

How to Say 'No' in Chinese: A Pragmatic Study of Refusal Strategies in Five TV Series

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This paper analyzed situations in which refusal will occur and examined the refusal strategies and corresponding linguistic forms that can be employed to react to various refusal situations in Chinese culture. Since refusal is an act in response to other acts, acts that prompt refusals play an important role in the choices of refusal strategies. Therefore, this paper categorizes situations of refusal according to the initiating acts of refusal. Based on 160 video clips collected from five television series, this paper found that refusal is initiated by four types of acts: request, offer, invitation, and suggestion. Each type can be subcategorized in terms of their different communicative functions. The study can facilitate the instruction of refusal to learners of Chinese from multiple perspectives.

0. Introduction

Although there are a number of studies of refusal, most of them deal with either English or Japanese (e.g., Morrow 1995, Gass & Houck 1999). Only a handful of studies focus on Chinese (e.g., Liao 1994, Chen & Zhang 1995, Chen 1996), and these studies tend to analyze refusal from the perspective of semantic content. Although examples of refusal strategies are given, the contexts in which these strategies were used are not analyzed in detail. For example, they did not study the contextual restriction of each strategy and hence may make over-generalizations. Furthermore, these studies have focused primarily on the person who conducted the refusal so that the party who responded to the refusal is not analyzed. Considering these limitations, it is necessary to examine when, where, and as well as the roles of the interlocutors (“initiator” and “refuser”). This is the kind of knowledge that learners of Chinese most need when they encounter situations of refusals. This paper therefore analyzes situations in which refusal will occur and examines the refusal strategies and corresponding linguistic forms that can be employed to react to certain refusal situations.

Since refusal is an act in response to other acts, acts that prompt refusals play an important role in the choices of refusal strategies. Therefore, this paper categorizes situations of refusal according to the initiating acts of refusal. The data for analysis is collected from five television series. Compared with previous data collection methods,

such as discourse completion tests or role plays, this data collection method has its own advantages for pragmatic study (see section 3).

Based on 160 video clips collected from five television series, this paper found that refusal is initiated by four types of acts: request, offer, invitation, and suggestion. Each type can be subcategorized in terms of their different communicative functions. Based on the data, 12 subcategories were identified (solicited suggestions, unsolicited suggestions, requests for favor, requests for permission/acceptance/agreement, requests for information/advice, requests for action, ritual invitations, real invitations, offers of gifts/favors, offers of drinks/foods and offers of opportunities). A pragmatic analysis was conducted to examine the refusal strategies and corresponding linguistic forms employed to deal with different types of initiating acts.

Both Chinese language instructors and learners of Chinese can benefit from this analysis. For Chinese language instructors, this analysis provides a rationale to select, organize and present examples of refusals in classroom instruction. For learners of Chinese, this analysis functions as a guide to learners on differentiating various refusal situations and directs them to make appropriate linguistic moves when encountering certain initiating acts of refusal.

1. Previous Studies on Chinese Refusal

As previously mentioned, although there are a number of studies of refusal, most of them deal with either English or Japanese (e.g., Morrow 1995, Gass & Houck 1999). Only a handful of studies focus on Chinese (e.g., Liao 1994, Chen & Zhang 1995, Chen 1996). Liao (1994) conducted a qualitative and quantitative study based on data collected from a realistic conversation writing test. English teachers, undergraduates and junior high school students in Taiwan (age, 18-55 yr.), were asked to develop three or four conversations dealing with requests and refusals. Through a qualitative analysis of the collected data, she found 22 refusal strategies and proposed six maxims (sincerity, agreement, tact, address, modesty and economy) underlying these strategies. Liao's analysis was primarily based on the semantic classification of refusal strategies. Although 22 refusal strategies are identified, when, where and to whom these strategies are directed to was not mentioned. In addition, the influence of power, social distance, and rank of imposition on refusal strategies were not examined.

Chen and Zhang (1995) also analyzed Chinese refusal by means of a written discourse completion test with 100 native speakers of Mandarin (50 men and 50 women, who had lived in the U.S. for an average of 2.4 years at the time of the study). Compared with Liao's study (1994), Chen and Zhang (1995) paid more attention to context. They examined the distribution of refusal strategies in response to four types of initiating acts: request, invitation, suggestion, and offer. In addition, they examined the distribution of refusal strategies in relation to social status. However, their data-collecting method determined that the refusal scenarios included in this study were limited. The questionnaire contained only 16 refusal situations. This restricted the analysis to the four general

types of initiating acts. In fact, the four initiating acts could be subcategorized according to the intentions the interlocutors wanted to establish or to the setting where the refusal took place. Different refusal strategies can be used in response to each of these subcategories. For example, the strategies used to refuse a suggestion by a salesman will be quite different from the strategies used to refuse a request by a close friend

Chen (1996) compared how native speakers of English and Chinese EFL learners differ in their perception of what is pragmatically appropriate for refusal and discussed the patterns, characteristics, and beliefs embedded in the differences. Like most previous studies, Chen used a written discourse completion test to collect refusal data from twenty-six native and nonnative speakers of English. The questionnaire in this study contained eight scenarios covering the four initiating acts. The scenarios involved interlocutors of various social statuses, but were limited to acquaintances only. None of the scenarios deal with refusals between strangers and intimates. After the analysis, she concluded that there was a pattern with each language group and for each scenario, and context factors triggered the pattern difference in some scenarios. Chen's study demonstrated that the importance of context to understand and implement refusal. However, due to the limitation of the data-collection method, only eight scenarios were included in this study, which does not provide a comprehensive view of the patterning of refusal strategies.

2. Methodology

Considering the limitations of previous studies, this paper tried to answer two research questions: 1) what kinds of refusal strategies are used by Chinese native speakers? 2) When, where and to whom are these strategies used? What attitudes and themes seem to be embedded in these strategies? In order to resolve the first question, this study employed the refusal formula classification first proposed by Takahashi, Beebe and Uliss-Weltz (1990), the most comprehensive and widely used system, to identify the refusal strategies used in Chinese culture. In order to answer the second question, this paper categorized situations of refusal according to the initiating acts of refusal. For each initiating act, other factors influencing the selections of refusal strategies were examined, such as the relationship between the interlocutors, the Chinese concept of "face" and general characteristics of Chinese communication. In this way, situations in which refusals occur will be easily identified and functions conveyed by each strategy can be analyzed.

3. The Data

The data for analysis is collected from five television series: *Qīngniǎo de tiānkōng* (青鳥的天空) 'The Sky of the Green Bird,' *Qīngchūn bùjiě fēngqíng* (青春不解風情) 'Youth does not understand amorous feelings,' *Yùwàng* (欲望) 'The Desire,' *Biānjíbù de gùshì* (編輯部的故事) 'Stories in the Editors' office' and *Yī dì jīmáo* (一地雞毛) 'Trifles over the ground.' 160 clips of refusals have been selected from these

television series. All these television series are produced after 1990s, which represent modern Standard Chinese.

Compared with previous data collection methods, such as discourse completion tests or role plays, this data collection method has four advantages: 1) clips from television series provide contextual information, which is essential for pragmatic analysis. Most television series present ongoing stories about a specific set of people at specific locations doing certain things in culture. The contextual factors of a refusal instance, such as time, place, and the roles of the participants, can be easily identified in a television series. 2) Video clips from television series record both the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of participants in interactions. This will facilitate the examination of non-verbal behaviors of refusal. 3) Clips from television are materials that are readily adaptable for foreign language learning. They present not only linguistic expressions but also how these expressions are actually uttered in certain contexts by native speakers. 4) From the operational perspective, contextual variables are easier to control in produced video clips data, because researchers can more easily select the genre, the topics and the main characters of the television series. Compared with discourse completion tests which are short segments of realistic interactions, video clips from television series record the whole interaction process of refusal, which includes the information of the turn-taking mechanism and the negotiation strategies. Compared with role plays, data involving more situations can be collected in a relatively short time by means of video clips from television series.

4. Refusal Strategies in Chinese Culture

Based on the classification system by Takahashi, Beebe and Uliss-Weltz (1990), twelve refusal strategies and four adjuncts were identified in the data. Two adjuncts that do not appear in the classification by Takahashi, Beebe and Uliss-Weltz (1999) were observed: address forms and ritual politeness statements. The strategies and adjuncts that appeared in the data are illustrated in the following:

I. Direct Refusal: direct denial using denying vocabulary or statements showing unwillingness or inability.

1. Using denying vocabulary

不行。 *bùxíng* ‘No’

不可以。 *bù kěyǐ*. ‘Can’t be done.’ / ‘Can’t be allowed.’

2. Statements showing unwillingness or inability

不用。 *bùyòng* ‘Not necessary.’

不要。 *bùyào* ‘Don’t want.’

算了。 *suànle* ‘Forget it.’

II. Indirect Refusal

1. Statement of regret
對不起. *duìbùqǐ*. 'Sorry.'
不好意思. *bùhǎoyìsī*. 'Feel embarrassed.'
2. Excuse, reason, explanation
我還有事兒. *wǒ hái yǒu shier*. 'I still have some things to do.'
3. Statement of alternative
我來吧. *wǒ lái bā*. 'Let me do it.'
你可以明天再來. *nǐ kěyǐ míngtiān zài lái*. 'You can come tomorrow.'
4. Set condition for future or past acceptance
他去我就去. *tā qù wǒ jiù qù*. 'If he comes, I will come.'
5. Promise of future acceptance
下次我一定來. *xiàcì wǒ yīdìng qù*. 'I will certainly come next time.'
6. Statement of principle
我丈夫從不收禮. *wǒ zhàngfū cónglái bù shōulǐ*.
'My husband never accepts gifts.'
7. Statement of philosophy
幫人幫到底. *bāng rén bāng dào dǐ*.
'Help one, help all.'
8. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor
你不想做, 你可以辭職. *nǐ bùxiǎng zuò , nǐ kěyǐ cízhí*.
'If you don't want to do it, you can quit the job.'
你想過這樣做的後果嗎? *nǐ xiǎng guò zhèyàng zuò de hòuguǒ ma ?*
'Have you ever thought about the consequences of acting this way?'
9. Acceptance that functions as a refusal
你的要求我們會考慮的. *nǐ de yàoliú wǒmen huì kǎolù de*.
'We will think over your requests.'
10. Avoidance
 - Nonverbal
 - Silence
 - Hesitation
 - Physical departure

o Verbal

▪ Topic switch

▪ Joke

我不能找你買保險。看到你這麼漂亮的保險推銷員，我一定把我的工資都買了保險。

wǒ bùnéng zhǎo nǐ mǎi bǎoxiǎn. kàndào nǐ zhème piāoliàng de bǎoxiǎn tuīxiāoyuán, wǒ yīdìng bǎ wǒ de gōngzī dōu mǎi le bǎoxiǎn.

‘I can't buy insurance from you. Seeing such a pretty insurance saleswoman like you, I will certainly spend all my salary on insurance.’

▪ Repetition of part of request

借錢? jiè qián? ‘Borrow money?’

▪ Postponement

讓我們研究研究。ràng wǒmen yánjiū yánjiū.

‘Let’s think it over.’

▪ Hedge

我試一試吧，但不保證。

wǒ shìyīshì bā , dàn bù bǎozhèng.

‘Let me try it, but I can’t guarantee anything.’

這個問題我不太清楚。

zhègè wèntí wǒ bù tai qīngchǔ.

I’m not sure about this problem.

III. Adjuncts: expressions that accompany a refusal but cannot be used to fulfill a refusal alone.

1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement

好是好... *hǎo shì hǎo* ‘It’s good, but...’

我很想去, *wǒ hěn xiǎng qù*, ‘I would like to go...’

2. Statement of empathy or understanding

我理解你的處境很難。 *wǒ lǐjiě nǐ de chǔjìng hěnnán.*

‘I realize you are in a difficult situation.’

3. Pause fillers

嗯 *en* ‘uhh’/ 哦, *ò*, ‘oh’ / 那 *nà* ‘well’

4. Gratitude/appreciation

謝謝。 *xièxiè.* ‘Thanks.’

5. Address form

王經理 *wáng jīnglǐ* ‘Manger Wang’

大姐 *dàjiě* ‘Big Sister’

6. ritual politeness statement
別客氣。 *bié kèqì*. 'Don't be polite/ That's OK.'
你太客氣了。 *nǐ tai kèqì le*. 'You are too polite.'

5. The Classification of Chinese Refusals

As previously mentioned, this paper tried to analyze refusal strategies in terms of the various types of initiating acts. In the data, refusal is initiated by four types of acts: request, offer, invitation, and suggestion. Each type can be subcategorized in terms of their different communicative functions. The categorization of initiating acts in refusal sequences is shown in the following:

1. Invitation

1) **Ritual invitation**: ritual invitation often occurs at the end of the interactions. It functions as a leave-taking act between interlocutors. Through unspecific expressions of invitation, the inviter shows the willingness of maintaining relationship with the listener in the future. For example,

有空到我家來玩兒。
yǒu kōng dào wǒjiā lái wánér.
'Come to visit me sometime.'

2) **Real invitation**: it shows speakers' sincere intention to treat the listener and functions as an invitation

2. Offer

- 1) **Gift offer**
- 2) **Favor offer** (e.g. giving a ride)
- 3) **Food / drink offer**
- 4) **Opportunity offer** (e.g. job, promotion)

3. Suggestion

- 1) **Solicited suggestion**: the suggestions asked by the interlocutor
 - 2) **Unsolicited suggestion**: the suggestions voluntarily given by the interlocutor
- A. Personal suggestion**: the suggestions given by the speaker to establish or / and maintain the relationship between the listener.

- Show concern:
天氣涼了，你最好多穿些衣服。
tiānqì liáng le , nǐ zuìhǎo duō chuān xiē yīfú.
'The weather is getting cold. You'd better wear more clothes.'
- Develop conversation rapport:
時間不早了，早點回家吧！
shíjiān bù zǎo le , zǎodiǎn huíjiā bā !
'Time is running late. Go home earlier!'

- Establish or show membership in a group:

把你當自己人，我才建議你別去的。

bǎ nǐ dāng zìjǐ rén , wǒ cái jiànyì nǐ biéqù de.

‘Because I consider you as my insider, I suggested you not go.’

B. Commercial suggestion: suggestions to guide others’ commercial thoughts or behaviors, such as the suggestions to buy by salesmen or advertisements.

4. Request

- 1) **Request for favor** (e.g. borrowing or help)
- 2) **Request for permission / acceptance / agreement** (e.g. job application)
- 3) **Request for information/advice** (e.g. product information)
- 4) **Request for action** (e.g. payment)

5.1 Refusal of Invitations

In Chinese culture, sometimes speakers will offer invitation in a ritual way to show politeness. This type of invitation often occurs at the end of the interactions and functions as a leave-taking act between interlocutors. Through unspecific expressions of invitation, the inviter shows his/her willingness of maintaining relationship with the listener in the future. In this paper, this type of invitation is called “ritual invitation,” while the invitation that expresses the addresser’s sincere intention to treat the addressee is called “real invitation.” Different strategies are employed by Chinese speakers to deal with the two types of invitations.

Ritual invitations often occur between acquaintances as a way to show the willingness to maintain relationships with each other. Compared with real invitations, the inviter will not give many details about the invitation. Normally, the invitee tends to accept the invitation without asking for further information. There are no expectations of subsequent actions for both the inviter and invitee. As shown in the following example, A offered a ritual invitation “come and visit us sometime” as a way to indicate the termination of their conversation. Correctly interpreting the intention of A, B accepted the invitation without asking for the details and took leave after the acceptance. Sometimes, when the invitee is not sure whether the invitation is real or ritual, the invitee will ritually refuse the invitation to ascertain the real intention of the inviter.

(A and B are two old friends. One day, they ran into each other on the street. After an exchange of information, A planned to terminate their conversation through a ritual invitation.)

A: 有空去我們家。

B: 行，打電話吧。我有事先走了。

A: 好，拜拜。

A: *yǒukōng qù wǒmén jiā .*

B: *xíng, dǎ diànhuà ba . wǒ yǒushì xiān zǒu le .*

A: *hǎo, bàibài .*

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- A: Come and visit us sometime.
B: OK. Call me. I have to leave because of some stuff.
A: OK. Bye.

From *Yùwàng* (2000) 'The Desire,' episode 8

There are two types of refusals in Chinese culture. One is real refusal when the addressee says “no” directly or indirectly and means “no”. The other is ritual refusal when the addressee says “no” directly or indirectly, but in fact the addressee is willing to accept the initiating act. Ritual refusal functions as a polite act to show refuser’s considerations of the initiator. The two types of refusals both occur when dealing with real invitation. Different strategies are used in these two types of refusals.

Sometimes, it is difficult to judge whether an invitation is real or ritual. In this case, ritual refusal can be used to infer the real intention of the inviter, except for showing concerns about the costs that the inviter will bear. If the inviter doesn’t insist on inviting, the invitation can be interpreted as a ritual one. Then, declining is an appropriate way to respond to this invitation. On the other hand, if the response of the inviter indicates that the invitation is a serious and real one, ritual refusal will lead to a final acceptance. For example,

(After work, two roommates are at home.)

- A: 我們一塊去吃飯吧，我請客!
B: 幹嘛亂花錢啊，今天還是我做吧!
A: 哎喲，別做了，難得高興嘛!
B: 那好吧!
A: *wǒmén yīkuài qù chīfàn bā , wǒ qǐngkè!*
B: *gànma luàn huāqián ā , jīntiān háishì wǒ zuò bā !*
A: *āiyō , bié zuò le , nándé gāoxīng ma !*
B: *nà hǎo bā !*
A: Let’s dine out together. I’ll take care of the bill.
B: Why waste money? Let me cook today.
A: Hey, don’t cook. It’s my pleasure (to treat you).
B: Alright.

From *Qīngchūn bù jiě fēngqíng* (2001) 'Youth does not understand amorous feelings,' episode 9

In this example, the first response of B is a ritual refusal in response to the invitation by A. In this ritual refusal, B employed a negative opinion “Why waste money?” to show her concern about the cost of A. Then B used an alternative “Let me cook today” to infer whether the invitation is a real one. A declined the alternative and stated the reason of invitation. Therefore, B was certain of the sincerity of the invitation and finally accepted it. As shown in the example, ritual refusal of invitation generally has two functions. On the one hand, it ritually functions as a polite behavior to show concerns about

the costs of the inviter, and indicates gratitude to the inviter. On the other hand, it is also a way to infer whether the invitation is ritual or real. According to the responses by the inviter, the invitee is able to choose appropriate strategies to respond. Normally, the invitee will not give specific reasons, excuses or explanations in ritual refusal. Formulaic expressions to express concerns about the inviter are often employed, such as *tai máfán* (太麻煩) ‘too much trouble’ and *zhēn bùhǎoyìsī* (真不好意思) ‘I am embarrassed.’

When dealing with real invitations, specific reasons, excuses, explanations or alternatives are the primary strategies. The relationship between interlocutors, such as the social status of the inviter, the social distance between the inviter and the invitee, determines whether other strategies are accompanied with the reason. When refusing invitations by acquaintances or people of unequal status, statements of regrets or appreciation will be favored. When refusing invitations by intimates, these statements are infrequently used.

Following are three examples dealing with real invitations by people who are in different relationship with the invitee. Reasons, excuses or explanations are employed as the main refusal strategy in all the three examples. However, various adjuncts are employed in response to different relationships between the interlocutors. Example 1 deals with an invitation by a business partner. Except for a reason, the invitee used an adjunct of gratitude and appreciation (“Thanks for your kindness”) to show thanks for the invitation, since the banquet is specially prepared for the invitee. In Example 2, when dealing with an invitation by a coworker, the invitee used a statement of regret *bùhǎoyìsī* (不好意思) ‘I’m embarrassed’ to soften the refusal. Example 3 deals with an invitation by a close friend. No adjuncts are employed in addition to a specific reason.

Example 1:

(At the end of a work day, two business partners are in the office)

A: 今天晚上公司的管理層為你設宴洗塵。

B: 多謝葛總美意，可是今天不行，晚上六點我還有一個重要的約會。

A: *jīntiān wǎnshàng gōngsī de guǎnlǐcéng wéi nǐ shèyànxǐchén.*

B: *duōxiè Gězǒng měiyì, kěshì jīntiān bùxíng, wǎnshàng liùdiǎn wǒ háiyǒu yīgè zhòngyào de yuēhuì.*

A: The management level of the company will hold a welcome banquet for you tonight.

B: Thanks for your kindness, Manager Ge, but today doesn’t work. I have an important appointment at six tonight.

From *Qīngchūn bù jiě fēngqíng* (2001) ‘Youth does not understand amorous feelings, episode 1

Example 2:

(at the end of a work day, two coworkers are in the office)

A: 今天晚上有時間嗎? 我請你吃飯。

B: 不好意思，今天晚上我約了人了。

A: 好，好，算了，明天吧!

A: *jīntiān wǎnshàng yǒu shíjiān ma? wǒ qǐng nǐ chīfàn.*

B: *bù hǎo yìsī, jīntiān wǎnshàng wǒ yuē le rén.*

A: *hǎo, suànle, míngtiān bā!*

A: Are you free tonight? I will invite you to dinner.

B: I feel sorry. I have an appointment with others tonight.

A: Well, well, let it be. (Let's have dinner) tomorrow!

From *Yùwàng* (2000) 'The Desire,' episode 25

Example 3:

(In the evening, two roommates are at home)

A: 我們明天要去找工作。你明天不是沒事？跟我們一塊兒去吧！

B: 我明天有事，我要去接我男朋友。

A: *wǒmén míngtiān yào qù zhǎo gōngzuò. nǐ míngtiān bù shì méishì? gēn wǒmén yīkuàiér qù bā!*

B: *wǒ míngtiān yǒushì, wǒ yào qù jiē wǒ nán péngyǒu.*

A: We are going to look for jobs tomorrow. Aren't you free tomorrow? Go with us!

B: I have something to be done tomorrow. I am going to pick up my boyfriend.

From *Qīngchūn bù jiě fēngqíng* (2001) 'Youth does not understand amorous feelings, episode 1

5.2 Refusal of Offers

According to what is offered, there are four types of offers: "gift offer", "favor offer", "food / drink offer" and "opportunity offer". Except for opportunity offer, both ritual refusal and real refusal will occur when dealing with other three types of offers.

Chinese people tend to decline gifts multiple times before final acceptance. It is a ritual way to show modesty and to avoid indications of personal greed. Usually, some formulaic politeness expressions will be used to refuse gifts ritually, such as *nǐ tai kèqì le* (你太客氣了) 'You are too polite' and *bùhǎo yìsī* (不好意思) 'I am embarrassed.' These expressions can be considered as signs of ritual refusals. Sometimes, questions to blame the gifts giver will be used in this type of refusal, such as *gànma dài dōngxī lái?* (幹嘛帶東西來?) 'Why do you bring gifts?' or *gànma mǎi zhème duō dōngxī ne?* (幹嘛買這麼多東西呢?) 'Why do you buy so many things?' These strategies started as a way to indicate negative opinions about gift offering and eventually became a ritualistic way to respond to any gift offers. For example,

(A and B are business partners. After a business negotiation, A prepared a banquet for B. The following conversation occurs on the way to the banquet.)

A: 吃完了飯我開車送你們回去，走的時候帶幾箱汽水，可樂什麼的。

B: 哎喲，那不用了，你們太客氣了。

A: 沒什麼。別客氣，別客氣。

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A: *chī wán le fàn wǒ kāichē sòng nǐmén huíqù, zǒu de shíhòu dài jǐxiāng qìshuǐ , kěle shíme de.*

B: *āiyō , nà bù yòng le , nǐmén tai kèqì le.*

A: *méishénme. bié kèqì , bié kèqì.*

A: After the dinner, I will drive you back. Why don't you take some soda back with you?

B: Oh, it is not necessary. You are too polite!

A: It's no big deal! Don't be polite. Don't be polite.

From *Biānjībù de gùshì* (1992), 'Stories in the Editors' office,' episode 13

There are always possibilities that Chinese people genuinely intend to refuse a gift. Normally, a long negotiation process will be involved in real refusals of gift offer. The two parties of the negotiation will both employ several strategies to dissuade each other before arriving at a final agreement. According to the data, alternatives, statements of principle and direct refusals are the primary strategies to genuinely refuse gifts. Except for direct refusal, these strategies are seldom employed in ritual refusals of gift. Although direct refusal occurs in both real and ritual refusals of gifts, its usage is different in these two types of refusals. Direct refusal is normally accompanied by other strategies (e.g. alternatives or reasons) in real refusals while direct refusal is accompanied by formulaic expressions in ritual refusals. In addition, statements of the costs that the gift giver will bear usually appear in real refusals, while these statements seldom occur in ritual refusals.

Like gift offers, Chinese people tend to decline favors multiple times. In Chinese culture, this behavior is a polite way to show modesty, because it indicates the willingness of not putting many troubles on others. As shown in the following example, specific reasons, alternatives and other strategies will not appear in ritual refusal. Usually, direct refusal, e.g. *bùyòng le* (不用了), 'not necessary' and formulaic politeness expressions e.g. *tai máfán nǐ* (太麻煩你) or *gòu máfán nǐ le* (夠麻煩你) 'I bothered you so much' are common ways to ritually refuse favors.

(Two old school friends are chatting on the street)

A: 回家還是回飯店，我開車送你吧！

B: 不用，不用，我已經夠麻煩你的了。

A: 跟老同學你還客氣啊？

A: *huíjiā háishì huí fàndiàn , wǒ kāichē sòng nǐ bā!*

B: *bù yòng , bù yòng , wǒ yǐjīng gòu máfán nǐ de le.*

A: *gēn lǎo tóngxué nǐ hái kèqì ā?*

A: Go home or go to the hotel. Let me give you a ride.

B: It is not necessary, not necessary. I have already bothered you so much.

A: Why are you so polite to your old school friend?

From *Yùwàng* (2000) 'The Desire,' episode 4

Because favor offers often benefit the addressee at the expenses of increasing the costs of the addresser, an immediate direct refusal avoids any suspicion of the addresser and decreases the trouble or costs the addresser will bear. Hence, direct refusal is mostly favored for refusing favors. These direct refusal expressions include *bùyòng (le)* (不用了) 'not necessary,' *suànle* (算了) 'forget it,' *bùxíng* (不行) 'no way' and *bù* (不) 'no.' From the perspective of Chinese, offering favors means the addresser is giving face to the addressee. If the favor is refused, the favor giver will feel like he / she has lost face. In order to save the face of the favor giver, when genuinely refusing favor offers, direct refusal is often accompanied by other strategies, such as alternatives and reasons, excuses or explanations.

Like ritual refusals of favors and gifts, Chinese people tend to decline food or drink offers multiple times before final acceptance, especially when the food or drink are offered by unfamiliar people. Formulaic politeness expressions, such as *bié kèqì* (別客氣), or *bùyòng kèqì* (不用客氣) 'don't be polite', are often used alone in ritual refusal of drink or food. Sometimes, direct refusal like *bùyòng le* (不用了) 'not necessary' and *biémáng le* (別忙了) 'don't be busy' is employed to ritually refuse foods or drinks.

A lot of Westerners complain that it is very difficult for them to refuse food or drink offer in China. Chinese people often interpret their refusal as ritual way to show politeness. However, in Chinese culture, there really exist some situations when Chinese people genuinely refuse food or drink. In these situations, a persuasive reason, excuse or explanation or a statement of principle is necessary. As shown in the collected data, a safe guard may state the principle "No smoking while working" to refuse an offer of a cigarette from the customer. Allergy could be a persuasive reason to refuse an offer of foods from coworkers.

Unlike gifts, favors or food / drink offers, there are no ritual refusals of opportunity offers in Chinese culture. The speaker sincerely intends to decline the opportunity when he/she refuses the opportunity directly or indirectly. According to the data, reasons, excuses or explanations and alternatives are the most preferred strategies to refuse opportunity. Direct refusal is also employed to clarify the intention of refusal.

5.3 Refusal of Suggestions

A suggestion occurs when one person uses utterances to propose some actions or at least changes on the part of the addressee. According to whether the suggestions are required by the listener, there are two types of suggestions: solicited suggestions and unsolicited suggestions.

5.3.1 Refusal of Solicited Suggestions

Solicited suggestions refer to suggestions needed by the listener. The speaker gives suggestions in response to the listener's needs. For example, a subordinate comes to the manager and asks for the manager's suggestions about the new business plan. A graduate asks for advisors' suggestions about his / her paper.

In my data, solicited suggestions only occur between acquaintances or intimates, since people are more likely to trust suggestions given by acquaintances or intimates. Four refusal strategies are used to refuse solicited suggestions: direct refusal, giving a reason, excuse or explanation, statement of alternative, and attempts to dissuade the interlocutor. Three types of adjuncts are observed: pause filler, address form and statement of positive opinion or feeling. The relationship between the interlocutors also influences the choices of strategies. In the data, when dealing with solicited suggestions by intimates, the most frequently used strategy is the attempt to dissuade the interlocutor, followed by excuse, reason and explanation. The close relationship allows the refuser to have more freedom to dissuade the suggestion giver. However, when dealing with solicited suggestions by acquaintances, excuse, reason or explanation are still the most frequently used strategies, followed by alternatives or attempts to dissuade the interlocutor.

5.3.2 Refusal of Unsolicited Suggestions

Unsolicited suggestions are suggestions that are voluntarily given by the speaker without the request of the listener. Hinkel (1994) claims that speakers of Chinese or Japanese often utilize giving advice / suggestions as a rapport-building strategy, with various intentions akin to the purpose of small talk and/or conversation-making devices, which show solidarity and affirmation. In this paper, suggestions used to establish or maintain relationships are termed as personal suggestions. Unsolicited suggestions given by salesmen or peddlers to influence others' purchase behavior are called commercial suggestions.

When dealing with personal suggestions that show concern, the primary strategies include explanation, excuse or reason, direct refusal and alternative. Because unsolicited suggestions often occur between acquaintances, correct choice of the form of address is very important in mitigating the uncomfortable feelings caused by refusal, for example:

(Jinzi is an hourly rate maid for Xuihui. Jini had been doing housework for several hours, and her hostess asked her to rest a while and drink some water.)

主人：金枝，時間到了，過來喝點水吧！

金枝：不用了，徐慧姐，我幹完了我再喝。

zhǔrén : Jīnzhī , shíjiān dào le , guòlái hē diǎn shuǐ bā !

Jīnzhī : bù yòng le , Xúhuì jiě , wǒ gàn wán le wǒ zài hē .

Hostess: Jinzi, work-time is over! Come here and drink some water.

Jinzi: That's OK, sister Xuhui. After I am finished, I will have something to drink.

From Qīngniǎo de tiānkōng (2003) 'The Sky of Green Bird,' episode 1

In this example, the maid used the form of address *xúhuì jiě* (徐慧姐) 'Older Sister Xu Hui' to maintain and strengthen their relationship. Heavily influenced by Confucian tradition, Chinese people believe family relationship is the most solid and loyal relationship. People who are related by blood are inherently in-group members who

trust each other and help each other. Gradually, these kinship terms have been extended to people who do not share blood relationships, particularly when the addresser wants to establish a friendly and reciprocal relationship with the addressee.

Unsolicited personal suggestions are also used to build conversational rapport and elicit more information. Following is an example of this type of refusal:

(Gu and Hao are in-laws. One day, Hao went to visit Gu.)

顧：您工作這麼忙，應該我去看您。

郝：哪里，您太客氣了。

Gu: nín gōngzuò zhème máng , yīnggāi wǒ qù kàn nín.

Hǎo : nǎlǐ , nín tai kèqì le.

Gu: You are so busy. I should come to visit you.

Hao: Not at all. You are too polite.

From *Yùwàng* (2000) 'The Desire,' episode 14

The suggestion "I should come to visit you" is a ritual way to build conversational rapport and to show respect for the addressee, although Gu may not truly want to visit Hao. This kind of suggestion often functions as a small talk between two acquaintances after they greet each other. Because the expression "I should come to visit you" raises the position of the addressee and lowers the speaker's position, it also functions as a compliment to the addressee. Therefore, formulaic, polite expressions are used to deal with this kind of suggestion. *nǎlǐ* (哪里) 'not at all' is a ritual expression used to respond to a compliment. *nǐ tai kèqì le* (你太客氣了) 'You are too polite' is used to show the acceptance of the politeness indicated by the speaker.

Sometimes, Chinese speakers use unsolicited suggestions to establish or show membership in the same group as the listener. As Shepherd states (2005: 215), "in a group-oriented culture such as China's, syncing plays a much more obvious role than in the more individually-oriented culture of the United States. Chinese behavior is often determined by what others do or not do." Therefore, establishing or showing an inside group relationship is an efficient strategy in developing relationships with interlocutors. Refusing suggestions to show membership may cause awkward situations and embarrassment because the refusal indicates the addressee refuses to acknowledge the suggestion giver as an in-group member. Special efforts should be made to make up any damage to the relationship. Elaborated reasons and/or alternatives are apparently necessary in order to refuse these kinds of suggestions.

Unsolicited commercial suggestions are often used by salespeople or advertisements when suggesting a purchase. The social distance between the interlocutors plays an important role in the refusals of commercial suggestions. When refusing commercial suggestions by strangers, a direct refusal is acceptable. When dealing with acquaintances, excuses and/or postponements like *kǎolù kǎolù* (考慮, 考慮) 'think over' are often observed.

5.4 Refusal of Requests

According to what is requested, refusal of requests can be subcategorized into 1) request for favors (e.g. borrowing or help); 2) Request for permission / acceptance / agreement (e.g. job application); 3) Request for information/advice (e.g. product information); 4) Request for action (e.g. payment). Different refusal strategies are selected for these four types of requests.

Requests for favors entail doing activities that require some time and/or effort on the part of the addressee or involve asking for something outside the addressee's daily routine. According to the data, excuse, reason or explanation is the primary strategy in refusing requests for favors, followed by alternatives and attempts to dissuade the interlocutor. Statements of negative consequences to the initiator, statements of negative opinion about the requests and self-defense are often employed to dissuade the interlocutor. Compared with strategies to deal with suggestions, strategies of avoidance, such as postponement or repetition of the request, are often used in this type of refusal. In addition, the social status of the interlocutor has some impact on the choice of strategy for this type of request. Compared with a requester of equal status, more alternatives and strategies of avoidance are employed to refuse a requester of unequal status, i.e. a requester of high or low status. Alternatives are the most frequently used strategy in dealing with a requester of unequal status, while reasons, excuses or explanations are the major strategies used to deal with a requester of equal status.

Requests for permission, acceptance or agreement include situations such as job applications, business negotiations or informal discussions. According to the data, direct refusal, alternatives, and reason, excuse or explanations are employed to refuse this type of request. Social status is an important factor influencing the choice of refusal strategies in this situation. Since this type of request is seldom addressed to a person of high status, instances of high status requester are not observed in the data. When dealing with a requester of equal status, alternatives are the most frequently used strategy. However, when dealing with a requester of low status, direct refusal is the primary strategy. However, direct refusal is seldom used alone in this situation. It is often accompanied by other strategies to mitigate the imposition of direct refusal. For example,

(A subordinate is trying to get her supervisor's permission)

下級：老張，從明兒起，我得請幾天假，我姑媽從外地來了，我得陪她玩兒幾天。

主管：唉，好。姑媽來了嘛，陪她玩玩，這是應該的。但是現在是不行啊，你手頭上有材料沒寫完嘛，啊，等寫完了，你再去陪你姑媽。

xiàjí : lǎozhāng , cóng míngér qǐ , wǒ dé qǐng jǐtiān jiǎ , wǒ gūmā cóng waidì lái le , wǒ dé péi tā wánér jǐtiān .

zhǔguǎn : āi , hǎo . gūmā lái le ma , péi tā wánwán , zhè shì yīnggāi de . dànshì xiànzài zài shì bùxíng ā , nǐ shǒutóu shàng yǒu cáiliào méi xiěwán ma , ā , děng xiěwán le , nǐ zài qù péi nǐ gūmā .

Subordinate: Old Zhang, starting tomorrow, I have to take off several days. My aunt is coming here. I have to show her around.

Supervisor: Well, good. When your aunt comes, it is proper to show her around. But not now. You have some unfinished work. Ah, after finishing it, then you can accompany your aunt.

From *Yī dì jī máo* (1994) 'Trifles over the ground,' episode 2

When dealing with requests for information or advice, the addressee usually employs a verbal avoidance strategy, such as topic switch, postponement (see the following example) or dodging, such as *wǒ bù tài qīngchǔ* (我不太清楚) 'I am not really sure.'

Request for action refers to an act that the addresser requires the addressee to complete certain actions. Compared with the requests for favors, the actions involved in this type of request may not benefit the addresser. According to the data, reasons, excuses or explanations, attempts to dissuade the interlocutor and alternatives are the common strategies used to refuse this type of request. For example,

(A hotel receptionist is requiring a customer to check out.)

服務員：請您現在結賬。

顧客：對不起，我現在沒有那麼多現金，我走的時候再結，可以嗎？

服務員：不行，我們有規定。

fúwùyuán: qǐng nín xiànzài jiézhàng.

gùkè: duìbùqǐ, wǒ xiànzài méiyǒu nàme duō xiànjīn, wǒ zǒu de shíhòu zài jié, kěyǐ ma?

fúwùyuán: bùxíng, wǒmén yǒu guīdìng.

Receptionist: Please check out right now.

Customer: Sorry, I do not have so much cash. Can I check out when I leave?

Receptionist: Won't work. We have policies.

From *Yùwàng* (2000) 'The Desire,' episode 6

6. Pedagogical Application

European (Western) learners of Chinese often report that refusal in Chinese culture is confusing and often causes misunderstandings. They report that Chinese speakers sometimes say "yes" when they really mean "no," or mean "no" without saying the word "no". On the other hand, learners of Chinese often feel that they have difficulty making refusals in Chinese. They find it impossible to refuse offers of food, cigarettes, tea, and so forth, since no one may take their "no" for a real refusal. Their comments suggest the necessity of teaching refusal performances to learners of Chinese. The analysis in this paper may facilitate the instruction of refusal from multiple perspectives. First of all, it provides a rationale to select, organize and present examples of refusals in classroom instruction. Secondly, the data collected in this study are readily adaptable for foreign language learning. Most important of all, this study analyzed the selection of refusal strategies in response to various initiating behaviors. For each initiating act, other factors influencing the selections of refusal strategies was examined, such as the relationship between the interlocutors, the Chinese concept of "face" and general characteristics of

Chinese communication. With such contextual parameters understood, learners of Chinese can begin to see what strategies can be used to respond to different kinds of initiating acts, and what social and cultural factors influence the choices of strategies. As a result, they are able to make appropriate linguistic moves in response to different initiating acts.

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