REFUSAL STRATEGIES OF MALAY SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH AND NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract: Refusing is not an easy task since saying "no" is a dispreferred response as an initiator would expect an interlocutor to accept the offer/request/invitation made in an initiating act. In Malaysian context, performing this act is very difficult particularly when having to decline in their second/foreign language. Inability to say 'no' appropriately may result in negative emotion such as embarrassment, anger, resentment and guilt as they struggle to contradict their interlocutor's expectation and at the same time maintaining their interpersonal relationship. This study aims to discover the types and the contents of refusal strategies of the Malay ESL university students (MSE). Findings of the MSE are compared to the English native speakers from an international school (NSE). Data were collected using open role plays based on an offer initiating act i.e. declining a scholarship offer from their institution. Results indicate that both groups employed almost similar refusal strategies; preference for indirect strategies, employment of lesser degree of directness and utilization of positive opinion. However, the contents of their indirect strategies show the impact of culture on their employment of the strategies; the MSEs reflect the eastern values while the NSE the western values.

Keywords: Refusals, Speech Act, Dispreferred Response, Open Role-Play, Politeness
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Introduction

"Refusal" refers to the speech act of saying "No", expressing the addressee's non-acceptance with a request, an invitation, a suggestion or an offer. In contrast to other speech acts, it is not initiated by the speaker but it is a negative response to the interlocutor (Gass & Houck, 1999). This speech act requires a higher level of pragmatic competence than others because it tends to risk the interpersonal relationship of the speakers and thus, is often referred to as a face threatening act (FTA). Brown and Levinson (1978) point out that in communication and interaction, this negative response tends to risk either the speaker's or the hearer's feeling or face. In this sense, many people find it stressful and difficult to say 'no' since it may trigger a

confrontation that threatens a potential bond (Kuang, 2009). As a result, some may find themselves trap into saying 'yes' instead of a difficult 'no' and find themselves committing to things that they loath and may not be able to fulfil.

Rubin (1983) maintains that saying 'no' or refusing itself is not a problem but it is how the refusal message is communicated is imperative. Refusing in an inappropriate way without considering various contexts will affect interpersonal relationship between speakers. Leech and Thomas (1988) view this act as interpersonal rhetoric i.e. the way the speakers accomplish their goals as social actors who do not just need to get things done but also attend to their interpersonal relationship with their interlocutors at the same time. To accomplish both effectively and appropriately interlocutors need to have two components of pragmatic knowledge namely pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics (Dippold, 2008). Pragmalinguistics refers to knowledge of the forms and strategies to convey particular illocutions whereas sociopragmatics relates to knowledge of the use of these forms and strategies in appropriate context. Cohen (2004) stresses on the importance of the knowledge of both components which will enable learners to determine the situational-appropriate utterance, namely what can be said, where it can be said, and how to say it most effectively.

Purpose
The focus of the present study is on the speech act of refusal of an offer. The study examines how the Malay speakers of English as a second language (henceforth referred to as MSE) and native speakers of English (henceforth referred to as NSE) refuse an offer by a higher status interlocutor. Specifically, the study aims to determine the types and contents of refusal strategies as employed by MSE and NSE when refusing to the higher status interlocutor.

Literature Review
Politeness
Human beings are highly social beings who like to be surrounded by friends, families and other people to share ideas and experiences. As such, communication becomes central activity to humans. However, communication is not just simply sending and receiving messages. It requires proper ways of speaking to the others so that interactants feel comfortable with the spoken words and their interpersonal relationship is maintained or enhanced. To achieve good communication requires both linguistic knowledge and also understanding of social and cultural factors in a situation.

This concept of good communication is closely related to the concept of politeness. Lakoff (1973), for instance, posits that, "to be polite is saying socially correct things" (p.53) while Adegbija (1989) associates politeness with situations in which a person "speaks or behaves in a way that is socially and culturally acceptable and pleasant to the hearer" (p.58). Brown and Levinson (1978) associate politeness with efforts to safeguard people's feelings which involve 'face'. One is the desire of the individual "not to be imposed on", which is the "negative face", and the other, the "positive face", is the desire of the individual "to be liked and approved of". A face threatening act tends to risk either the speaker's or the hearer's positive or negative face. Brown and Levinson (1987) maintain that speakers tend to alter their language use based on their interlocutor i.e. they develop their strategies to compose messages which help to protect the face of the hearers and at the time help them to achieve their own objectives.

Asmah (2007) differentiates her perception of politeness from Brown and Levinson's (1987) perception. To Asmah (2000), politeness is not merely 'a strategy'; in fact, politeness is a

characteristic of Malay culture which calls for its members to be polite by being respectful toward one another. The formation of polite behaviour among the Malays is developed through a long continuous nurturing process and it has become a characteristic of the Malays. She also differentiates the Malay 'face saving' concept which is more than just 'protecting own or other's face' as perceived by Brown and Levinson (1987). Face- saving has greater roles which are not confined to the period in which communication takes place. Apart from the interlocutor's face, it also entails the kind of education he/she has received from his/her parents, teachers and family. Hence, a person's good name and dignity also implicates the good name and dignity of his/her parents and family. As such the Malays are reminded to be cautious when interacting with others, be it written or verbal so as not to tarnish the face of the interlocutor. If the face of the other person is tarnished, conflicts may arise and may result in the face of family members and friends also being implicated.

As can be seen the concept of politeness may differ from one to another culture which in turn influence their ways of communication. Hofstede (1980) and Hall (1976) capture the communication differences between the western and eastern cultures in their cultural dimension theories. Hofstede identifies four dimensions; Power Distance, Individualism-Collectivism, Masculinity-Femininity, and Uncertainty Avoidance while Hall highlights four key concepts; high-context - low-context cultures, and monochromatic – polychromatic cultures. They state that these dimensions actually exist in all cultures but certain dimensions are more dominant in certain cultures. It was found that Malay culture tends to be more inclined towards the high-power distance, collectivism, femininity, and moderate uncertainty avoidance dimensions. The Malays also tend to practise high-context and polychromatic cultures. Conversely, the British and the Americans are more inclined towards low-power distance, individualistic, masculine and also tend to practise low-context communication and monochromatic culture. Nevertheless, similar to the Malays they tend to be moderate in terms of uncertainty avoidance.

Previous Studies
One of the prominent studies on speech act was conducted by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990). They investigated refusals by Japanese learners of English to examine evidence of pragmatic transfer in the order, frequency, and content of semantic formulas using a discourse completion test (DCT) which was administered to 20 Japanese-speaking Japanese, 20 Japanese-speaking English, and 20 American English speakers. It was found that the Americans ordered the semantic formulas in the same way for both levels of unequal status (i.e. higher status or lower status) in contrast to Japanese learners who reacted differently to the higher-status compared to the lower-status interlocutors. The study found that they used expressions of regret (apologies) with higher-status interlocutors more often than with lower-status interlocutors. This appears to be the result of transfer from Japanese since using different semantic formulas in refusals to people of different status is the norm in the Japanese society (sociopragmatic norm). Their classification of the semantic formulas of refusals into three categories: directness, indirectness, and adjuncts to refusals has been extensively used by other researchers (Nikmehr, 2014; Asmali, 2013; Al-Shboul, Marlyna Maros & Mohamad Subakir Mohd Yasin 2012; Abarghoui, (2012); Sattar, Salasiah & Raja Rozina, (2011) and it was also adopted by the present study.

Four studies involving Malay speakers of English reviewed also employed DCT to elicit data on refusals and used Beebe et. al's (1990) refusals taxonomy to analyse their data. The first, Sattar and Farnia (2014) compared the Malays' and Iraqis' refusal to invitations in English based on two variables; relative power and social distance. The second, Farnia and Wu (2012)

compared Chinese international students' refusal to Malay students' refusal strategies in English when refusing an invitation made by an equal status interlocutor and also by a higher status interlocutor. The third by Al-Shboul et al. (2012) compared Jordanian EFL and Malay ESL postgraduate students of a local university who refused requests, invitations and offers. The fourth by Abdul Satar, Salasiah and Raja Rozina (2011) compared refusal strategies used by Malay university students to refuse requests from professor (higher status) and student (equal status) using DCT. The findings of the studies revealed that the groups compared shared more similarities than differences in their refusal strategies; preference for indirect strategies and use of *excuse/reason/justification* strategy to express their refusals indirectly followed by *statements of regret*. They also found that the Malay participants used longer and elaborated responses than their counterpart. In terms of the use of direct strategy, both groups showed preference for a lesser degree of directness, i.e. *negative willingness*. Both groups also used a lesser degree of directness when refusing higher status interlocutors. Al-Shboul et al. attributed the similarities between the Iraqis and the Malays to religious similarity and collectivist cultural orientation.

Margalef-Boada (1993) studied refusals among native speakers of German and Peninsular Spanish, and German learners of Spanish. This was done by investigating two types of data-elicitation methods; DCTs and role plays. Her analysis of frequency and content of refusal strategies indicated that the most frequently employed semantic formula across all participant groups was: explanation, regret, direct refusal, and adjuncts. Her analysis of the NS Spanish data showed no significant differences in the frequency with which these participants employed direct refusals, explanations, adjuncts and positive feelings, across both types of elicitation methods. Most importantly, her comparison of data collected from both instruments revealed that the refusals data collected via role plays were richer and more complex than those collected through the DCT. Her study has shown that role plays are more interactive and more representative of natural data than the data obtained from the DCTs.

In contrast to the above studies in which discourse-fillers/utterance(s) given by the participants in completing the dialogue were used as the unit of analysis, Gass and Houck (1999) examined the nature of interlanguage refusals at the level of discourse. They investigated the refusals of three Japanese ESL learners whose English proficiency ranged from low to intermediate across the complete refusals interaction. The participants participated in eight simulated role-play situations with a native speaker, and the data collected were analysed in terms of episodes, which the researchers describe as having a discernable beginning and an end and as being relatively independent. Gass and Houck (1999) observed that refusals function as a response to an initiating act. Since their qualitative analyses were discourse analytic in their orientation, Gass and Houck were able to capture the complexities of refusal interactions. They stated that analyzing at discourse level enabled them to learn how refusals were sequenced and the types of responses that certain speech act realizations caused turn-by-turn in interactions. The present study analyzes the role-play interactions at discourse level i.e. from the initial stage to the resolution stage.

The Study
Twelve MSE consisting of undergraduate students of a law programme of a local university and twelve NSE comprising students of an International Baccalaureate programme of an International School in Penang were chosen based on a purposive sampling. This sampling method was used mainly due to the fact that such studies require participants who can provide

"the desired information, either because they are the ones who have it, or conform to some criteria set by the researcher" (Sekaran, 2003, p.277).

Data for the study were obtained using an open role-play. In this type of role-play, a participant is given a situation which provides details such as social distance, power status of the interlocutors and their specific roles in the situation. The participant will have to negotiate his/her refusal himself/herself spontaneously. Billmyer and Varghese (2000) maintain that equipping the participants with contextualized background information will elicit more elaborated and natural-like data. The situation given is as follows:

> *You have sat for your final exam and your result is excellent. Your university academic advisor who is your former lecturer from whom you have often sought advice during our university years, has informed you that you have been offered a scholarship to pursue your BA/MA at a Toronto University, Canada. She has asked you to see her in her office to finalize the offer. However, you do not want to study at that University. On the appointment day, you go to her office.*
> *(Adapted and modeled based on a study by Norma, 2016)*

Social factors which the participants need to consider are; status i.e. a lower status interlocutor interacting with a higher status interlocutor (university academic advisor), social distance i.e. close as the officer was also their former teacher/lecturer and power in which the academic advisor has some authority as university/college officer.

The enactment of the role-play involved two persons to play the part of an interlocutor addressed by a participant. The researcher herself played the part of the academic advisor while the participants acted as university/college students who had to decline the scholarship offer. The role play was conducted at the researcher's office. Each participant was given three minutes to read the situation and then continued with the role-play. The role-play interactions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Based on the transcriptions, refusal strategies were identified and coded according to Beebe et.al. (1990) classification of semantic formulas (Appendix A). Finally, the semantic formulas obtained were analysed across full refusal interactions as suggested by Gass and Houck (1999). Thus, the refusals strategies realized were analysed as a series of strategies that comprised the entire sequence as proposed by Blum, House and Kulka (1989). The sequences are as follows:

1. Pre-refusal strategies which prepare the addressee for an upcoming refusal;
2. Head-at or main refusal which expresses the main refusal;
3. Post-refusal strategies which follow the head act and tend to emphasize, mitigate, or conclude the refusal response.

Analysis and Results
This section provides answers to the two research questions i.e. types and content of the refusal strategies. The findings are presented according to the three categories of strategies: direct, indirect and adjunct to refusal strategies based on Beebe et al., (1990) refusal semantic formula. Findings of the direct strategies are presented first, followed by the indirect and finally the adjuncts to refusal strategies.

Types and Contents of Direct Refusal Strategies

Interlocutors are said to use direct strategies when they reject an offer directly by using remarks such as "It is not possible", "I don't think I can", "I can't/won't", "no" or "I refuse/decline/reject". These direct strategies, listed from the least to the highest degree of directness, are: *mitigated refusal, negation of proposition, flat no* and *performative.* Figure 1 shows the employment of direct strategies by MSE and NSE participants. Both groups used all four types of direct strategies. Overall, the MSE (37.3%) utilized more direct strategies than the NSE (27.9%). However, closer examination indicates that MSE participants had clear preference for the least and lesser degree of directness i.e. *mitigated refusal* and *negation of proposition* (29.8%) whereas the NSE participants employed both the lesser and the highest degree of directness quite equally i.e. *negation of proposition* and *mitigated refusal* (13.9%), and *flat no* and *performative* (14%). The use of direct strategies implies that the MSE and NSE participants were firm in refusing their advisor's recommendation for them to accept the scholarship offer to study at Toronto University. The NSE participants, however, expressed firmer stance towards their superior as indicated by their use of two high degree of directness i.e. *flat no* and *performative* at a higher percentage compared to the MSE.
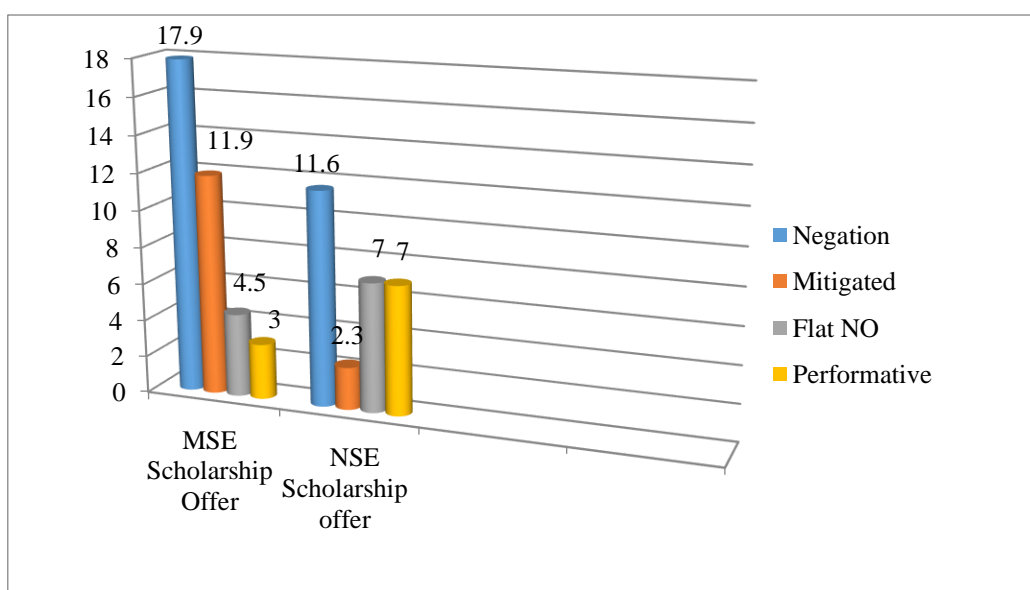

Figure 1 MSE and NSE Direct Strategies to Refuse an Offer by a Higher Status Interlocutor

In terms of forms/contents, both used similar forms of direct strategies as listed earlier. However, the strategy that followed high degree of directness i.e. the flat no indicates a difference tone of firmness. The MSE's flat no was followed by reason whereas the NSE's flat no was followed by statement of assurance.

Types and Contents of Indirect Refusal Strategies

The findings reveal that indirect strategies were dominant strategies employed by MSE and NSE to refuse the scholarship compared to direct strategies. As indicated in Figure 2 and Figure 3, MSE employed nine (9) indirect strategies whereas NSE utilized eight (8) indirect strategies. Among these strategies, two *reasons/justifications* were used substantially (MSE 19.1%, NSE 14.2%). They reaffirmed their stance further by utilizing *statement of assurance* (MSE 3.9%, NSE 3.8%) moderately. The other indirect strategies were used minimally.
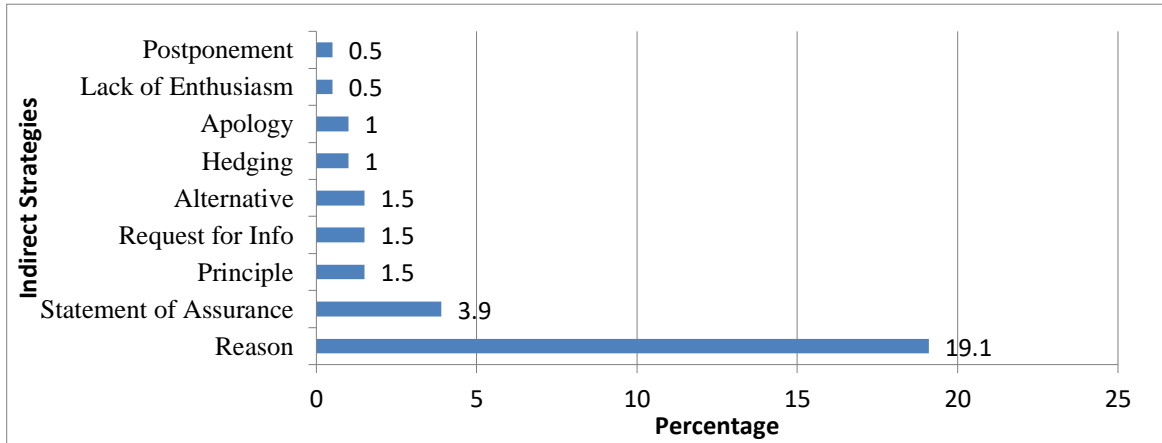
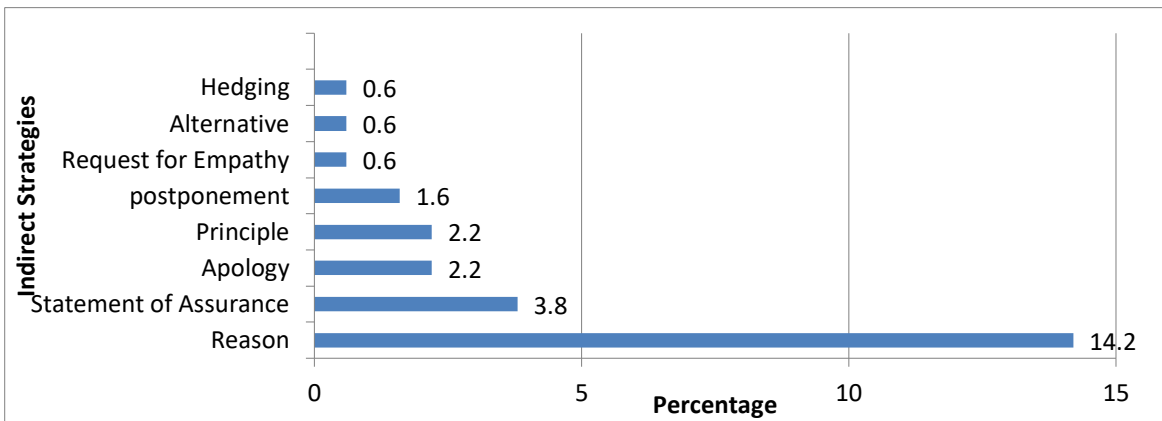*Figure 2* **MSE Indirect Strategies to Refuse a Scholarship Offer**

Figure 3 **NSE Indirect Strategies to Refuse a Scholarship Offer**

Themes of the contents of the major strategy i.e. reason/justification are presented in Table 1. As can be seen, to both groups, the major reason for declining was not the scholarship itself but the fact that they had to pursue their studies at Toronto University to secure the scholarship. They wanted to pursue their studies at their preferred university. However, the MSE and the NSE differ in other themes. First, the MSE also expressed their fear of foreign environment as one of the reasons to further support their rejection of the scholarship. This fear includes lack of confidence to survive or study without family members and friends to lend support, and to adapt to a foreign environment. Furthermore, the MSE also cited family factors i.e. taking of sick father/mother and wanting to be with family. These two reasons were not cited by the NSE. In fact the NSE had family support to pursue their studies at their preferred university.

Table 1 *MSEs' and NSEs' Contents of Reason/Justification*

MSE Reasons/Justifications	n	NSE Reasons/Justifications	n
Own Preferred University	22	Own preferred university	15
Fear of Foreign Environment	7	Family support decision	5
Other Avenue to Support Their Studies	5	Financial not a problem	4
Family Factors	5	Too far from home	2
		Course offered Not Requested	2
Total	39		28

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Types and Contents of Adjuncts to Refusals

Apart from direct and indirect strategies the groups also used adjuncts to refusal strategies. These particular strategies comprise preliminary remarks which cannot stand alone to function as refusals. Table 4.2 illustrates the MSE and the NSE employment of these strategies. The MSE used four types whereas the NSE employed only three types of adjuncts to refusals. Nevertheless, both groups employed two salient strategies i.e. *positive opinion/feeling of agreement* which was employed substantially and *gratitude/appreciation* which used moderately.

Table 2 *MSE and NSE Adjuncts to Refusals*

Situation Strategies	MSE Scholarship Offer		NSE Scholarship Offer	
	N	%	n	%
Positive Opinion	13	30.2	13	30.2
Gratitude/Appreciation	4	9.3	4	9.3
Exclamation	1	2.3	-	-
Preparator	1	2.3	2	4.6
Disclaimer			1	2.3
Total	**19**	**44.1**	**20**	**46.4**

Positive opinion remarks indicate the MSE and NSE effort to appease their academic advisor by agreeing with her point initially before stating their opinion. One of the strategies was to agree on the advantages of having a scholarship; "I really would like that scholarship but Canada is not a good place to study (MSE)" and "It's a good offer. I'm pleased but I have already planned to go to a university in UK (NSE)". Another strategy was to show their keenness towards Toronto first then cited a reason indicating their refusal; "Yeah I would really like to go there but I prefer to study at the local university" (MSE) and "Yeah I know that Toronto University is one of the top universities in Canada but I have my own plan…" (NSE).

Discussion and Conclusions

Overall statistics showed that the MSE and NSE preferred indirect strategies which represent two third of their complete refusal strategies to refuse their higher status interlocutor's offer. Findings on the use of direct strategies used to refuse their higher status interlocutor by the MSEs' and the NSEs' revealed their preference for the two low degree of directness; *negation of proposition* and *mitigated refusal*. Comparatively, the results also indicated that the NSE were more direct than MSE as the NSE employed more high degree of directness i.e. *flat no* and *performative* in refusing their higher status interlocutor. The strategy which followed the NSEs' *flat no* i.e. *statement of assurance* e.g. *"No. My decision is final,"* also indicates that the NSEs were firmer in their refusal compared to the MSE whose *flat no* was followed by *reason* (*No. Actually ah:: when it comes to further studies I want to choose my university where I want to study*).

Both groups employment of the direct strategies are congruent with Brown and Levinson's *on-record* strategy (1987, pp. 68-69) with respect to the precision and clarity of communicative intention and Grice's maxim of manner (1975, pp.45-46) in which messages should be conveyed without obscurity and also maxim of quality i.e. do not say what you believe to be

false. By being direct the participants can avoid misunderstanding or being seen as a manipulator and their refusal message is clearly conveyed.

The MSEs and NSEs firm approach is also reflected from their use of indirect strategies. They also used indirect strategies which could threaten the hearer's positive face; stating their *principle,* showing their *lack of enthusiasm* and made a *statement of assurance* in addition to providing *alternative*. Their firmness was also indicated by their *apologies* which were minimal and were used without intensifier *really, very,* or *so*.

On the other hand, the MSEs and the NSEs use of other indirect strategies also showed their effort to save their hearer's face as they switched from threatening strategies to self-effacing strategies and strategies to mitigate their directness/firmness as they searched for equilibrium between defending their stance on the issue and at the same time not to offend the interlocutor. This indicates that they still respected their higher interlocutor. For instance they employed self–effacing strategies i.e. providing *reason/justification* substantially to mitigate their direct strategies and also *apologized*, *requested for info, hedged* and one participant even *postponed* her decision to save the hearer's negative face and to show their respect.

The MSEs' and the NSEs' employment of *reason* as the most used strategy in refusing their superior's offer is in line with the findings by Beebe et al.s' (1990) and Al-Shboul et al.s' studies (2012). Beebe et al found *reason* to be the most common strategy by the native and non-native speakers of English and it was also the preferred strategy for the Malays in Al-Shboul et al. The reasons given by both the MSE and NSE to refuse the scholarship offer were mostly specific. This contradicted Beebe et al's findings which revealed that the native speakers of English gave specific reasons whereas the non-native speakers provided vague reasons.

However, Beebe et al.s' and Al-Shboul et al.s' findings that *apology* was the second most used strategy contradicts the present study's finding in which *statement of assurance* was the second most used after *reason* for both groups. The difference in the findings may be due to the difference in the aspect that they refused. In the present study it was a scholarship offer which was rejected. Hence, they were firm and not as apologetic as in the two previous studies.

In terms of content of the strategies, the MSEs' and NSEs' major strategy i.e. *reason/justification* centred on their rejection to study at Toronto University and not the scholarship itself. To refuse the *scholarship offer,* which could only be secured if they agreed to study at Toronto University, the majority cited wanting to study at their preferred university rather than the stipulated university and also having other financial avenues to support their studies. After expressing their wish to study at their preferred university, the majority of the MSE participants cited personal reasons. Among the personal reasons were fear of studying in foreign environment; difficulty in adapting, absence of family and friends to support and missing home. In contrast, only one NSE participant cited similar reason to the MSE i.e. the Toronto University being far away from home. The rest of the NSE participants cited their wish to further studies elsewhere far from home. Hofstede et al's study (2010) found that in terms of uncertainty avoidance dimension, Malaysia and Great Britain (UG index of 36 and 35 respectively) were categorized as tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity. However, as revealed, this finding contradicted Hofstede's et al findings since MSE participants exhibited ample signs of insecurity to further their studies overseas. In other words the MSE participants showed elements of having high uncertainty avoidance. This contradiction may be due to the fact that Hofstede et al.'s participants were professional staff working in organizations whereas the

participants of the present study were students who had never been overseas and mostly were without working experience. The finding on the NSE was congruent with Hofstede et al.'s finding since they exuded confidence to venture overseas in pursuit of their studies. Their confidence may be due to the fact that the NSE participants were from well to do expatriate families whose parents had been living overseas and they themselves studied at international boarding schools.

The MSE also cited family factor; attachment and commitment to their family which include wanting to take care of a sick family member and be with family. The MSEs' principles "*family is precious in my life*"also reflected their priority to family. In contrast, the NSE differed in the *principles* stated to reaffirm their refusal. The NSE stressed individual's need ("*not the path I wanted to take," "not sort of me"* and *"It's my life"*). The NSEs' personal reasons and principles which highlighted doing what they wanted is a manifestation of the western values which emphasize 'individualistic culture' as highlighted by Brown and Levinson (1987). Likewise, Hofstede (1994) in his 'individualism' versus 'collectivism' dimension suggests that people from this "individualistic culture" prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of a group. Hofstede et.al IBM studies (2010) categorised Great Britain as individualist society while Malaysia under collectivist society. This finding is also congruent with Hall's (1976) categorization of the western countries under 'monochromic culture' (1976) where human relationship is loose and the focus is more on doing one task at a time i.e. accomplishing their personal pursuit. In contrast, the MSEs' principles and reasons stressing family factor manifests eastern values as stated by Asmah (2002) that Malay culture prioritizes group's importance rather than individual and that a person should take care of extended family before self. Hofstede (1994) categorizes societies with this value under 'collectivistic culture' in which willingness to support groups and larger societal goals and one's allegiance to group are more important. The east is considered under 'polychromic culture' in which greater value is placed on human contact and many tasks are handled simultaneously i.e. accomplishing their personal pursuit and at the same time taking care of their family members (Hall, 1976).

The MSE and the NSE participants' employment of adjuncts to refusal also indicated their effort to mitigate the effect of their refusal. Both employed two primary strategies, *positive opinion* and *gratitude/appreciation.* The *positive opinion* was used as a strategy to appease the interlocutor before stating their refusal. Thus, they concurred with the interlocutor's opinions that Toronto University being a top university, the offer was good and that it would be useful to have a scholarship and then only negated the ideas and provided reason(s) to justify. In addition, these strategies were employed to counter the high degree of directness employed via strategies from the direct strategies and also *indirect* strategies such as *statement of assurance* and *principle* which may offend their interlocutor's positive face.

In terms of the distributional order of the strategies, the MSE participants employed both delayed refusal order and immediate refusal order evenly. Nevertheless regardless of the order they opted for, the strategies showed their cautious approach. If they refused immediately they employed low degree of directness either using *negation of proposition* or *mitigated refusal* except for one who used *flat no* or through indirect strategies either using *hedging* or *apology* while those who opted for delayed refusal used pre-refusal strategy comprising *positive opinion* or *preparator* then only established their refusal via indirect strategy either *reason* or *apology* or via direct strategy. At the post refusal strategies they switched from self-effacing i.e. *reason* and *apology or* affable strategies such as *positive opinion and appreciation* to strategies which were *face threatening i.e. statement of assurance, principle, flat no* and *performative* then back

and forth. For example; (head-act - *flat no*) + (post-refusal - *reason+ principle+reason+positive opinion + reason+ appreciation*) or (Pre-refusal - *positive opinion* + (head-act - negation of proposition) + (post-refusal: *Reason + lack of enthusiasm + reason + statement of assurance + reason*). Salient strategies at the stage i.e. *reason, statement of assurance and principle* intermingle with direct and adjuncts to refusal strategies reflected their firm but conciliatory approach. The NSE participants also followed the same approach. In the *scholarship offer*, the majority chose to delay their refusal by starting their refusal with *positive opinion* and also *preparator* or with *preparator* and *gratitude and appreciation* then proceeded to establish their refusal via *reason or apology*.

One salient difference between the groups is the MSE who employed more strategies in all the three situations than the NSE. As revealed in the findings the MSE used more strategies in the direct, indirect and adjuncts to refusals categories. These findings are in line with Farnia and Wu (2014). Both studies found that the Malays' responses were lengthier compared to Chinese responses when refusing an invitation. Hall (1976) refers these lengthier responses as one of the characteristics of high-context culture which is marked by the use of indirectness; the use of many covert and implicit messages hoping the interlocutor to pick up the clues. In contrast, the NSE participants who belong to the low-context culture employed more overt and explicit messages resulting in fewer strategies.

In summary, the findings show that culture influences the interactants' employment of refusal strategies. The contents of strategies reflect the values of the world they are from. The use of substantial indirect strategies and the choice of positive opinion, and the lesser degree of directness when using direct strategies indicate that despite their firm approach in refusing the scholarship offer, the interactants are cautious not so as not offend their high status interlocutor. Hence, they still uphold the value of being respectful towards their interlocutor.

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APPENDIX A
Classification of Refusal Semantic Formulas

_____

I Direct Refusal
    A.   Performative (e.g., "I refuse")
    B.   Non performative statement
      1. "No"
      2. Negation of Proposition or Negative willingness/ability
      3. Mitigated Refusal
II.   Indirect Refusals
   A. Statement of regret/ apology
     (e.g., "I'm sorry…", "Excuse me")
  B. Excuse, reason, explanation, justification
  C. Statement of alternatives
      1. I can't do X instead of Y (e.g., "I'd rather…",
       "I'd prefer…"
      2. Why don't you do X instead of (e.g., Why don't
     you ask someone else?"
   D. Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g.,
     "If you had asked me earlier, I would have…")
   E. Promise of future acceptance (e.g., "I'll give you a pay
     raise as soon as I can")
   F. Statement of principle (e.g., "I never do business
     in restaurant")
   G. Statement of philosophy (e.g., "Such things can happen
    to anyone")
   H. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor
      1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the
       requester (e.g., "You won't be able to understand
       my handwriting" for refusing to lend class notes)
     2. Statement of negative feeling:
     Criticism of the request/requester, guilt trip (e.g.,
     "You are lazy")
      3. Criticized the request/requester / negative feeling
       Opinion/insult/attack (e.g., "Who do you think you are?",
       "That's terrible idea!")
     4. Request for help, empathy, and assistance (e.g.,
      "I hope you can understand my situation")
     5. Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g., "Don't
      Worry about it", "that's is okay", "you don't have to")
     6. Self defense (e.g., "I'm just following the course program",
      "I'm doing my best", "I'm doing all I can do")
      Statement of assurance (e.g., "I like it the way it is")

I Avoidance
  1. Verbal
    a. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., "Did you say Monday?")
    b. Request for information
    c. Postponement (e.g., "I'll think about it")
    d. Wish
     e. Hedging (e.g., "I'll don't know", "I'm not sure")
    f. **Compromise**
III.   Adjuncts to Refusals (preliminary remarks that cannot stand alone to
    function as refusals/disagreement.)
  1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement
    (e.g., "good idea", "I'd love to…"), compliment (e.g., The cake was   very good").
  2. Statement of empathy (e.g., "I realize you're very good in a difficult situation")
  3. Support
  4. Gratitude/Appreciation (e.g., "Thank you very much")
  5. "Exclamation of disappointment, surprise (e.g., "What a pity!", "What a coincidence!")
  6. Preparator
  7. Disclaimer

(Source: Al Issa, 1998 and Felix-Brasdefer, 2004)