A Pragmatic Study on Refusal Strategies by Chinese College Nursing Majors

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the refusal strategies employed by Chinese college nursing majors. The survey is carried out among a portion of students from Shanghai Institute of Health Science in the form of DCT Questionnaire.

The results indicate that the subjects used 27 strategies among which the most popular one is excuses or explanations; the second one is direct refusal. In terms of content, the subjects are most likely to employ degree adverbs, educating or criticizing and expressing regrets. In terms of lexical use, the subjects are likely to use degree adverbs and alerts. In terms of syntax, the structure of "yes…but" occupies the dominant percentage.

Data analysis shows that the subjects are status-conscious. The higher the social status of the refusee, the refusal act tends to be more polite. When the status is equal, they are most likely to use excuses and explanations, or just refuse directly. The subjects also refuse differently in different contexts, i.e. when being requested, invited, offering, and suggesting.

The results can contribute to a better understanding of refusal strategies used by young Chinese females. Besides, they may shed some light on the relations between medical personnel and patients.

Key words: Speech act, Refusal, Refusal strategies, Chinese College Nursing Majors

1. INTRODUCTION

The term speech act, put forward by J.L. Austin (1962), defined by Searle (1969) as a minimal unit of discourse and also defined by Cohen (1996) as a basic and functional unit of communication, has aroused a lot of interest, mainly because it is related to interpersonal relationship. A good understanding of speech acts helps people to develop communicative competence. For example, the choice of a refusal strategy is an art which can show respect or dishonor for others and thus make a big difference in a relationship.

The present study has been conducted among Chinese college students of nursing majors, all post-90 females. The results can contribute to a better understanding of refusal strategies used by young Chinese females in the Chinese context. Besides, they may shed some light on the relations between medical personnel and the patients.

Research Questions：

This study was conducted among 120 college students of nursing majors. The data consist of refusal realizations in 12 different contextual situations, collected by means of DCT. The major findings attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

1）What refusal strategies do nursing majors employ?

2）How do nursing majors use indirect refusal strategies in terms of content, lexical use and syntax?

3) How do the variables of social status affect the choice of refusal strategies for nursing majors?

4) How do nursing majors use indirect refusal strategies in different situations of request, invitation, offer and suggestion?

2. REFUSAL STRATEGY

2.1 Definition

According to Kasper, strategy is a term often used in pragmatics, communication theory and studies on second language acquisition, referring to interactional participants' solutions to multiple conflicting goals (Kasper, 1996:1; 347); according to Miles, strategy is a set of measures the communicator utilizes for the sake of smooth communication or adaptation to the social norms in which he lives (Miles, 1994:279).

The refusal speech act can be performed either strategically or non-strategically. Generally speaking, refusing strategically happens much more pervasively in conversations. Strategic refusals are those which cater to the interpersonal needs of communicators. They often involve different types of politeness strategies (also known as refusing strategies) for the purpose of softening the illocutionary force embedded in refusals or redressing face-loss of the interlocutor. On the other hand, non-strategic refusals usually cater to the refuser's own personal or actionable

goal and the result of such communication often leads to interpersonal conflict or the deterioration of the relationship between the interlocutors.

2.2 Categorizing refusal strategies

Probably the best-known and most frequently cited system for analyzing refusals is Beebe and her colleagues'. Beebe et al. (1990:72-73) divide refusal responses into semantic formulas (expressions which can be used to perform a refusal) and adjuncts (expressions which accompany a refusal, but cannot by themselves be used to perform a refusal).

2.3 Previous studies

2.3.1 Liao's study

By using all kinds of instruments, including participant observations, interviews, realistic conversation writing, open-ended discourse completion tests in the form of questionnaire, and intuition as a native speaker of Chinese, so far Liao (1994) has made the most extensive study on the refusal phenomena of Chinese spoken by Taiwanese, which was conducted among over 1000 adults and more than 500 children. Her study of refusal in Chinese provides learners of Chinese as a foreign language with what Chinese people say in these strategies. In general, she devised six maxims of refusing in Chinese: (1) tact, (2) agreement, (3) modesty, (4) address, (5) sincerity, and (6) economy, with the highest principle being politeness principle. In detail, she concluded:

It is more polite to use the address form than not, even if the refuser has the requester's attention already;

A performative verb 建议（'suggest'）*in an explicit performative utterance in assertive form is more polite than giving a suggestion in a question with* 为什么 *or* 怎么（'why'）;

Giving an alternative in a suggest-assertive is better than uttering a vague reason to refuse;

A specific reason is more polite than giving an alternative in a 'why not' form.

A composite strategy of vague reason plus alternative is better than an alternative plus a vague reason.(Liao, 1994)

The conclusion of her study is: while the strategies of refusal are universal, what is uttered in each strategy and for each request and the relative politeness levels may be language-specific, and that, while speech acts may be universal, the range of ways of expressing each differs from language to language and is sensitive to sociolinguistic variables.

2.3.2 Chen et al's study

Following Beebe et al's (1985) model of doing refusal study, Chen, Ye, and Zhang (1995) collect data from 100 native speakers of Mandarin Chinese to determine the most frequently used strategies in refusal situations by speakers of Mandarin Chinese. According to them, there are two main types of refusals: substantive refusals and ritual refusals. The former means those in

which a refusal is intended while the later means a polite act indicating the refuser's concern for the person doing the offering or inviting. In other words, in substantive refusals the speaker says no and means no while what they called "ritual refusals" is characteristic of Chinese interaction in which speakers may say no to initiations such as offers and invitations when in fact they are willing to accept.

Statistics findings show that the main substantive refusal strategies used by native Chinese is reasons, followed by alternatives: the former allows the refuser to justify the refusal without threatening face, while the latter enables the refuser to avoid confrontation.

Chen et al (1995:137) claimed that the social role relationship between the interlocutor and the speaker has an impact on strategy choices. They came to the conclusion that the study of substantial refusals is in relation to social status by saying that choices of strategies are affected by status in complex ways.

2.3.3 Wang Di's study

In Wang Di's study (2004), in order to compare the refusal strategies used by native Chinese and native Americans, she elicits data of both the Chinese language and American English by a DCT questionnaire that incorporates four kinds of refusal situations. The 12 situations include those 3 requests, 3 invitations, 3 offers and 3 suggestions with higher, equal and lower status of refuser. compared with Americans, the Chinese tend to care more about the concerns of the interlocutors，especially a hearer with a higher status. In the present study, I employed 8 situations in her questionnaire, and modified 4 of them in order to make the situations more job-related.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Subjects

The subjects are sophomore nursing majors from Shanghai Institute of Health Science, with the total number of 100.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument used in this study is the DCT questionnaire which consists of two parts: personal information and twelve situations. Eight of the situations were from the published work of Wang Di (2005) and four of the situations were modified to relate to nursing majors. Each situation contains a short description followed by an incomplete dialogue. The dialogue consists of two turns in which one of the participants' response is left to be a blank in which a refusal is required to be given.

The situations are categorized into four groups of refusal: three requests, three invitations, three offers and three suggestions. In accordance with the focus of the present study, each item specified the social status/power relative to the interlocutor (higher, equal, lower), while the influence rooted in other factors, such as age and gender are regarded as less important and

decreased to a maximal degree. Thus, the social status/power of the interlocutor is the controlled variable that is to be analyzed primarily in the research.

The four modified situations are: head nurse refusing a nurse staff's request for avoid night shift; chief surgeon refusing a pharmaceutical salesman's invitation to have dinner together; nurse refusing dean's offer to work in suburb; student refusing instructor's advice to arrange things.

To determine the appropriateness of these situations, Dean of nursing department and five students in Shanghai Institute of Health Science were asked whether the situations were feasible in their daily life. Their answers were consistent: all the situations will happen in their daily life.

The directions were written out on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in Chinese only in that the subjects are required to answer questions in their own mother tongue to test their ability to produce refusals in Chinese.

Finally the DCT questionnaire is designed as table A.

Table 3.1 Design of Refusal Questionnaire

item	Social status (relative to interlocutor)	Initiating act	content
1	higher	request	Avoiding night shift
2	equal	request	Borrowing class notes
3	lower	request	Overtime work
4	higher	invitation	dinner
5	equal	invitation	dinner
6	lower	invitation	dinner
7	higher	offer	Paying for a broken vase
8	equal	offer	Having another cake after dinner
9	lower	offer	Promotion with move
10	higher	suggestion	Changing teaching method
11	equal	suggestion	Trying a new diet
12	lower	suggestion	Writing the reminders

3.3 Data Collecting Procedure

To make sure the validity and reliability of the data, I took several procedures in data collection. Firstly, in the process of designing the DCT questionnaire, I borrowed eight situations from the work of Wang Di (2005). As she has got appropriate results from the questionnaire, I assume the eight situations are valid. I designed four situations related to nursing student's life by myself. These four situations were agreed by Dean of Nursing Department and five nursing students in Shanghai Institute of Health Science.

Secondly, in the process of taking the questionnaires, one class of the students were administered by their instructor while the other class of students were under my administration. It took all the subjects about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire as required.

Thirdly, 120 students from two different classes did the questionnaire and 100 valid questionnaires were selected out of them. Some of the answers were too short, some of them were far away representing the real-life responses, and some of them were acceptances instead of refusals, so they were excluded.

3.4 Coding Data

3.4.1 Semantic units

The responses collected in DCT questionnaire need to be coded for further analysis. Generally speaking, one refusal speech act can be realized by a sequence of strategies. In order to get a set of strategies, first the utterances should be separated into semantic units (Cai, 2009), each of which is conceptualized as the smallest and complete units of semantic information that can be stand alone and be understood by itself including words, phrase and utterance.

Each individual idea unit can be coded as a specific refusal strategy category which will be presented in the following part.

3.4.2 Examples of refusal strategies in this study

Different researchers have proposed various systems for categorizing refusal strategies. As mentioned in chapter 2, there are nine ways of saying no according to Rubin (1983:12-13), while Ueda (1974:189) lists 16 ways to avoiding saying no in Japanese.

In this study, we adopt Cai's (2009) way of dividing refusal strategies. She uses DD to refer to direct refusal strategy. By definition, direct refusal means the word 'no' or 'not' appears in responses. Similar expressions such as 'I cannot make it', 'I won't go there' or 'the answer would be no' are all considered as a direct refusal. In contrast, indirect refusals avoid using the negative word 'no' or 'not' in order to cushion the blow of refusals. She divides indirect refusal strategies into three categories in terms of content, lexical use and syntax. After analyzing the DCT questionnaires in this study, I concluded 1 direct refusal strategy marked as DD and 26 indirect refusal strategies marked as S1 to S26 for the sake of convenience for illustration. To be more specific, 16 indirect strategies fall into the category of content with contrast to S17 to S22 and S23 to S26 into the groups of lexical use and syntax respectively. To better understand each strategy, correspondent examples are shown after each strategy.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Refusal strategies in this study

4.1.1 Statistics findings

Table 4.1 Ranking of the scores of each strategy

ranking	strategy	scores	frequency
1	2: Excuses or explanations	1212	35.16%
2	DD	287	8.33%
3	21: Degree Adverbs	249	7.22%
4	11: Educating or criticizing	236	6.85%
5	1: Expressing regrets	227	6.59%
6	15: Principles or rules	181	5.25%
7	18: Alerts	121	3.51%
8	3: Alternatives	117	3.39%
9	13: Self-defense	98	2.84%
10	24: Yes…but	97	2.81%
11	10: Fake agreement or promise	94	2.73%
12	5: Expressing the gratitude	79	2.29%
13	20: Down-grader	66	1.91%
14	4: Letting off the hook	65	1.89%
15	9: Comforts come before refusals	62	1.80%
16	19: Pause fillers	60	1.74%
17	6: Dissuading interlocutors	54	1.57%
18	16: Third party	43	1.25%
19	23: Partial negative	25	0.73%

20	22: repetition	18	0.52%
21	25: Asking for opinions	15	0.44%
22	14: philosophy	13	0.38%
23	12: Refusing in a joking way	11	0.32%
24	26: Conditional clause	6	0.17%
25	7: Switching topics	5	0.15%
26	17: Switching pronouns	4	0.12%
27	8: Being ambiguous	2	0.06%

4.1.2 Analysis

It is obvious that the highest score goes to S2, the strategy of excuses or explanations, which has a point of 1212, with the frequency of 35.16%. The subjects' employment of excuses or explanations reveals individual differences: Some subjects used 3 or 4 excuses or explanations in each situation while some used none. On average, each subject used at least 1 excuse or explanation in each situation. The Chinese are not used to being straightforward when it comes to refuse a person. They tend to talk a lot about the reasons of refusal till the last moment, which is exactly the case from the results of this questionnaire survey.

Issues relating to parents and families constitute a major part of excuses. As a matter of fact, statistics in this study show that up to 78.7% of the refusal excuses fall into the above mentioned category. The reasons why the subjects use 78.7% family-related excuses or explanations could be that the subjects are all female nursing majors who have concerns for family and family members. Most of them think of the family reasons when they are asked to refuse people.

The second score goes to DD, direct refusal, which has a point of 287, with the frequency of 8.33% of the whole strategies. Meanwhile, a close look to the answers to the questionnaires shows that DD is rarely used alone; it is always used with other strategies to lessen the threatening force.

4.2 How do nursing majors use indirect refusal strategies in terms of content, lexical use and syntax?

4.2.1 Indirect refusal strategies in terms of Content

Strategy 1-16 are content-based and they are presented in table 4.2

Table 4.2 refusal strategies in terms of content

ranking	strategy	scores
1	2: Excuses or explanations	1212
2	11: Educating or criticizing	236
3	1: Expressing regrets	227
4	15: Principles or rules	181
5	3: Alternatives	117
6	13: Self-defense	98
7	10: Fake agreement or promise	94
8	5: Expressing the gratitude	79
9	4: Letting off the hook	65
10	9: Comforts come before refusals	62
11	6: Dissuading interlocutors	54
12	16: Third party	43
13	14: philosophy	13
14	12: Refusing in a joking way	11
15	7: Switching topics	5
16	8: Being ambiguous	2

The strategy subjects employ most in terms of content is S2 Excuses or explanations, getting the point of 1212, implying that subjects tend to explain and make excuses when they refuse people, which is a good sign for the subjects are nursing majors. The relationship between medical personnel and patients would be improved if the medical personnel could explain more.

S11, S1, S15 and S3 are employed with scores in their hundreds. S11 Educating or criticizing ranks the second highest, having a point of 236. The reason could be that the subjects are taught to be nurses who should always know how to educate patients. That's why the subjects tent to speak in an educating manner.

S1 expressing regrets ranks the third highest, having a point of 227. The subjects are taught to express regrets before refusing, which are supposed the manner of nurses.

S15 principles or rules ranks the fourth highest, scoring 181. As mentioned above, subjects use this strategy most in the first situation in which they are playing the role of head nurse and are asked to refuse a nurse's request to avoid night shift. Subjects tend to claim the hospital rules or their principles of management in this situation.

S3 providing alternatives ranks the fifth highest, scoring 117. Providing alternatives is a strategy makes the refusee easier to accept the refusal.

S14, S12, S7 and S8 are found with numbers as small as less than 20. S8 being ambiguous is the strategy subjects use the least, only getting a point of 2, indicating that subjects don't tend to be ambiguous when refusing people, which might be the talking style of people born after1990s. They tend to be direct and precise.

Given all that, in terms of the refusal content, subjects use the strategy of excuses or explanations most and they also tent to use the strategies of educating or criticizing, expressing regrets, principles or rules and providing alternatives. The strategies subjects use least are strategy of switching topics and strategy of being ambiguous, indicating that their way of speaking is direct and precise.

4.2.2 Indirect refusal strategies in terms of Lexical use are presented in table 4.3

Table 4.3 refusal strategies in terms of lexical use

ranking	strategy	scores	frequency
3	21: Degree Adverbs	249	
7	18: Alert	121	
13	20: Down-grader	66	
16	19: Pause fillers	60	
20	22: repetition	18	
26	17: Switching pronouns	4	

In terms of lexical use, the strategy most employed is degree adverbs, scoring 249, indicating that subjects tend to use degree adverbs.

The second rank goes to S18 alerts, getting the point of 121. In detail, the most used alert is "老板". There is also one alert called "亲", the abbreviation of "honey" which is the address form the seller called the buyer when people doing business on Tao Bao. This tao bao style implies that subjects may often do shopping on the internet. They are so affected by the name "亲" that they even use it in the questionnaire.

In contrast to strategy of using degree adverbs, the strategy of using down-grader only scores 66, half of them goes to the word "恐怕".

The strategy subjects use least is S17 switching pronouns, only scoring 4. This strategy is usually used to those who are at very young age. In this study, all of them appear in situation 10 in which subjects play the role of English teachers and speak to a student to refuse her suggestion to practice oral English instead of grammar. The subjects switch "你们" to "我们" or "我们大家". They say "我们还是应该先学好语法。" and "我们大家都应该重视语法。"

In sum, subjects tend to use Degree Adverbs to make the refusal more mild and less threatening to the hearer when they refuse people. Besides, they also use the titles to show respect and politeness.

4.2.3 Indirect refusal strategies in terms of Syntax are presented in table 4.4

Table 4.4   Refusal strategies in terms of syntax

ranking	strategy	scores	percentage
10	24: Yes…but	97	3.07
19	23: Partial negative	25	0.79
21	25: Asking for opinions	15	0.47
24	26: Conditional clause	6	0.19

In terms of syntax, the strategy most employed is the Yes…But structure, scoring 97, indicating subjects tend to use this strategy among these four; while the strategy least employed is conditional clause, scoring only 6, indicating that subjects don't tend to use this structure in Chinese. S23 Partial negative scores 25. As mentioned above, this strategy is used only in situation 7. 25 of the subjects use the sentence whose main idea is "那花瓶也不是什么贵重的东西。"

In sum, the strategy subjects use most is "yes…but" structure.

4.3 How do the variables of social status affect the choice of refusal strategies for nursing majors?

Table 4.5 refusal strategies and social status

	In situation 1/4/7/10	In situation 2/5/8/11	In situation 3/6/9/12	
Score for DD	46	163	81	
Score for S1	44	68	112	

Score for S2	353	369	490
Score for S3	21	60	36
Score for S4	65	0	0
Score for S5	5	9	65
Score for S6	0	54	0
Score for S7	0	2	3
Score for S8	0	0	2
Score for S9	62	0	0
Score for S10	40	46	8
Score for S11	153	83	0
Score for S12	2	6	3
Score for S13	0	0	98
Score for S14	9	4	0
Score for S15	131	0	0
Score for S16	43	0	0
Score for S17	4	0	0
Score for S18	0	6	115
Score for S19	22	24	14
Score for S20	39	7	20
Score for S21	46	73	130
Score for S22	0	7	11
Score for S23	20	5	0
Score for S24	13	18	66

Score for S25	7	6	2	
Score for S26	1	1	4	

When the interlocutor is in a higher social status, strategy 2 is most preferred and scores 353; following S2, S11 ranks the second, scoring 153; the strategy subjects use in the third place is strategy 15, scoring 131. In other words, subjects tend to use excuses or explanations, educate or criticize people and use principle or rules to refuse the people when they are in a higher social status. It is noted that the scores of S6, S7, S8, S13, S18 and S22 are zero, which means the missing strategies are not used and there are 21 kinds of strategies are employed by the subjects when the interlocutor is in a higher social status, with the total score of 1126. There are 6 strategies they seldom use, scoring under 10, they are: S5, S12, S14, S17, S25 and S26. The strategies appeared only when interlocutors are in higher social status are: S4, S9, S15, S16 and S17.

When the interlocutor is in an equal social status with the addressee, strategy 2 is still on the top of the list, scoring 369; direct refusal ranks the second, scoring 163. In other words, subjects tend to use excuses or explanations and direct refusal when they refuse the people who have the same social status with them. There are 7 strategies the subjects don't use: S4, S8, S9, S13, S15, S16 and S17. In other words, there are 20 kinds of strategies in this list, with the total score of 1011; there are 10 strategies they seldom use, scoring under 10, they are: S5, S7, S12, S14, S18, S20, S22, S23, S25 and S26. The strategies used only when interlocutors are in equal social status are: S6, Dissuading interlocutors.

When the interlocutor is in a lower social status, strategy 2 still gets the highest score of 490; the strategy subjects use in the second place is strategy21, Degree Adverbs, scoring 130; strategy 18, alert, scores 115 and ranks the third; the strategy subjects use in the fourth place is strategy 1, Expressing regrets, scoring 112. There are 9 strategies the subjects don't use: S4, S6, S9, S11, S14, S15, S16, S17 and S23; in other words, there are 18 kinds of strategies in this list, with a total score of 1260. There are 6 strategies they seldom use, scoring under 10, they are: S7, S8, S10, S12, S25 and S26. The strategies used only when interlocutors are in a lower social status are: S8, Being ambiguous and S13, Self-defense.

The results show that the subjects are status-conscious, especially when they are in a lower social status. They used 10 percent more excuses and explanations than the other two groups with higher or equal status, because it is not easy for them to refuse a higher-status figure without reasonable explanation; they use degree adverbs to lessen the face-threatening act; they use alerts like "老板，主任，老师" to show politeness; They say sorry to express their regrets-- almost 50% of this strategy is used to people with higher status. All these four strategies they used most are to show respect to the higher positions which are usually related to prestige, authority or privilege. In China, people place a high value on respect for authority. Social ranking was extremely dominant and rigidly followed in the Chinese feudal society that lasted for thousands of years.

For the subjects born after 1990, most of their parents still teach their children obedience and expect to be treated with respect, and then similarities prevail between teachers and students, while later in life the model may happen between bosses and employees, which influenced the subjects.

When the subjects are having an equal social status with the addressee (in this study, friends and classmates), they prefer most to use excuses and explanations to refuse people, or in the second place, they just refuse directly, which may because they don't need to worry about losing their jobs or ruining the previous efforts to build up a harmonious relationship with the boss. They feel free to say "no" directly to friends or classmates.

When the subjects are in a higher social status, they use excuses or explanations, educate or criticize people and use principle or rules to refuse people, while in Wang Di's study, when the subjects refuse a person with lower status, reasons, dissuasion and direct refusal are most preferred.

Unlike the results in Wang Di's study, the most face-threatening strategies--direct refusal is not among the top three choices for the subjects in this study, although it is usually easier for those in higher positions to turn down others due to their superiority in status. Instead, they prefer indirect refusal strategies: they use excuses or explanations to explain why they refuse, and they educate or criticize people to show their concern, and they use principle or rules to show their authority.

It is interesting to notice the total scores of the strategies from each group. When subjects are in a lower social status, the total score of the strategies they use is 1260; when the subjects are in an equal status, the total score of the strategies they use is 1011. According to Cai (2009), the more strategies the subjects use, the more sensitive they are to the social status. The results in this study verified what she said: when it comes to refuse a person who is more powerful in position, the subjects spare no efforts to use as many strategies as possible to show concern and politeness. When refuse a person who is in an equal status, in this study, friends or classmates, they feel at ease and are less realizing the social status, so they use the least strategies.

4.4 How do nursing majors use refusal strategies in different situations of request, invitation, offer and suggestion?

Table 4.6 Refusal strategies in different situations

	In situation 1/2/3 request	In situation 4/5/6 invitation	In situation 7/8/9 offer	In situation 10/11/12 suggestion
Score for DD	83	48	135	21
Score for S1	101	100	22	4

Score for S2	447	74	433	258
Score for S3	27	6	10	74
Score for S4	0	0	65	0
Score for S5	0	17	55	7
Score for S6	0	0	0	54
Score for S7	2	0	0	3
Score for S8	0	0	0	2
Score for S9	53	2	4	3
Score for S10	2	90	1	1
Score for S11	99	0	1	136
Score for S12	2	0	0	9
Score for S13	0	0	0	98
Score for S14	2	0	0	11
Score for S15	97	11	7	66
Score for S16	43	0	0	0
Score for S17	0	0	0	4
Score for S18	53	11	36	21
Score for S19	5	36	3	16
Score for S20	20	26	6	14
Score for S21	76	139	11	23
Score for S22	0	15	0	3
Score for S23	1	0	23	1
Score for S24	37	54	1	5

Score for S25	5	5	0	5
Score for S26	5	0	1	0

In situation of request, 20 strategies are used, among which seven strategies get the score under 10; they are S7, S10, S12, S14, S23, S25 and S26. 13 of the strategies are normally used. Among them, S2 are used most and scored 447. S1, S11 and S15 gets the scores of 101, 99 and 97 respectively, ranks the second, the third and the forth, but they get very close amount of scores. Direct refusal gets the score of 83. The amount of scores all the strategies gets is 1160.

In the situation of invitation, 15 strategies are used, among which 3 of them get the score under 10, they are S3, S9 and S25. 11 of the strategies are normally used. Among them, S21 are used most and scored 139. S1 gets the score of 100 and ranks the second; S10 gets the score of 90 and ranks the third. Direct refusal gets the score of 48. The amount of scores of all the strategies gets is 634.

In the situation of offer, 17 strategies are used, among which 8 of them get the score under 10, they are S9, S10, S11, S15, S19, S20, S24 and S26. Among them, S2 are used most and scored 433. S4 gets the score of 65 and ranks the second; S5 gets the score of 55 and ranks the third. Direct refusal gets the score of 135. The amount of scores of all the strategies gets is 814.

In the situation of suggestion, 24 strategies are used, among which 12 of them get the score under 10, they are S1, S5, S7, S8, S9, S10, S12, S17, S22, S23, S24, S25. Among them, S2 gets the score of 258 ranks the first. S11 gets the score of 136 and ranks the second. S13 scores 98 and ranks the third. Direct refusal gets the score of 21. The amount of scores of all the strategies gets is 839.

In summary, S2 is used in all the four situations, but it is most commonly used in the situations of request. The situation of request also gets the highest total strategy score of 1160. In other words, the subjects use the most explanations as well as strategies in the situation of request, which indicates that the subjects feel hard and make the greatest efforts to refuse people when being requested. On the contrary, the situation of invitation gets the lowest total strategy score of 634, which indicates it is assigned the least efforts. But it doesn't mean the subjects are not polite when they are invited. Actually the first three most commonly used strategies are degree adverbs, saying sorry, using fake agreement or promise, all of which are meant to show the subjects' politeness and concern. The second evidence is that the least amount of direct refusal is used in the situation of invitation. So subjects are polite but effortless when being invited.

The most amount of direct refusal is used in the situation of offer. It is probably because, compared with refusing   a request, suggestion and invitation, refusing an offer actually minimizes the offer's costs and may be least likely to hurt the offers' face.

On the contrary, the least amount of direct refusal is used in the situation of suggestion. But it doesn't necessarily mean that the subjects are most polite in this situation, because they use 98

times of strategy of self-defense, even to their consultant, a person with a higher social status. Being straight forward is one of the features of post 90 students.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Major findings of the Study

This study aims to find out what refusal strategies nursing majors employ and how they apply them in different situations.

By experiment, the findings are as follows:

1.   The Chinese college nursing majors used 26 strategies in the survey in terms of content, lexical use and structure. Strategy 2 comes out the first choice on the list of the 26 strategies to show the subjects are most likely to employ excuses or explanations to refuse people. The second choice on the list is direct refusal strategy, which is always used with other strategies to soften the rigid image of the refuser. Strategy 21 Degree Adverbs ranks the third.

2.   A closer look on the 27 strategies shows that: first, most of the excuses or explanations are related to parents and families, indicating that family members are important to post 90s nursing majors. Second, the alert of "亲" which is a popular alter on the internet appears among the answers to the questionnaire to indicate that the post 90s nursing majors are influenced by mass media. Third, subjects tend to employ the strategy of self-defense even against their counselor, indicating that post 90s nursing majors tend to defense themselves when refusing someone who is in a higher position.

3.   In terms of content, the most preferred strategies are S2 Excuses or explanations, S11 Educating or criticizing and S1 expressing regrets; the least used one is S8 being ambiguous, which indicates that the subjects tend to be polite and precise when refusing others. In terms of lexical use, the most employed strategies are degree adverbs S18 alerts. In terms of syntax, the strategy most employed is the "Yes…but" structure.

4.   Data analysis shows that the subjects are status-conscious because the variable of social status has an impact on the use of various strategies. when the subjects are in a lower social status, they used 10 percent more excuses and explanations than the other two groups with higher or equal status; they use degree adverbs to lessen the face-threatening act; they use alerts to show politeness; they say sorry to express their regrets-- almost 50% of this strategy is used to people with higher status. When the subjects are refusing their friends and classmates who have the equal social status with them, they prefer most to use excuses and explanations to refuse people, or in the second place, they just refuse directly. When the subjects are in a higher social status, they prefer indirect refusal strategies: they use excuses or explanations to explain why they refuse, and they educate or criticize people to show their concern, and they use principle or rules to show their authority. The results also show that: when it comes to refuse a person who is more powerful

in position, the subjects spare no efforts to use as many strategies as possible to show concern and politeness.

5.   In the situation of request, the subjects use the most explanations as well as strategies, indicating that the subjects feel hard and make the greatest efforts to refuse people when being requested. In the situation of invitation, the first three most commonly used strategies are degree adverbs, saying sorry, using fake agreement or promise, showing subjects' politeness and concern. But in this situation, the subjects use the least amount of strategies, showing that they don't say a lot to refuse people when being invited. In the situation of offer, the strategy of direct refusal is most used, which is probably because refusing an offer actually minimizes the offer's costs and may be least likely to hurt the offers' face. In the situation of suggestion, the strategy of self-defense is used most, showing that being straightforward is one of the features of post 90s students.

5.2 Limitations of the study

Firstly, the classification of the refusal strategies is subjective. Most strategies are easy to classify into certain categories because specific examples are given by Cai (2009). However, some strategies are difficult to classify, and they are classified according to my own understanding. During this process, different authors may have different results.

Secondly, the questionnaire, a time-efficient instrument, may not be the best way to obtain authentic data from the intercultural communication. Because, as is mentioned above, it is difficult to tell what the subjects have written down is what they actually say in spontaneous conversations and the DCT does not offer the repetitions, the number of turns, the emotional depth, body language etc. as in natural situations.

Thirdly, only the variable of interlocutors' status is the controlled variable in the study so that the result is not comprehensive.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

Firstly, both female and male nursing majors should be involved to verify the results.

Secondly, more factors should be considered. Various variables such as social distance and social power should be included in the design of the study.

Thirdly, interview and tape record should be added into the method as the supplement for the DCT questionnaire, so that it can be examined whether the refusal strategies remain the same between spoken language and written language.

Lastly, cross-cultural studies in relation to the use of refusal strategies should be carried if the foreign nursing majors could be obtained.

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