A Study on the Strategies, Maxims, and Development of Refusal in Mandarin Chinese

中國國語拒絕語的策略、原則與發展研究

廖招治 編著
Chao-chih Liao

文鶴出版有限公司
THE CRANE PUBLISHING CO., LTD.
A Study on the Strategies, Maxims, and Development of Refusal in Mandarin Chinese

中國國語拒絕語的
策略、原則、與發展研究

Copyright © 1994 Chao-chih Liao

ISBN: 957-9463-16-6
中國國語拒絕語的策略，原則，與發展研究

本研究探討在台灣的中國人使用國語拒絕語的策略，原則，並提及其他語言的拒絕語語料，以進而瞭解世界上大部份語言共通的拒絕策略與原則。

本研究採歸納法，先收集對話中含有拒絕成分的語料。收集方法包括直覺，觀察，請精通國語之本國人寫下他們的日常生活中包含拒絕的談話。將這些語料歸納出二十二個拒絕策略。第三步驟是把這二十二個拒絕策略歸納為高等層次的禮貌原則。與拒絕有關的六個禮貌原則為：誠懇原則，同意原則，技巧原則，尊重原則，謙虛原則，及經濟原則。

布朗與萊明孫提出五個威脅顯而易見的語言禮貌原則：大膽清楚原則，正禮貌清楚原則，負禮貌清楚原則，不明說原則，及不威脅原則。拒絕行為為絕對威脅聽話者；直接說不行，不行，即符合大膽清楚原則。爲了減少威脅，說話者往往間接委婉表達拒絕之意。有些間接語言，延用久了，人人都瞭解其爲拒絕。這些便是正禮貌清楚原則或負禮貌清楚原則。委婉表達致使對方可能聽不懂已被拒絕，這就是不明說原則。本研究也根據布朗與萊明孫提出的檢查方法，把二十二個拒絕策略歸納爲四個拒絕語言禮貌原則。

在語言研究，使用的統計方法包括：變異數分析，卡方檢定，費德曼等級變異檢定，及霍蘭德與奧爾夫検定。

最後探討台灣小朋友的語言發展。八歲或八歲以上的小朋友，在拒絕語方面的理解和使用，已經相當有能力了。男女小朋友，在拒絕策略的使用上，到十三歲時有顯著的差異。
Abstract

Leech (1983) proposes six interpersonal maxims toward absolute politeness. His study is based on his own intuition as a native English speaker. Brown and Levinson (1978/1987) propose four higher order super-strategies of politeness; namely, bald-on-record, positive polite on-record, negative polite on-record, and off-record and many strategies under each higher order super-strategy of politeness for making requests, which are FTAs (face-threatening acts). Based on the theories proposed by Leech, and Brown and Levinson, I have done both a qualitative and a quantitative study based on data of Mandarin Chinese refusals. But until we have much more information in hand, we can only guess at the universal application (or otherwise) of those categories of analysis that have been developed.

The qualitative study is based on data of my intuition as a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese, my retrospection, interviews with informants, participant observations, and the contribution of many informants as native speakers of Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan. The method of collecting data is Realistic Conversation Writing (RCW). The quantitative data are from Discourse Completion Tests (DCT) given to native speakers of Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan and controlled ranking judgements of a few utterances.

DCT is quite popular within sociolinguistic refusal, apology, and politeness studies. However, it is greatly influenced by the context given by the researchers. In this study, I also discuss its advantages and defects and devise two different contexts for native speakers of Mandarin Chinese to fill in and compare the different results.
The statistical methods used in this study include a parametric measure, an ANOVA (analysis of variance), and three nonparametric ones, Chi-square tests for homogeneity, the Friedman test for variance of ranks, and the Hollander and Wolfe test for investigating where the differences are exactly located for variance of ranks.

The results of the study are that there are twenty-two first-order strategies for refusal in Mandarin Chinese. These strategies are categorized as the second order maxims of Sincerity, Agreement, Tact, Address, Modesty, and Economy. The highest principle of these strategies is politeness.

Children of eight years old and older are as good as competent native speakers in judging the relative politeness of different refusal utterances. They are also good at producing lies, excuses, reasons, explanations after the specific tautologous construction of \textit{stative V shi4 (is) stative V} which acts as a refusal strategy of general agreement with excuses.
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank National Taiwan Normal University for supporting my undergraduate through graduate study for both MA and PH. D.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. John Kwok-Ping Tse, Dr. Yu-hwei E. Lii-Shih, Dr. Feng-fu Tsao, Dr. R. O. Ing and Dr. Shuanfan Huang for their criticisms and valuable constructive suggestions to this dissertation. Any inadequacies that remain in this work are my sole responsibility.

I would also like to thank Dr. Tzyh-lai Huang, Dr. Tsan-sui Huang, Dr. Heng-syung Cheng, Dr. Vincent Wu-chang Chang, Dr. Deng-yuan Huang, who taught me non-parametric statistics and multivariate parametric statistics; Dr. Jwei-tun Wu, who taught me cognitive psychology and statistics applied to linguistics study; and many other professors who taught me and encouraged me.

Last but not least my special thanks go to hundreds of the elementary school kids, junior high school students, and undergraduates, and their teachers who made this study possible.

January, 1994

Chao-chih Liao
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT**  

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**  

**LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES**

**CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1 Background</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Objectives of the study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 General framework of the study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Terminology and abbreviations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES**  

9

**CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.1 Face and politeness</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Different concepts of politeness in different countries</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Linguistic politeness</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Brown and Levinson's strategies in doing FTA</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Factors influencing language use</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Refusal studies</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.1 Previous studies on refusal</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Summary</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES**  

46

**CHAPTER 3 METHOD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1 Review of methods used in politeness and refusal studies</th>
<th>50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2 The scope of the study</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Methods</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4 STRATEGIES OF MANDARIN REFUSAL: TOWARD
UNIVERSALITY PHENOMENON

4.1 Silence, hesitation, lack of enthusiasm 67
   4.1.1 Quantitative study on the meaning of silence 72
   4.1.2 In contrast to Rubin's observation: quantitative studies 73
       4.1.2.1 Male versus female speech: a quantitative study 83
4.2 Offering an alternative 84
   4.2.1 Politeness ranking judgement of different ways of
       offering alternatives: quantitative studies 86
   4.2.2 DCTs are sensitive to contexts: a quantitative study 91
4.3 Postponement 93

4.4 Putting the blame on a third party or something over which you
       have no control. 98
4.5 Avoidance 100
   4.5.1 Quantitative studies 104
4.6 General acceptance without giving details 105
4.7 Divert and distract the addressee 106
4.8 General acceptance with excuse 110
   4.8.1 Quantitative studies 113
4.9 Saying what is offered or requested is inappropriate 116
4.10 External yes, internal no 117
4.11 Statement of philosophy 122
4.12 Direct NO

4.13 Lie, excuse, reason, or explanation

4.13.1 Politeness ranking judgement of refusing by offering alternatives versus lies, excuses, reasons, or explanations: a quantitative study

4.14 Complaining or appealing to feelings

4.15 Rationale

4.16 Joke

4.17 Criticism

4.18 Conditional yes

4.19 Questioning the justification of the request

4.20 Threat

4.21 External no, internal yes

4.22 A composite strategy

4.22.1 Politeness ranking judgement of refusing by offering alternatives vs lies, excuses, reasons, or explanations vs a composite strategy: quantitative studies

4.23 Direct NO vs External no, internal yes vs External yes, internal no

NOTES

CHAPTER 5 MANDARIN POLITENESS MAXIMS IN REFUSALS

5.1 Propositional content condition in refusal

5.2 CP and refusal strategies

5.3 On-record vs off-record strategies of refusal

5.4 The politeness maxims in Mandarin refusal
5.5 Politeness markers in refusal: dwei4-bu4-qi3 and xie4-xie0

NOTES

CHAPTER 6 LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF REFUSAL

STRATEGIES

6.1 Experimental study

6.2 Comparing boys' excuses and girls'

6.3 Politeness ranking of giving alternatives by the second, third, and fourth graders of elementary school

6.4 The use of strategies

6.5 Summary of the experimental studies on language development

NOTES

CHAPTER 7 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

7.1 Summary of the study

7.2 Conclusion

7.3 Limitations and suggestions

NOTES

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

I Briefs of Rubin's 9 strategies of refusal

II Ranking judgement of the four ways of offering alternatives

III Different DCT contexts result in different answers

IV Ranking judgement of two ways of giving alternatives and two ways
V Ranking judgement of giving alternatives versus excuses versus composite strategy 271
VI Ranking judgement of giving alternatives versus four composite patterns 272
VII DCTs for filling in excuses following tautologous construction 273
VIII DCTs for elementary school students to fill in excuses following tautologous construction 274
IX DCTs for refusing a person of a higher rank versus a peer 275
X DCTs for filling in dwei4-bu4-qi3 and xie4-xie0 276
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH 279
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Five super-strategies of doing FTAs proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978/1987) 26

Table 2.1 The meaning of B's Thanks to three situations (Junior high school students) 48

Table 2.2 The meaning of B's Thanks to three situations (Adult native speakers of Mandarin) 48

Table 2.3 The meaning of B's Thanks to Would you like some more coffee? (Comparison of Adult native speakers of Mandarin and junior high school students) 48

Table 2.4 The meaning of B's Thanks to Do you like coffee? (Comparison of Adult native speakers of Mandarin and junior high school students) 48

Table 2.5 The meaning of B's Thanks to Are you thirsty (Comparison of Adult native speakers of Mandarin to junior high school students) 49

Table 3.1 Summary of the tests in the study 58

Table 4.1 Meanings of non-response to an inquiry letter 72

Table 4.2 Negative responses to a movie 76

Table 4.3 Negative responses to clothing being tried on versus clothing owned by the evaluation-seeker 82

Table 4.4 Re-analysis of Table 4.3 (having positive comments or not) 82

Table 4.5 Re-analysis of Table 4.3 (Giving alternatives or not) 82

Table 4.6 Males' versus females' use of uncertainty words or particles and questions in response to clothing being tried on in Taiwan 84
Table 4.7 Males' versus females' use of uncertainty words or particles and questions in response to clothing owned by the evaluation-seeker in Taiwan
84

Table 4.8 The politeness ranking of the four utterances of offering alternatives as refusal (Native adults' judgement) 87

Table 4.9 The politeness ranking of the four utterances of offering alternatives as refusal (Junior high school 3rd grader's judgement) 87

Table 4.10 The politeness ranking of the four utterances of offering alternatives as refusal (Junior high school 2nd graders' judgement) 88

Table 4.11 The politeness ranking of the four utterances of offering alternatives as refusal (Competent native speakers' judgement) 88

Table 4.12 The effect of different contexts for DCT on different distributions of frequencies of refusal strategies 92

Table 4.13 The politeness ranking of the four utterances of offering alternatives versus lies, excuses, reasons, or explanations as refusal (Adult native speakers' judgement) 131

Table 4.14 The politeness ranking of the four utterances of offering alternatives versus lies, excuses, reasons, or explanations as refusal versus composite use of reasons plus offering alternatives (Adult native speakers' judgement) 150

Table 4.15 The politeness ranking of offering alternatives versus the composite use of lies, excuses, reasons, or explanations plus offering alternatives versus composite use of offering
alternatives plus lies, excuses, reasons, or explanations
(Adult native speakers' judgement) 153

Table 4.16 Comparing of two groups of undergraduates in filling DCT1
165

Table 5.1 The number of students using address form in DCT1 186
Table 5.2 Frequencies of 'Thank you' used in different situations 196
Table 5.3 The politeness ranking of lies, excuses, reasons, or
explanations with or without politeness marker (Adult native
speakers' judgement--Group 1 (53 subjects)) 203
Table 5.4 The politeness ranking of lies, excuses, reasons, or
explanations with or without politeness marker (Adult native
speakers' judgement--Group 2 (43 subjects)) 204
Table 5.5 The politeness ranking of lies, excuses, reasons, or
explanations with or without politeness marker (Adult native
speakers' judgement; combination of Group 1 and group 2--96
subjects) 204
Table 6.1 The number of students participating in the DCT of the
taxotologous construction 214
Table 6.2 Mean (and SD) for the five groups in elementary school
children 216
Table 6.3 Mean (and SD) for the five groups in elementary school
children in understanding tautologous construction as general
acceptance with excuses (100 point system) 217
Table 6.4 Summary of ANOVA (Independent variable being grade) 217
Table 6.5 Summary of ANOVA (Independent variable being gender) 217
Table 6.6 Summary of ANOVA (Independent variable being grade,
gender, and interaction of gender and grade) 217

Figure 6.1 The interaction effect of gender and grade in the production of excuses after tautologous constructions 218

Table 6.7 The distribution of using the strategy of putting the blame on the third party or something over which one has no control (Group 3) 220

Table 6.8 The distribution of using the strategy of putting the blame on the third party or something over which one has no control (Group 4) 220

Table 6.9 The distribution of using the strategy of putting the blame on the third party or something over which one has no control (Group 5) 220

Table 6.10 The distribution of using the strategy of putting the blame on the third party or something over which one has no control (12-year-olds) 221

Table 6.11 The distribution of using the strategy of putting the blame on the third party or something over which one has no control (13-year-olds) 221

Table 6.12 The politeness ranking of the four utterances of offering alternatives as refusal (judgement of the 2nd graders in elementary school) 223

Table 6.13 The politeness ranking of the four utterances of offering alternatives as refusal (judgement of the 3rd graders in elementary school) 223

Table 6.14 The politeness ranking of the four utterances of offering alternatives as refusal (judgement of the 4th graders in
elementary school)  223
Table 6.15 Refusal ways of elementary school, junior high school, and university students to DCT1  225
Table 6.16 Refusal ways of elementary school, junior high school, and university students to DCT1 (Re-analysis of Table 6.15)  226
Table 6.17 Comparing three Refusal strategies used by elementary school, junior high school, and university students to DCT1 (Re-analysis of Table 6.16)  229