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SPEECH ACTS OF REFUSALS: CHALLENGING THE CHALLENGES

Sadikov Erkin Tursunovich*

*TESOL/TEFL certified teacher
 English Philology Department, Bukhara State University
 UZBEKISTAN
 Email id: erkdil2004@mail.ru

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to present information about the role of speech acts in English language teaching and learning. For the sake of the study, pragmatics has been selected as the speech act of refusals which may occur in different scenarios and contexts. There are some authentic activities and samples that may assist the educators to implement into their teaching process. Firstly, the article introduces some background information about speech acts and their categories; secondly, it focuses on the speech act of refusals and their interpretations. Finally, it indicates a detailed activity demo which can be used in various contexts and aspects.

KEYWORDS: *Refusals, Interpretations, Pragmatics, Indicates*

INTRODUCTION

General background

The wide-spread of the English language throughout the world has already made it “global”. This globalism is urging people to speak English for different purposes and reasons. Using the language proficiently does not only rely on mastering linguistic features of the language corpus, but also speakers or producers to be pragmatically competent in order to acclimatize themselves to various needs of different contexts.

It can be denominated that the aspects of speech acts are highly involved in this process and their subfields such as culture of the language, the status and sex of the interlocutors can be utilized efficiently. According to Yuan (2012) pragmatics reveals the following crucial components, for example, users of the target language, context and meaning, social interaction.

Taguchi (2003) points out that pragmatic competence is a specific capability to perform the language properly in terms of negotiators and the settings. Thus, pragmatics builds a robust bond between the linguistic patterns and social factors.

Introduction to the speech act of Refusals

Austin's (1962) speech act concept mainly comprises the compliments, refusals, apologies, requests, complaints and others. Among these speech acts one of the toughest is the speech acts of refusals. Searle (1969) sends them to the list of commissives which commit the language users to a future course of action.

Traditionally, the speech acts of refusals may occur when the speaker simply denies or rejects the suggestion. That may happen with specific utterances, for instance, with "no" which may inform that the request is not accepted. Even these refusals can be presented in a polite or impolite way.

Example 1. Polite refusal

A: Shall we go to the city center?

B: Unfortunately, I have to say "no" as I am seeing off my parents tonight.

Here the respondent is denying the offer, but it is being done in a good manner. Firstly, the respondent reveals his being sorry and then says "no". Moreover, the speaker informs about the reason of not accepting the proposal.

Example 2. Impolite refusal

A: Shall we go to the city center?

B: No.

It is a bit inconvenient when you receive the direct rejection. Thus, the respondent uses the word "no" directly which seems to be impolite, even somehow rude towards the communicator.

It should be highlighted that the significance of refusals mostly derives from the fact that they are so over-sensitive to diverse social aspects, for example, they illustrate the power, gender, age, social distance of the speakers. Apart from this, it is crucial to know about facial expressions/gestures of the speakers as they also play an integral part in the process of interaction. As an illustration it can be cited that some people deny the proposal by wearing a smile in their face, however, the other people may negatively nod and demonstrate their attitude towards the request.

According to the social context refusals can be constructed in different scenarios, such as, refusing invitations (inviting to the cinema, inviting to the picnic, inviting to the party), refusing borrowings (refusing to give a pen, refusing to lend a book, refusing to share a room).

Example 3.

A: I would like to rent a room in a dormitory; I am planning to share it with you as we did last year. Do you agree John?

B: I beg your pardon, but I have already rented a room with Rob.

Even though the respondent to the suggestion is not using the utterance of refusal (“no”), it is still clear from the message that the invitation has been denied.

A sample activity for using to teach learners to the speech acts of refusals in the ESL classroom

Panel discussions for speaking classes

Brief description

It is a kind of activity which can be used in group cooperation. This method helps learners develop their speaking skills, critical thinking and logical perception. A panel discussion is utilized in schools, colleges, lyceums or even in higher education. In a real fact, themes must be adjusted to the levels of the learners; moreover, initial interests of the students should be taken into consideration. Thus, they can be arranged according to face to face interviews in which learners can have an interview with each other (the specific notion is using the pragmatic speech acts of confirming and refusing during the conversation).

This activity is beneficial for enhancing speaking skills and critical thinking of the learners. It assists to overcome barriers of the learners who have challenges in speaking and negotiating.

Target group: B1 level learners (can be successfully used for B2 and C1 level learners)

Time: 40-45 minutes

Objectives

This activity is beneficial for enhancing speaking skills and critical thinking of the learners. It assists to overcome barriers of the learners who have challenges in speaking and negotiating. This method can be used both in small and bigger groups.

Directions for the students

Students will ...

- follow the explanations
- choose the topic
- present topics turn by turn
- ask questions from each other
- keep note-taking skills
- clarify questions and answers
- follow the time limit
- listen to their partners carefully

Teacher’s instructions to students

Teachers will ...

- explain rules and process
- demonstrate some questions

- divide learners into groups
- observe the process
- motivate the speakers
- ask learners to stop the procedure
- evaluate the performance of each speaker

The role of the teacher

- facilitator
- observer
- motivator
- assessor

Activity tools and equipment

- board
- cards
- posters

Advantages of this activity

- develops speaking skills
- improves critical thinking
- broaden learner's horizons

Disadvantages of this activity

- time-consuming
- some learners can be in an inactive state

Stages

An instructor represents some topics for discussion and asks learners to choose any of them for this type of presentation. Topics may cover different themes, such as, social issues, teenager problems, book reviews or some cultural identities.

The teacher selects topics and sticks them on the board and students choose themes by voting. Then the teacher invites five or six candidates to present the topical questions in front of their mates.

All of the learners think about the topics. Students, who are “panelists”, revise and think about the topic that they have chosen. Learners who are in the role of interviewers prepare some questions according to each topic.

Here are some sample questions that can be modified during the diverse groups and classes.

Sample situation 1

Imagine a stranger asking you to carry his bag. Choose one option out of three and explain your choice.

- A) I will approach him and help
- B) I will say “no” and ignore his request
- C) I would act as if I hadn’t seen him

Sample situation 2

Your classmate is inviting you to come to the party which she is organizing on her birthday, but you cannot attend as you have to look after your young brother. How would you react?

- A) I will directly refuse the invitation
- B) I will indirectly refuse the invitation
- C) I will not go and explain the reason

Summary

As it has been outlined above, speech acts of refusals are diverse and they are varied according to the different aspects which speakers may face with, or feel in depth, such as the factors of gender, social distance, culture and age. These phenomenal features should be taken into account when educators start to perform the process of teaching.

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