



## Indonesian EFL Learners' Refusal: Refusal-Speech Act Specific Motivation on Refusal Realization

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### Abstract:

*Knowing how to produce speech act especially refusal appropriately is necessary since it is known as 'face-threatening' act; otherwise it would lead to discomfort between interlocutors. This ability may be influenced by many factors, one of which is motivation. One of the pragmatic motivation types is Speech Act Specific Motivation (SASM), which was found to have explanatory power to predict the production of a certain speech act. This study aimed to investigate the correlation between learners' refusal-SASM and their refusal. By conducting purposive sampling, 45 students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Palembang (UMP) majoring in English Education Study Program were selected as the sample of the study. The instruments used were the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and refusal-SASM questionnaire, which had been validated by conducting moderation. Pearson Correlation test and multiple regression were done to see the correlation between the variables and the contribution of one variable to the other respectively. The results showed that the correlation between the two variables was insignificant, and the refusal-SASM contributed only 3% to the learners' refusal. The recent study also found that the learners tended to use indirect strategy in refusing to almost all situations. The reason for this phenomenon is likely to be the influence of L1 culture. However, further studies are highly suggested in this matter.*

**Keywords:** *refusal, refusal strategy, speech act specific motivation*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Knowing how to express thoughts and ideas appropriately according to contexts is crucial for language users, and this ability is known as pragmatic competence. However, improving pragmatic competence in English is not an easy task for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It was found that Indonesian EFL learners have low pragmatic competence, especially in speech acts, because of the lack of necessary material and the inability of teachers to teach pragmatics properly (Retnowaty, 2017; Suryoputro & Suyatno, 2017).

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Many studies have been conducted to seek what may influence someone's pragmatic competence. One of those studies found motivation was the only significant factor, among the amount of interaction using English and length of residence, influencing the learners' pragmatic competence (Eslami & Ahn, 2014). It was also found that there was a significant correlation between language learning motivation and pragmatic competence. It means that the higher someone's motivation, the better his/her pragmatic competence (Chen, 2017; Hidayatullah & Hidayanto, 2023). Thus, it can be said that motivation may play a role in the development of learners' pragmatic competence.

Interlanguage pragmatic motivation was first introduced in 2012. There are two types of motivation: General Pragmatic Motivation (GPM) and Speech Act Specific Motivation (SASM). An attempt has been made to see the correlation between those kinds of motivation and speech acts of request, refusal, and apology. The previous study found that SASM could predict learners' pragmatic production, even though it was to a small degree. It was also found that among the three types of speech acts, only refusal-SASM could more likely influence EFL learners' refusal (Tajeddin & Moghadam, 2012). Interlanguage pragmatic motivation is indirectly related to the act of refusing since a significant correlation between interlanguage pragmatic motivation and meta-pragmatic awareness focused on refusing was also found (Arabmofrad, 2019). It can be concluded that refusal-speech act-specific motivation (SASM) may play a role in the act of refusing.

Some studies also have explored the subjects' speech act of refusal and what factors might influence it. Firstly, it was found that language proficiency did not contribute to the act of refusing production. It indicates that learners with high proficiency may lack of pragmatic competence especially in speech act of refusal. This study even showed insignificant difference between the refusal speech act produced by high and low proficiency (Tabatabaei & Farnia, 2015). Next, pragmalinguistic transfer was found to influence learners' realization of refusal strategies. This previous study proved by finding that Javanese EFL learners mostly used Javanese pragmalinguistic forms and functions to express the target language politeness (Wijayanto 2013). In addition, it was also found that pragmatic knowledge influenced the realization of refusal strategies. The study found that the most preferred strategy used by Indonesian senior high school students is avoidance of keeping silent in refusing their teacher who had higher status. It indicates that they did not know how to refuse appropriately using English which is a foreign language for them (Nurweni, Sudirman, & Mahpul, 2014). Another study also has investigated how gender could somehow influence the refusal realization. The finding stated the women tended to be more polite in compared to the men who applied direct strategy in refusing to almost the situations given (Mohammed & Adeeb, 2021). Other factors that could contribute the refusal utterances utilized were the initiating acts and the social status of interlocutors. As it was found that EFL students tended to utilize certain strategies in refusing certain social status and initiating acts, they were found to utilize criticize request in refusing someone's suggestion and request from an equal status (Dwiana et al., 2021).

Based on all the previous studies mentioned above, many factors could influence learners' refusal. However, none of the research focused mainly on investigating the relationship between refusal-speech act specific motivation and act of refusing. Thus, the present study would like to conduct a further research investigating the relationship between learners' refusal-Speech Act Specific Motivation (SASM) and their acts of refusing. The recent study also wanted to find out the distribution of refusal strategies realized by the learners. Unlike the previous study (Tajeddin & Moghadam, 2012), the present study focused on the speech act of refusal due to the

correlation between meta-pragmatic of refusal and interlanguage pragmatic motivation (Arabmofrad, 2019), and on one type of interlanguage pragmatic motivation which is Speech Act Specific Motivation (SASM).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Act of Refusing

Refusing is one of the speech acts that are frequently used in conversations. It belongs to the category of 'commissives' which are speech acts in which speakers commit themselves to some future actions by producing the speech act (Ilmiani et al., 2016). Producing an appropriate refusal statements might be difficult since it deals with the hearer's face. The inappropriateness may lead to discomfort relationship between the interlocutors. In rating the appropriateness of speech act, the use of appropriate linguistic forms, grammatical expression and strategy based on the given situation should be considered. The classification of refusal strategies was proposed by Beebe et al (1990). There are three main strategies; direct, indirect strategy and adjuncts to refusal, those are divided into more sub-strategies which can be seen in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Three main strategies; direct, indirect strategy and adjuncts

Strategies	Examples
<b>Direct</b>	
a. Performative	<i>I refuse</i>
b. Nonperformative statement	<i>I can't; I won't; I don't think so.</i>
<b>Indirect</b>	
a. Statement of regret	<i>I'm sorry...; I feel terrible</i>
b. Wish	<i>I wish I could help you</i>
c. Excuse, reason, explanation	<i>My children will be home that night</i>
d. Statement of alternative	<i>I'd rather...; I'd prefer</i>
e. Set condition for future or past acceptance	<i>If you had asked me earlier, I would have...</i>
f. Promise of future acceptance	<i>I'll do it next time</i>
g. Statement of principle	<i>I never do business with friends</i>
h. Statement of philosophy	<i>One can't be too careful</i>
i. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor	
i. Threat	<i>I won't be any fun tonight</i>
ii. Guilt trip	<i>I can't make a living off people who just offer coffee</i>
iii. Critise request	
iv. Request for help	
v. Let interlocutor off the hook	<i>Don't worry about it; That's okay</i>
vi. Self defence	<i>I'm trying my best</i>
j. Acceptance that functions as a refusal	
i. Indefinite reply	
ii. Lack of enthusiasm	
k. Avoidance	
i. Nonverbal	
ii. Verbal (Topic switch, Joke, Repetition of part of request, Postponement, Hedging)	
<b>Adjuncts to Refusals</b>	
a. Statement of positive opinion	<i>That's a good idea; I'd love to</i>
b. Statement of empathy	<i>I realise you are in a difficult situation</i>
c. Pause fillers	<i>Uhh; well; oh; uhm</i>
d. Gratitude	

## **2.2 Interlanguage Pragmatic Motivation**

It was firstly proposed that the way the learners use the target language appropriately, try to understand the target culture and L2 social variables such as power, imposition and familiarity is likely to be influenced by learners' motivation which is known as interlanguage pragmatic motivation (Tajeddin & Moghadam, 2012). The motivation mentioned is argued to have an effect towards the learners' pragmatic development.

Speech Act Specific Motivation (SASM) is one of two types of interlanguage pragmatic motivation. This motivation concerns on motivation in acquiring and developing sociopragmatic norms (how speakers appropriately use a language according to context) and pragmalinguistic forms (how speakers perform variety of language functions through utterances) in producing a certain speech act (Tajeddin & Moghadam, 2012). Knowing about pragmalinguistic forms and sociopragmatic norms of the target language is very much necessary for learners as the misunderstanding of these pragmatic features would lead to communication breakdown and failure (Mirzaei et al., 2012).

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The correlation study was done in this present study to see the relationship between learners' refusal-SASM and their acts of refusing. This researcher also analysed the learners' refusal realization by using refusal strategy classification by Beebe et al (2010). It should be done in order to investigate the different refusal strategy realized by learners who have high refusal-SASM and those who have poor refusal-SASM. In choosing the sample, purposive sampling was conducted. The participants were selected based on whether they had passed all Basic English skill classes assuming that they were proficient English users. Based on the criteria mentioned, 45 students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Palembang majoring English Education Study Program could be involved in the present study.

In collecting the data, the researcher gave two kind of tests. The first one is refusal-SASM questionnaire consisting 26 items with 4 likert scale; strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). This questionnaire measured learners' motivation of the acquisition of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatics in producing refusal. Second, Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was given in order to see the learners' speech act of refusal production. There were twelve situations covering four kinds of initiating act (suggestion, request, offer and invitation). The learners were required to give responses to the written tasks by writing their acts of refusing in the blank space given. Both refusal questionnaire and DCTs were considered construct and content valid since it has covered the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic and covered the speech act refusal as well respectively. Moderation was also conducted by asking some colleagues who had appropriate knowledge of interlanguage pragmatic and procedures of the data collection and the instruments to proofread and validate those instruments.

After collecting the data needed, some analysis processes could be done. The researcher categorized the responses from the learners by using the classification of refusal strategies proposed by Beebe et al (Beebe et al. 1990) and assessed the appropriateness of the utterances by using the appropriateness rating rubric by Taguchi. It evaluated the appropriate expressions at the level of directness and politeness based on the situations. The rubric has 6 likert scale; 5 (excellent), 4 (good), 3 (fair), 2 (poor), 1 (very poor) and 0 (no performance) (Taguchi 2006).

Some statistical procedures were also conducted; (1) descriptive statistics to calculate minimum and maximum scores, means and standard deviation of the learners' questionnaire and DCT, (2) Pearson Correlation to examine the relationship between the learners' refusal-SASM and their acts of refusing, and (3) Multiple Regression to see the contribution of refusal-SASM towards the learners' acts of refusing. The researcher also did in-depth analysis of the learners' DCT responses which had been classified before in order to find out the refusal strategies distribution and differences in refusal strategies realized by the learners with high refusal-SASM and those with low refusal-SASM.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. The Distribution of Refusal Strategies

In completing DCT, the learners used varied strategies, it was found that there were 1377 utterances utilized by 45 learners responding to all the situations given.

Table: 2 The Distribution of Refusal Strategy

Strategies		Situation												Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
DS	PERF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	NPERF	17	9	21	25	13	25	23	16	29	16	22	18	234
		<b>Total</b>												235
IDS	REG	26	13	26	37	37	30	27	17	0	31	32	34	310
	WISH	1	1	3	2	3	2	0	0	2	5	2	3	24
	ERE	16	26	24	35	40	35	21	39	0	38	38	43	355
	SoA	14	7	12	10	10	5	5	6	8	1	0	0	78
	SCF	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	4
	PFA	16	6	6	0	2	3	8	3	0	5	8	2	59
	SoP	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	THR	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
	CR	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
	RHEA	5	3	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	1	0	4	19
	OTH	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	34	0	0	0	37
	SD	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	IR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	TS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
	RPR	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
POST	2	3	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	8	
		<b>Total</b>												913
AS	AGREE	10	11	9	3	2	9	8	9	0	2	9	8	80
	SoE	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	6
	PF	0	4	3	2	2	1	4	4	4	1	3	1	29
	GRAT	11	15	0	0	0	5	9	22	7	23	6	16	114
		<b>Total</b>												229
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>119</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>1377</b>

Notes:

- DS = Direct Strategy
- IDS = Indirect Strategy
- AS = Adjuncts to Refusal
- PERF = Performative
- NPERF = Nonperformative
- REG = Statement of Regret

- WISH = Wish
- ERE = Excuse, Reason, Explanation
- SoA = Statement of Alternative
- SCF = Set condition for future or past acceptance
- PFA = Promise of future acceptance
- SoP = Statement of principle
- THR = Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester
- CR = Criticise request
- RHEA = Request for help, empathy and assistance by holding the request
- OTH = Let interlocutor off the hook
- SD = Self defense
- IR = Indefinite reply
- TS = Topic switch
- RPR = Repetition of part of request
- POST = Postponement
- AGREE = Statement of positive opinion or agreement
- SoE = Statement of empathy
- PF = Pause filler
- GRAT = Gratitude

As shown by Table 1 above, indirect strategy (913) was mostly used in the learners’ responses followed by direct strategy (235) and adjuncts to refusal (229). Based on the refusal strategies classification, the learners almost used all the strategies but statement of philosophy, nonverbal avoidance and lack of enthusiasm. The sub-strategies mostly utilized by the learners were excuse, reason and explanation followed by statement of regret. It was also found that the learners barely utilized performative and indefinite reply which both were utilized in responding to Situation 10.

#### 4.2. Refusal-SASM and Acts of Refusing

As mentioned before, SASM questionnaire was used in collecting data about the learners’ motivation in producing appropriate refusal. There were 26 items of the questionnaire answered by 45 learners. Based on the results, learners’ SASM in total ranged from a minimum 69 to a maximum of 95 with mean and standard deviation were 83.73 and 6.319 respectively.

Table: 3 Learners’ Refusal-Speech Act Specific Motivation

No. of Students	No. of items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
45	26	69	95	83.73	6.319

For the DCT (as shown in the table below), the learners had responded all 12 situations given. The results showed the learner’ appropriateness scale ranged from a minimum 3.56 to a maximum 4.49 with means of 4.07 and standard deviation of 0.22.

Table: 4 Learners’ Discourse Completion Task

No. of Students	No. of items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
45	12	3.56	4.49	4.07	0.22

One of the objectives of the study was to find out whether there was correlation between learners’ refusal-SASM and their acts of refusing. Thus, the writer conducted Pearson Product-Moment Correlation by using SPSS which the result could be seen in table below.

Table: 5 Correlation between Refusal-SASM and Acts of Refusing

		Correlations	
		SASM	REFUSAL
SASM	Pearson	1	-.290
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.053
	N	45	45
REFUSAL	Pearson	-.290	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.053	
	N	45	45

The results (in **Table 5**) showed that r-obtained was 0.290 and p-value was 0.053. The two variables is considered as a significant correlated if the p-value was lower than 0.05. Therefore, it could be assumed that there was no significant correlation between learners' SASM and their acts of refusing because the p-value was higher 0.05 and the r-obtained was lower than r-table (0.312).

Table: 6 Regression between Learners' SASM and their Acts of Refusing

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.055 <sup>a</sup>	.003	-.020	6.382

a. Predictors: (Constant), Refusal

Regression test was also conducted to see how much one variable could influence the other. As shown in **Table 6**, the result showed R value was 0.055 with R square 0.003. The contribution of learners' SASM towards their refusal was only 3%, it means 97% was influenced by another factor that would not be discussed in the recent study.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The refusal strategies realized by the learners were varied from direct strategies to adjuncts to refusal. From the research result regarding frequency of refusal strategies, indirect strategy was the preferred strategy. It is ideal for Indonesian to utilize indirect strategy since this strategy helps the speaker refuse without having conflict with the hearer (Basthomi, 2014). The most sub-strategies of indirect strategy used were excuse, reason, explanation followed by statement of regret. It is similar to the previous study which concluded that the reason of Indonesian learners used giving reason and explanation the most was because they were still more influenced by their Indonesian language culture than the target language culture (Rahayu, 2019). Indonesian people tended to avoid doing acts of refusing since refusal realization might result feeling of discomfort and distance between interlocutors. Thus, they would utilize the speech act of refusal as polite as possible if they are required to refuse, hence, indirect strategy would be the most relevant strategy (Chojimah, 2015). It is in line with the recent study's results which the two mostly used strategies belong to indirect strategy and the lack of using direct "no". Even though direct "no" or performative was the least strategy used, the learners still utilized nonperformative. The researcher found that the learners tended to use this strategy to refuse equal and lower status. Even if the learners utilized direct strategy, they were always found to combine it with indirect strategy as well. It is their consideration in order to save 'face' of the hearer (Eviliana, 2015). The lack of direct strategy utilized also could show how EFL learners actually are aware of the

offensiveness of direct strategy could be (Mohammed & Adeeb, 2021), thus indirect strategy was utilized the most by EFL learners.

Adjuncts to refusal was also found to be applied by the learners, they tended to use adjuncts to combine it with their refusal statements. Among four sub-strategies, gratitude was the most preferred one. Expressing gratitude could mitigate refusal statement hence it was the preferred adjunct (Eviliana, 2015). Interestingly, the learners frequently showed gratitude to lower status and unfamiliar person. The frequency was even greater than the use of gratitude to higher status. The second most preferred adjunct was statement of positive opinion or agreement which was utilized in all situations except on Situation 9. This adjunct was used because the learners were aware of the hearer's face and worried about it, hence it was utilized in order to save the relationship with the hearer (Fitri et al., 2020).

The insignificant correlation was found between learners' refusal-SASM and their acts of refusing with  $r$ -obtained and  $p$ -value were 0.290 and 0.053 respectively. The recent study also found that the contribution of learners' refusal-SASM towards their acts of refusing was only 3%. It supports the previous study which revealed that SASM can predict EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge in a small degree comparing to the other type of pragmatic motivation. However, another previous study did confirm that English learning motivation has moderate correlation to non-English major students' pragmatic competence. The study also clarified that someone's pragmatic competence is influenced by many other factors such as culture, social situations and classes (Hidayatullah & Hidayanto, 2023).

As mentioned before that pragmatic motivation has two types; General Pragmatic Motivation and Speech Act Specific Motivation. The fact that EFL learners having greater speech act specific motivation than general one indicates that EFL learners acknowledge "the importance of speech acts and form-function relationship" (Tajeddin & Moghadam, 2012). However, the correlation between SASM and act of refusing was not significant. It may be because of how EFL learners still rely on their native language culture than the target language, thus their acts of refusing are still influenced by their L1 cultural norm. It is assumed that people with different cultural background would show different foreign language's pragmatic patterns (Oktavia et al., 2023)

From the refusal produced by the participants, it was clear that they tried to refuse the situations as polite as possible. However, there was still nonperformative strategy found which is the sub-strategy of direct strategy. The use of nonperformative could show how the learners try to avoid hurting the hearer's feeling (Asmali, 2013). This politeness could be the contribution of their L1. It is very clear that Indonesian culture is more collectivistic than English culture by means (Kadarisman, 2009). Indonesians are always known to have a communication etiquette called *tata karma* which indicate them to consider someone's age, gender and class in communication situations (Oktavia et al., 2023). Indonesians also tend to not speak openly and express their thoughts indirectly (Muniroh, 2013). Beside communication etiquette, respecting others and living in harmonious are upheld in the Indonesian society (Chojimah, 2015). Those living situations would likely contribute to how people communicate with each other. Thus, indirect strategy is the most preferred strategy to use since it is considered as the safest way to refuse.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The learners were found utilizing indirect strategy the most in refusing to almost all situations given. The most preferred strategy was excuse, reason, explanation and followed by statement of regret. Those strategies were applied in almost all responses which could indicate how they

wanted to sound as polite as possible. The recent study also found that the correlation between the learner's refusal-SASM and their acts of refusing was insignificant. Based on the regression analysis, the contribution of their refusal-SASM towards their refusal was only 3%. This result showed how the learners' refusal might be influenced by any other 97% factors. One of the potential factors could be the learners' L1. However, how any other factors could influence the learners' refusal is needed to be further conducted.

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