Linguistic Politeness in Indonesia: Refusal Strategies among School-Aged Children in the Indonesian Context

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Abstract

Literature asserts that when children attempt to master a language, they display characteristics that are distinct from those of adults. They develop structures, patterns, and rules of their own language in this way. Moreover, a number of experts have proposed that in speech acts, speakers do not always intend to achieve personal objectives, i.e. to obtain something, but also attempt to maintain good relations with their speech partner and ensure interactions run smoothly. According to our knowledge, this topic among schoolchildren has received less attention recently. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the politeness strategies employed by school-aged children when conveying specific refusals to their speech partners, it was necessary to conduct this current study on this phenomenon. This study adopted a qualitative methodology. Forty children between the ages of six and ten provided speech samples. Observation and field notes were utilized to collect the data. The collected data were subsequently analyzed using an interactive analysis model that included data collection, data presentation, data reduction, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that children use politeness strategies to avoid offending their speech partner, to avoid losing face, and to keep the conversation going. The current findings also indicate that there are eight distinct categories of refusal strategies: (1) refusing by questioning; (2) refusing by delaying; (3) refusing by requesting an apology; (4) refusing by offering an alternative task; (5) refusing by involving a third party; (6) refusing by suggesting a replacement; (7) refusing by stating conditional sentences; and (8) refusing by returning the command to the interlocutor. Also provided are implications and limitations for future research.

Keywords: *Linguistic Politeness; Refusal Strategies; School-Age Children; Communication; Indonesia*

Introduction

It is widely stated in the literature that in an effort to master a language, a child exhibits unique characteristics distinct from those of adults. In this regard, children develop the structures, patterns, and rules of their own language (Ellis, 2019). In addition, children frequently employ distinct strategies when accepting language exposure, internalizing it, and subsequently employing it in communication (Romanowski, 2018a, 2018b). In comparison to adult language, children's language has distinct semantic, syntactic, and conceptual characteristics (Canette et al., 2020; Meredith & Catherine, 2020). However,

they have a significantly smaller semantic component and conceptual meaning range than adults (Borghi et al., 2021). This argument is supported by other findings that state that children's speech differs from that of adults in terms of language sound, word selection, word formation, and sentence structure (Icht et al., 2022; Kizi, 2021; Seidenberg & MacDonald, 2018). Consequently, in the process of acquiring communication skills, children will not only acquire linguistic rules, but will also gradually learn how adults use sentences correctly. Thus, children learn not only language competence but also speech act competence, which is the ability to use language appropriately and correctly in a variety of social contexts (Bohn & Frank, 2019; Gleason & Perlmann, 2018).

In addition, a number of other experts have proposed that in speech acts, speakers do not always intend to achieve personal objectives, namely to obtain something, but also attempt to maintain good relations with their speech partner and ensure that interactions run smoothly (Ghazzoul, 2019; Sbisà, 2018). In other words, by submitting their refusal, for instance, individuals, in this case elementary school-aged children, are attempting to accomplish both personal and social objectives (O'Keefe & Delia, 2018; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). In addition to personal goals, the presence of social goals in elementary school encourages children to employ a variety of verbal forms (Nelson et al., 2018). This is due to the fact that in submitting a refusal, children's speech must not only be sufficiently informative, but also try to maintain good relations with the speech partners they are interacting with so that communication continuity can be maintained effectively (Beneteau et al., 2019).

Thus, the study of acts of refusal is not enough to be based solely on the principle of cooperation, this must be complemented by the principle of courtesy and other principles of social action so that speakers and speech partners can avoid communication bottlenecks. If the principle of cooperation functions to regulate what is said so that it can contribute to the achievement of the conversation's goals, the principle of courtesy maintains social balance and friendly relations in the conversation. This principle tries to keep the speech events that occur, speakers and speech partners do not feel lost when there is a communication disagreement between them (Garg & Sengupta, 2020; Handiawati et al., 2020; Hessels et al., 2019; Insani et al., 2019). Therefore, this phenomenon among school-aged children warrants further study in order to gain a deeper understanding of the politeness strategies they employ when conveying certain refusals to their speech partners. This topic has, to our knowledge, received less attention recently. Therefore, it is anticipated that the findings of this study will contribute to the development of pragmatic theory and speech act theory, as well as to the improvement of the language teaching and learning process in accordance with the communicative approach and contextual approach, which restores language to its primary function as a communication tool and brings language learners closer to their native languages.

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative method. Forty children between the ages of six and ten years old provided the research data through their speech. Observation and field notes were utilized as research instruments to collect the data (Dey, 2005). The collected data were then analyzed utilizing an interactive analysis model, which included data collection, data presentation, data reduction, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014; Usher & Jackson, 2019). Therefore, the data analysis was a series of continuous, repetitive, and continuous activities that were interconnected.

Findings and Discussion

The results revealed that when communicating refusal to their speech partners, children employed certain politeness strategies designed to avoid offending or humiliating their speech partners. These politeness strategies can be categorized into the following eight refusal modes: (1) refusing by questioning, (2) refusing by delaying, (3) refusing by requesting an apology, (4) refusing by offering an alternative task, (5) refusing by involving a third party, (6) refusing by suggesting a replacement, (7)

refusing by stating conditional sentences, and (8) refusing by returning the command to the interlocutor. Following are the results of the analysis and subsequent discussion.

Refusing by Questioning

Refusing by questioning is a refusal communicated to a speech partner by children using interrogative sentences. Thus, the children express refusal by posing specific questions to their speech partner. The following are examples of relevant data:

(1) R: Gus, go study. You have two exams but you keep on playing.

　　B　: Can I not take a nap? (as he entered the house, leaving his friends behind).
　　R　: Get some rest first. Don't keep playing.

(2) B: Danang, please pass the ball to Sigit.

　　D　: Should I be the one to return the ball? (while proceeding to play with the ball).
　　B　: Yes. It's late at sunset, you know.

In the discourse data (1) and (2), indirect refusal by asking mode was represented by the speech events (1) and (2). Speech events in the discourse data (1) occur when the child's mother instructs him to study for the remainder of the day because he will be tested in two subjects. The child attempts to disobey this command by challenging the established routine, which is to always take a nap. The child hopes that his mother would permit him to skip studying that afternoon. In the discourse data (2), it appears that, in order to refuse the request of the speech partner (B), the child (D) questions the request-related obligation. This is in line with previous studies that children make use of indirect strategies to refuse something (Azhari & others, 2018; Fatma et al., 2019).

Refusing by Delaying

Refusing by delaying is a refusal of a speech partner's request with the intent to not carry out the request, at least when the request is made by the speech partner. If it is impossible to refuse the request, the children are willing to comply as long as it is not "now" (Farooq et al., 2020). The following are examples of related data:

(3) R: Kid, let's eat so you can recover quickly.

　　B: I plan to eat later. I still feel queasy and have an urge to vomit. (leaving behind her mother who has
　　　　brought a dinner plate).
　　R: Eat only a little. Then, let's take our medication.
　　B : Please, Mother, I plan to eat later.

(4) E : Bagus, let's hurry, we're going to be late.

　　B : Yes, please wait. Awake, I'm ready to face the day (while pulling the blanket closer to get back
　　　　inside).
　　E: Let's get up.
　　B: Let me squirm first. Just five minutes.

The child refuses her mother's order to eat because she still feels "queasy" and wants to vomit, according to the speech events in the discourse data (3) above. However, in order to avoid offending the speech partner, the child conveyed her refusal by using indirect refusal with the mode of delay. This

means that if the speech partner asks the child to carry out her orders, the child is still willing to do so as long as it is not at that time (Farooq et al., 2020). This case is similar to data in discourse (4).

Refusing by Requesting an Apology

Refusing by expressing forgiveness statements is a refusal. This form is typically used to express refusal to a speech partner whose level of closeness to the child is not too close and whose social status is relatively higher than that of the child. The following are some examples of such data:

(5) E: Please call Danang, Ham (Irham).

I: I'm sorry, sir, I'm busy eating (while going into the house).
E: Oh, you're eating? Why are you straying?

(6) A: Mas Bagus, give Irham a call.

B: Sorry aunty, Irham went too far (while seating on a motorbike seat that was parked).
A: Where is Irham?

Speech acts in the discourse data (5) and (6) reveal that the children use statements of forgiveness to decline a request for assistance from a speech partner whose psychological relationship is not very close to them and whose social status is higher than them. By doing this, they hope to keep good relations with their speech partners and avoid upsetting or embarrassing them as a result of their refusal (Ding et al., 2022).

Refusing by Offering an Alternative Task

Refusing by suggesting an alternative task in place of the one the speech partner has requested is known as offering another task as a substitute. Typically, the child prefers this replacement task or finds it easier than the one provided by the speech partner. Consider the following two examples.

(7) R: It's time for you to take a nap, Gus.

B: Is it alright if I complete my homework first? I have extensive homework (whilst resting his head on his mother's lap).
R: Get some rest first. Then complete your homework tonight.

(8) B: Dry out the pool, Nang.

D: Mas, allow me to simply remove the bucket (bringing the half-filled water bucket to the park right away).
B: You always opt for the simpler option.

When the child is asked by his mother to take a nap, the speech event in the discourse data (7) takes place. In actuality, the child dislikes the naptime activity. Although it has become routine for him to obey his mother's commands, the child lacks the confidence to do so. Therefore, in an effort to keep the relationship with the speech partner positive, the child makes an effort to suggest homework as an alternative to napping (Gibson et al., 2020). The child does this in the hope that his mother would understand his refusal. Similarly, in the discourse data (8), the child attempts to substitute the task of "lifting the bucket" for the speech partner's request to "drying out the pool."

Refusing by Involving a Third Party

Refusing by mentioning a third party is a refusal made by citing another individual connected to the speech event's context as the justification for rejecting the speech partner's request. In most cases, the

third party is the one who has the biggest impact on the child and speech partner. An illustration of refusal in this mode is as follows.

(9) B: Ham, would you like to take my place at the football game?

    I: Where? Mas, is that in front of the mosque?
    B: Yes. Would you like to do it, Ham?
    I: Mother forbids me from doing so, she is concerned that I might be falling (while continuing to play
        on the swing in Bagus' yard).

(10) R: Bagus, let's take a nap.

    B : Mom, father asked me to study. Tomorrow there will be a test (while going to take a textbook).
    R: Go quickly study.

The discourse data (9) and (10) are examples of politeness strategy data for speech acts of refusal involving a third party by children. In the speech event (9), the child invokes the influence of his mother to support his refusal (Katz, 2019). In contrast, the child uses his father's name to reject his mother's request in discourse data 10.

Refusing by Suggesting a Replacement

Refusing by naming a substitute is a refusal made by naming someone else as a substitute to carry out the speech partner's order or request. This refusal is intended to provide an alternative to carrying out the speech partner's orders, as the child is incapable of carrying out certain requests or orders. Here are some illustrations of the data.

(11) R: Please, Gus, go to Mr. Aman's store and buy a lighter.

    B: Please ask my brother to do so, Mom. I'm still playing a game (while continuing to play PS with
        his friends).
    R: Why don't you pause it first?

(12) B: Nang, please contact Sigit. Tell him to put on shoes.

    D: Mas, could you please ask Irham to do that? I'd also like to wear some shoes (while rushing back
        to the house).
    B: Okay. Irham, please call Sigit.

The statements "Mom, please ask my brother to do so. I'm still playing a game." and "Mas, could you please ask Irham to do that?" are examples of politeness strategies for refusing speech acts by finding a substitute (for executing requests/orders). According to the discourse data (11), the child views "buying a lighter" as a mandatory directive. Therefore, when the child must decline a speech partner's request, he or she feels compelled to find a suitable substitute (Laubscher & Light, 2020). Likewise, speech events in discourse data (12).

Refusing by Stating Conditional Sentences

This type of refusal is one in which a child expresses his or her desire for an ideal situation or condition in comparison to the current situation or condition in which the child is currently experiencing. The child's refusal can be better understood if the desired and imagined circumstances and conditions are ideal. The refusal data are shown in the following example.

(13) B: Let's buy a good ball together, Ham.

    I: Yes, if I hadn't spent the money on Tamiya, I would love to (while playing
      Tamiya in the yard).
    B: Wita buys later, save more money.

(14) E: Gus, can you help me to wash the car later?

    B: I'd do it if Mother wouldn't make me take a nap, Dad (while leaving to play with Irham).
    E: After you've gotten out of bed in the afternoon, we'll wash it.
    B: Dad, I'm going to sleep until *maghrib*.

The statements "Yes, if I hadn't spent the money on Tamiya, I would love to" in the example of the discourse data (13) and " I'd do it if Mother wouldn't make me take a nap, Dad" in the example of the discourse data (14) are used by children to convey their refusal to their speech partners. These statements are used to explain why they are unable to accept the request because of their unfavorable circumstances. It is hoped that their speech partners will understand that they are willing to make the request, if the conditions allow, by delivering these ideal conditions to them (Harris, 2019; Jaszczolt & Witek, 2018).

Refusing by Returning a Command to the Interlocutor

Giving the command back to the interlocutor is a form of a child's refusal to do something that the interlocutor had previously rejected. When the child believes that the speech partner should perform an action that the speech partner has requested, he or she switches into this mode (Heath & Thomas, 2020). Here are a few examples of the data.

(15) I: Mas, could you please put away the toys?

    B: You need to clean it up a bit. I know who played it, and it was you (while walking towards the
      swing in the corner of the yard).
    I: It's a mess, and I have no idea how to fix it.

(16) A: Gus, put the PS back where it belongs.

    B : Do it on your own. It was great to see you play it as well. You were the last person to use the
      PlayStation, after all (while walking out of the house).
    A : I'm not looking forward to playing again the following day.

The children in examples 15 and 16 have a good reason to believe that the activities requested by their partners are more appropriate for them to participate in. A common admonition, "You need to clean it up," is similar to "Do it on your own."

Conclusion

As a way to avoid offending their speech partner, not lose face, and keep the conversation going, children use politeness strategies in conveying their refusals. The findings indicate that refusal strategies can be divided into eight categories: (1) refusing by questioning, (2) refusing by delaying, (3) refusing by requesting an apology, (4) refusing by offering an alternative task, (5) refusing by involving a third party, (6) refusing by suggesting a replacement, (7) refusing by stating conditional sentences, and (8) refusing by returning the command to the interlocutor. Additionally, this study has numerous implications and limitations. The findings should be emphasized more in the context of education so that school-aged children can communicate more effectively. They should be required to employ a greater variety of

communication strategies in all speech acts and contexts. In addition, although it sheds light on the investigated topic, future research should include additional studies with a larger sample size in order to obtain more reliable findings.

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