book after my reading.* (ES1/8)

(**Note:** Here and hereafter the symbol ‘*’ indicates that the utterance is ungrammatical.)

2. I will tell her, I will wish her. I will say sorry to her and I will tell her I wanted to attend your party But my mothers condition is not good. She is ill.

So I want to stay with my mother. So sorry, I will come your home in one of the day.* (ES2/27)

3. I will say that to my Professor my father is out of station for related with business and in my home my mother and my brother sister is small it is my responsibility to live with them and I will visit to this place next time.* (ES3/6)

In contrast, for situation 2 and 3, majority of the subjects have employed direct nature of the speech act. Of course, there are five responses each in second and third situations which are realized in conventionally indirect form. Following are the examples of direct nature of speech act of refusal:

1. Sorry Friend, I have not attend the birthday party, because my mother is ill and she admitted to the hospital, I want to go to take care of her.* (ES2/4)

2. First I wish him Happy Birthday and then I will say him that I cannot attend birthday party because my mother is admitted.* (ES2/5)

3. Sir, I am sorry, I cannot participate in the study tour because my father is out of station for his business work.* (ES3/5)

When the received responses are analyzed for the semantic strategy used as the head act, the details that emerge are provided in Table 2.

Semantic Strategy for HA	Situation			Total
	Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	
Negative Ability	1	44	41	86
Regret	0	1	1	2
Excuse / Reason	1	1	0	2
Alternative (Offer/Suggestion)	5	0	1	6
Condition for acceptance	15	0	0	15
Promise	20	2	3	25
Request for empathy	1	1	0	2
Inappropriate Response	5	1	3	9
No response	2	0	1	3
Total	50	50	50	150

Table 2: HA Strategy of Speech Act of Refusal (all Situations)

Since the nature of the speech act predominantly used for situation 2 and 3 is direct, they need to be expressed with the 'negative ability' as the semantic strategy. But in case of situation 1 where conventionally indirect form of refusal is used, it is essential to know the

specific strategies used as head act. As the table shows, 20 respondents have used ‘promise’, 15 have used ‘condition for acceptance’ and five respondents use ‘alternative’ as a strategy to refuse the request. The following are the examples semantic strategy of ‘promise’:

1. Yes, definitely I will give you But first I will read it completely then you take it.* (ES1/48)
2. I will say my friend that my mother is ill so I can attend your Birthday party. We will celebrate your Birthday in my home after my mother illness. because, friendship is very important in life but our mother is unshaparable part of our life. then my friend will be with me at that time.* (ES2/3)

The following are the examples of ‘conditional acceptance’ and ‘an alternative’:

1. Conditional acceptance: Sorry, because I have not yet finished, After I finished I will give you.* (ES1/25)
2. Alternative: I will say to my classmate that plz take a photocopy of the book and I will prepare the original Book.* (ES1/10)

Since the speech act of refusal demands the addresser to refuse something in the presence of the addressee, the addresser has to give some concrete reason and also promise that the act of refusal will not be repeated in future. For doing so, he/she has to employ more number of supportive moves. This fact has been well understood by the respondents and only 12 responses out of the analyzed 138 are realized in ‘only HA’ organization structure as shown in Table 3.

Organization Structure	Situation			Total
	Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	
Only HA	5	2	5	12
SM + HA	15	10	8	33
HA + SM	8	1	0	9
SM + HA + SM	3	18	11	32
(SM) + HA	8	4	12	24
HA + (SM)	0	0	2	2
SM + HA + (SM)	1	12	8	21
(SM) + HA + SM	3	2	0	5
No Appropriate Response	5	1	3	9
No response	2	0	1	3
Total	50	50	50	150

Table 3: Organization Structure of Speech Act of Refusal (all Situations)

In the remaining 126 responses, at least one supportive move is used. Similarly, in around 75 responses, two or more than two supportive moves are used. Thus, the total number of supportive moves used for situation 1 is 58, for situation 2 – 104 and for situation 3 – 87. Thus, there are total 249 supportive moves used for refusing in the given three situations. One more thing that can be noticed in the use of supportive moves and the nature of the speech act is that when the nature of speech act is conventionally indirect, comparatively, the number of supportive moves is less. But, when it is direct; the number of supportive moves increase. Thus, it can be concluded that the respondents thought that the use of conventionally indirect form of refusal requires less number of supportive moves, while the use of direct form of refusal requires more number of supportive moves.

Refusal in Marathi

The general tendency of the respondents regarding the realization of the speech act of refusal in Marathi is as follows:

Out of the 150 expected responses, one response is not received and four received responses are inappropriate. Thus, only 145 responses are analyzed and interestingly, all these responses are realized in implicit manner.

Nature of Speech Act	Situation			Total
	Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	
Direct	0	41	45	86
Conventionally Indirect	47	9	3	59
Inappropriate Response	3	0	1	4
No response	0	0	1	1
Total	50	50	50	150

Table 4: Nature of Speech Act of Refusal (Marathi)

Table 4 details the situation-wise nature of the speech act employed in the responses. The table clearly shows the preferences of the respondents. For situation 1, the preferred form of the speech act is conventionally indirect and all the responses are realized in this form. On the contrary, for situation 2 and 3, the direct nature of the speech act is preferred. The following are the examples:

1. Conventionally indirect: पहिला मी माझे वाचन पूर्ण करेन, आणि मग मी तुला ते पुस्तक देईन.* (MS1/1)

2. Conventionally indirect: माझे बाबा गावी गेले आहेत. त्यांच्या परवानगीशिवाय मी येऊ शकणार नाही. मला माफ करा मी पुढील वर्षी नक्की सहभागी होईन.* (MS3/21)
3. Direct: मी माझ पुस्तक वाचून झाल्यानंतर लगेच २-३ दिवसात तुला देतो, पण मी तुला आता हे पुस्तक देऊ शकत नाही sorry. * (MS1/43)
4. Direct: मी नाही येवू शकणार कारण, माझी आई आजारी आहे आणि मी तिला दवाखान्यात घेवून आलो आहे.* (MS2/7)
5. Direct: माझ्या घरगुती कारणांमुळे, काही अडचणी असल्याने मी येऊ शकत नाही. मला माफ करा.* (MS3/2)

Regarding the situation-wise differences in the preference of semantic strategy for the head act of the response, the details are shown in Table 5. For all the direct responses in situation 2 and situation 3, 'negative ability' is used as a semantic strategy for their head acts. On the other hand, for the conventionally indirect head acts, the preferred strategy to refuse is 'promise' (42 responses) and 'excuse/reason'.

HA Semantic Strategy	Situation			Total
	Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	
Negative Ability	0	41	45	86
Regret	0	0	1	1
Excuse / Reason	2	3	1	6
Alternative (Offer/Suggestion)	2	0	0	2
Promise	42	4	1	47
Request for empathy	1	1	0	2
Positive Feelings / Opinions	0	1	0	1
Inappropriate Response	3	0	1	4
No response	0	0	1	1
Total	50	50	50	150

Table 5: HA Strategy of Speech Act of Refusal (Marathi)

The following are the examples of various semantic strategies:

1. Promise: माझे वाचन पूर्ण झाल्यानंतर मी तुला दोन-तीन दिवसांनी पुस्तक देतो.* (MS1/11)
2. Excuse/Reason: मी हे पुस्तक संध्याकाळी तुला दिले तर चालेल?*(MS1/46)

3. Excuse/Reason: मी पाटीला जाऊ शकत नाही त्यासंबंधी मित्राकडे दिलगिरी व्यक्त करीन आणि मी पाटीला न येण्याचे कारण माझ्या मित्राला सांगेन.* (MS2/43)

4. Negative ability: सॉरी, मी पाटीला नाही येवू शकत.* (MS2/12)

The situation-wise organization structure of the responses is given in Table 6.

Organization Structure	Situation			Total
	Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	
Only HA	5	1	4	10
SM + HA	28	12	10	50
HA + SM	1	4	4	9
SM + HA + SM	3	7	8	18
(SM) + HA	9	11	13	33
HA + (SM)	0	2	1	3
SM + HA + (SM)	1	9	1	11
(SM) + HA + SM	0	4	7	11
No Appropriate Response	3	0	1	4
No response	0	0	1	1
Total	50	50	50	150

Table 6: Organization Structure of Speech Act of Refusal (Marathi)

In all, eight different organization structures are used and all of them have been used for situation 2 and situation 3. Whereas, for situation 1, the number of organization structures is six. Except 10 responses out of 145, at least one supportive move is used in the remaining responses.

Findings:

Refusal in English

1. Out of the expected 150 responses for this FTA, three are not received and nine received responses are inappropriate considering the given situations.
2. All the 138 analyzed responses are realized in implicit manner.
3. Only 'direct' and 'conventionally indirect' natures of the speech act are preferred for this FTA. However, for Situation 1, the 'conventionally indirect' nature is preferred (42

responses) while for Situation 2 and 3, 'direct' nature is preferred (44 and 41 responses respectively).

4. To refuse in 'conventionally indirect' manner, the semantic strategies like Alternative (offer/suggestion) (6 responses), Condition for acceptance (15 responses) and Promise (25 responses) are used. The semantic strategy of Negative ability is used as the most preferred way of refusing and it is present in 86 responses.
5. In contrast to the responses received for Request situation in English, only 12 responses out of 138 have the organization structure 'Only HA'. It shows the realization of the respondents that a single utterance response, though polite to any extent, cannot successfully be used for performing the FTA of Refusal. In remaining 126 responses, at least one supportive move is used which adds required politeness to the responses.
6. The total number of pre-HA supportive moves is 153 and that of post-HA supportive moves is 96. The total goes to 249 supportive moves. Among other things, it indicates the belief of the respondents that refusal needs to be accompanied by certain excuses as supportive moves.

Refusal in Marathi

1. Whereas one response is not received to the situation demanding speech act of Refusal in Marathi, four responses out of the received ones are inappropriate.
2. All the on record responses are realized in implicit manner indicating the awareness of the respondents that explicit manner of refusal is inappropriate.
3. Both direct and conventionally indirect natures of speech act are used in the data. However, for Situation 1, the conventionally indirect nature of speech act dominates and for Situations 2 and 3, the direct nature prevails.
4. The participants have preferred 'Negative Ability' (86 responses) and 'Promise' as the preferred semantic strategies for performing the speech act of refusal in Marathi.
5. Out of the 145 responses analyzed, the organization structure of only 10 is 'Only HA'. In remaining 135 responses, at least one supportive move is used. It shows the respondents' realization that a single sentence utterance is inappropriate for refusing in Marathi.
6. There are 170 pre-HA supportive moves and 72 post-HA supportive moves. The total number of supportive moves in the data is 242.

Comparison and Conclusions

1. For refusing both in English and Marathi, only the implicit manner of speech act is used.
2. As for the nature of the speech act of refusal, there are no much differences seen in Marathi and English.
3. Similarly, the strategies of refusal used both in English and Marathi responses are almost the same.
4. Similar tendency is also seen in the organization structure of the speech act of refusal performed by the respondents both in English and Marathi.

5. The performance of speech act of refusal both in English and Marathi made the respondents use the greatest number of supportive moves. There are 249 supportive moves in English Refusal and 242 supportive moves in Marathi Refusal.

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Appendix

Situations for English and Marathi DCT

1. You are studying in MA Economics. Recently, you have bought a new reference book related to your subject. One of your classmates requests you to give him/her the book for some days. But you have not yet finished reading the book. What will you say to your classmate?

2. Your friend has invited you to his/her birthday party. But your mother is ill and is admitted to the hospital. Therefore, you cannot attend the party. What will you say to your friend?

3. Your college/department has organized a study tour of two days and the In-charge Professor of the tour has asked every student to participate in the tour. But at the scheduled time of the tour, your father is out of station for his business work. Therefore, you cannot participate in the study tour. What will you say to the Professor?

1. तुम्ही अर्थशास्त्र विषयात एम ए करीत आहात. तुमच्या विषयासंबंधी एक संदर्भग्रंथ तुम्ही नुकताच विकत घेतला आहे. तुमचा / तुमची एक क्लासमेट हे पुस्तक देण्यासाठी तुम्हाला विनंती करतो / करते. परंतु आद्याप तुमचे वाचन पूर्ण झालेले नाही. तुम्ही तुमच्या क्लासमेटला काय म्हणाल?

2. तुमच्या मित्राने / मैत्रिणीने त्याच्या / तिच्या वाढदिवसाची पार्टी आयोजित केली आहे व तुम्हाला त्यासाठी आमंत्रित केले आहे. परंतु तुमची आई आजारी असल्याने दवाखाण्यात दाखल केले आहे. त्यामुळे तुम्ही पार्टीला जाऊ शकत नाही. तुम्ही तुमच्या मित्राला / मैत्रिणीला काय म्हणाल?

3. तुमच्या कॉलेजने दोन दिवसांच्या अभ्यास सहलीचे आयोजन केले आहे व सर्व विद्यार्थ्यांनी सहभागी होण्यासाठी संबंधित प्राध्यापकांनी सूचना दिल्या आहेत. नेमके त्याच वेळेला कामानिमित्त तुमचे वडील परगावी गेलेले आहेत. त्यामुळे तुम्ही या सहलीमध्ये सहभागी होऊ शकत नाही. तुम्ही प्राध्यापकांना काय म्हणाल?