

CANADIAN ENGLISH SPEAKERS' CHOICES IN REFUSING INVITATIONS

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ABSTRACT: *Using data provided by a group of Canadian undergraduate university students, the present study expands research on regional pragmatic variation in English. It focuses on types, frequencies, pragmatic functions, realization forms, and situational distribution of invitation refusals in Canadian English. Results show that the invitation refusals collected appear either as single speech acts or as communicative acts/speech act sets in which refusals are combined with other types of acts. The analysis also reveals the use of direct refusals and/or indirect refusals and/or supportive acts in the production of refusal utterances, with significant differences regarding their frequencies, realisation patterns, pragmatic functions and situational distribution. The use and combinations of these invitation refusal strategies are also examined, from the perspective of politeness and rapport management. Limitations of the study as well as avenues for future research are outlined in the conclusion of the paper.*

KEYWORDS: Invitation Refusals, Face, Mitigation, Variation, Canadian English

INTRODUCTION

This study is a continuation of a previous research on a quantitative analysis of refusals in Canadian English (cf. Mulo Farenkia 2018a). The present paper provides a more detailed analysis, focusing on invitation refusal. The studies currently available explore refusals in British, American, and Scottish English (Félix-Brasdefer 2008); in Cameroon English and Ghanaian English (Anchimbe 2015), Egyptian Arabic (Nelson et. al 2004), Korean and American English (Kwo 2004), Mainland and Taiwan Chinese (cf. Ren 2015), Cameroon and Hexagonal French (Mulo Farenkia 2018b), Canadian French (Berrier 2008), Persian (Izadi & Zilaie 2015) etc. Using data from role-plays, written questionnaires, interviews, verbal reports, naturally occurring conversations, etc. these studies examine the linguistic realization patterns and/or perceptions of refusals and politeness strategies, the effects of factors such as age, region, social status, sociocultural norms, etc. on the choices of refusal strategies, among other things. While some researchers investigate refusals in individual languages, others compare refusal strategies in different languages (cross-cultural pragmatic perspective) and/or in different varieties of the same language (variational pragmatic approach). The acquisition and development of refusals in second/foreign language learning has also been the focus of some researchers (cf. Barron, 2003). The general findings show that refusal strategies differ from one language and cultural setting to another.

Although there are numerous studies on refusals in many regional varieties of English, there is very little knowledge about the linguistic and pragmatic choices made by Canadian English speakers to perform refusals in general and invitation refusals in particular. The present study is an attempt to fill this research gap. The data used for the analysis were collected using a written Discourse Completion Task questionnaire. The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical background, in which the speech act of refusing is defined and a brief literature review is presented. The methodology is outlined in Section 3, and the findings are

presented and discussed in Section 4. The paper concludes with remarks and perspectives for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The act of refusing can be defined, from an interactional point of view, as a reactive speech act, as a response to requests, invitations, offers, suggestions, etc. by which a speaker expresses their will not “to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor” (Chen et al. 1995: 121). As a negative response, a refusal represents a high degree of threat to the hearer’s face and to social harmony. In terms of realization, many studies show that refusals take different realization patterns, depending on the language used and/or cultural setting in which the exchange takes place and on whether the speaker intends to achieve a harmonious or conflictive outcome of the verbal exchange. If the speaker intends to amplify the negative effects of the refusal on the interlocutor’s face, s/he may use direct strategies in combination with several intensification devices. On the other hand, speakers may use a range of refusal strategies in association with internal and external mitigating devices in order to save the interlocutor’s face, to avoid interpersonal conflict and to achieve a positive outcome for the exchange. In research on refusals it has been shown that speakers may use single acts/moves, namely single direct refusals as in (1) and (2) or single indirect refusals such as reasons as in (3) or promises as in (4).

- 1) No.
- 2) I am unable to come.
- 3) I am very busy.
- 4) Next time.

Refusals can also be realized using complex utterances consisting of two or more refusals as in (5) and (6). Complex refusal utterances could also combine refusals proper and supportive acts as in (7).

- 5) No (*Direct refusal*) I can’t (*Direct refusal*) I am very busy (*Indirect refusal/Reason*).
- 6) I am sorry (*Indirect refusal/Apology*) I can’t make it (*Direct refusal*).
- 7) Thanks for your invitation but (*Supportive act/Thanks*) I can’t make it (*Direct refusal*)
I am very busy that day (*Indirect refusal/Reason*).

In most cases, refusals are realized in speech act sets. As a matter of fact, the communicative act of refusing is realized in many examples of the data used in the present study through combinations of direct refusals, indirect refusals and/or supportive acts. For this reason, it would be more adequate to describe refusals as communicative acts, consisting of a variety of realization patterns (cf. Trosborg’s, 1995).

As already indicated in the introduction, a number of interesting studies have been carried out on refusals in different languages and cultures, using different perspectives: a cross-cultural approach (cf. Félix-Brasdefer 2008 for a discussion of studies on refusals), an interlanguage pragmatic perspective (cf. Kwon 2004; Nelson et al. 2004), or a variational pragmatic approach

(cf. Ren 2015; Mulo Farenkia 2018). Investigations of pragmatic phenomena in Canadian English include analysis of complaints (Nakhle et. al 2014), directive speech acts (Hofmann 2003), thanks responses (cf. Mulo Farenkia 2012), compliments (Mulo Farenkia 2013) and compliment responses (Mulo Farenkia 2014), to name just a few. There is, to the best of my knowledge, no study on invitation refusals in Canadian English.

METHOD

Instrument and Informants

The data for this study were produced by 32 undergraduate University students, native speakers of Canadian English, 16 females and 16 males, aged between 18 and 23. The data were collected by means of a Discourse Completion Task questionnaire (cf. Blum-Kulka et al. 1989) consisting of many different situations in which the participants had to construct dialogues in which they were asked to realize a range of different speech acts. Three of these situations elicited invitation refusals, the focus of the present study. The three scenarios employed were described as follows:

- 1) Situation 1 (Birthday party): Your friend invites you to a birthday party. But you cannot attend. You say to him/her:
- 2) Situation 2 (Drink after class): A classmate invites you to a drink after class. But you cannot accept the invitation. You say to him/her.
- 3) Situation 3 (Colleague's talk): Your professor invites you to a colleague's talk. But you are unable to attend. You say to him/her.

As can be seen in the descriptions above, the situations differ in terms of social distance and power distance. In both situations 1 (birthday party) and 2 (drink after class), the person refusing the invitation and the inviter are equal in social status. In situation 1, the relationship is a close one, whereas in situation 2 speaker and hearer know each other as classmates/acquaintances. Their relationship is half way on the close–distant continuum. In situation 3 (colleague's talk), the inviter has a higher power position (professor) and the invitee and the inviter know each other as acquaintances.

Data Analysis

The 32 informants provided 95 answers for the three questionnaire tasks (32 responses in situation 1, 32 responses in situation 2, and 31 responses in situation 3¹). These examples were analyzed based on the schemes used in previous studies (cf. Beebe et al. 1990; Felix-Brasdefer 2008) in which refusals are examined with respect to the number of moves involved in the same utterance, the use of head acts and support moves, the level of directness of head acts, the use of internal mitigating or intensifying devices, etc. Head acts are the main components or strategies used to realize refusals, independently of other elements in the conversational turn. Overall, I examined the level of directness of head acts and obtained two types head acts, namely direct head acts or direct refusals and indirect head acts or indirect refusals. The examples produced by the participants were segmented into individual utterances and each

¹ One participant did not provide any answer for the task in situation 3.

occurrence was classified as a strategy belonging to one of the following three pragmatic categories: direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjuncts to refusals.

Direct refusals are realized in many different ways. While some respondents use “no”, others prefer utterances that express their inability to accept the invitation, using constructions like ‘I can’t’, ‘I am unable to make it’, etc. In the corpus, direct refusals can either appear alone as in ‘I can’t attend’ or appear in sequences made up of different types of speech acts with various pragmatic functions as in (8).

8) Sorry I won’t be able to make it! Thank you though for the invitation. (Friend²)

In (8), the direct refusal ‘I won’t be able to make it’ is preceded by an apology or regret ‘sorry’ and the direct refusal is followed by an expression of gratitude ‘thank you though for the invitation’. The apology and thanks are employed to mitigate the negative impact of the direct refusal on the addressee’s face and to save the relationship between the two friends.

The respondents also use many different speech acts as indirect invitation refusals. Indirect refusals appear in the form of apologies such as ‘sorry’ in (8) and (9), reasons like ‘but I’m busy today’ as in (9), statements of alternative such as ‘maybe some other time?’ in (9), etc. Indirect refusals can appear alone. They can also be associated with direct refusals, supportive acts, and/or other types of indirect refusals, as can be seen in (10).

9) Sorry, but I’m busy today. Maybe some other time? (Classmate)

10) Oh no I can’t, I have a class then. I’m so sorry I would have loved to come. (Professor)

Adjuncts to refusals or supportive acts are acts that come either before or after direct or indirect refusals. They cannot be used alone to decline an invitation. Their pragmatic function is to mitigate or to reinforce direct refusals and indirect refusals. Adjuncts appear in the form of gratitude expressions such as ‘that’s very nice of you’ in (11), expressions of willingness such as ‘I would love to attend but’ in (12).

11) That’s very nice of you, but I’m busy after class. I have to study. (Classmate)

12) I would love to attend but unfortunately I have other things to take care of. (Professor)

The next section presents and discusses the results of the analysis, highlighting the frequencies, realization forms, pragmatic functions, and situational distribution of the invitation refusal strategies found in the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall use of strategies

Table 1 shows the frequencies of the three main refusals strategies in the data. Overall, the respondents used 236 utterances to construct invitation refusals. As can be seen in Table 1, the participants mostly prefer indirect refusals and this strategy accounts for 62.7% (n=148) of the

² The examples are drawn from the present data. The examples are coded as follows: the three situations are coded as Friend (S1); Classmate (S2); Professor (S3).

data. The second most common strategies are direct refusals, which represent 22% (n=52), while adjuncts to refusals account for 15.3% (n=36) of the examples.

Table 1. Overall use of refusals strategies

Strategy	No	%
Direct refusals	52	22%
Indirect refusals	148	62.7%
Adjuncts to refusals	36	15.3%
Total	236	100%

I also examined the distribution of the three main refusal strategies across the three questionnaire situations. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Situational distribution of refusal strategies

	Friend (S1)	Classmate (S2)	Professor (S3)	Total
Direct refusals	15	17	20	52
Indirect refusals	55	57	36	148
Adjuncts to refusals	13	7	16	36
Total	83	81	72	236

First, Table 2 indicates that the respondents use almost the same number of strategies when declining invitations from friends (n=83) and from classmates (n=81). The number of strategies employed to decline professors' invitations was the lowest (n=72). Second, the participants mostly use direct refusals to decline professors' invitations (n=20). Third, the participants choose considerably fewer indirect refusals in the professor situation (n=36) than in the two other situations (friend (n=55); classmate (n=57)). Finally, the informants mostly prefer adjuncts to refusals when declining a professor's invitation to a colleague's talk (n=16). In the next sections, I will describe the realization patterns and frequencies of the direct refusals, indirect refusals and adjuncts attested in the data.

Direct Refusal Strategies

Overall, there are two realization types of direct refusals in the corpus: 'no' and 'negative ability/inability', as can be seen in Table 3. Of the 52 tokens of direct refusals attested, there are 50 (96.2%) occurrences of 'inability strategy, while the 'no' strategy appears only twice (3.8%). Thus, the respondents most frequently evoke the impossibility to accept invitations. With regard to their distribution across the three situations, Table 3 shows that the 'no' type only appears in the classmate and professor situations, while the 'negative ability' type is mostly used when declining invitations from professors.

Table 3. Types and frequency of direct refusals

Type of direct refusal	Friend	Classmate	Professor	Total
No	0	1	1	2 (3.8%)
Negative ability/inability	15	16	19	50 (96.2%)
Total	15	17	20	52 (100%)

It is worth mentioning that direct refusals either appear alone, as in (13), or in speech act sets, i.e. complex utterances made up of different types of speech acts with various pragmatic functions, as in (14) and (15).

13) I can't attend. (Friend)

14) Thank you for inviting me, but unfortunately I can't make it. (Professor)

15) I'm sorry, I can't right now would you like to make plans for another day? (Classmate)

In (14), the direct refusal "I can't make it" is preceded and mitigated by a gratitude expression "thanks for inviting me". In (15), the direct refusal is mitigated by an apology "I'm sorry", which precedes the refusal, which is then followed by a suggestion for an alternative day to have a drink with the classmate. The apology and the suggestions are intended to soften the negative impact of the refusal on the interlocutor's face.

As far as the linguistic realizations of the direct refusals are concerned, the results show that the "expression of inability to accept the invitation" appears in many different forms. While some respondents choose the elliptic form "I can't", others prefer utterances like "I can't/cannot make it", "I can't go/come", "I don't think I can make it", "I won't be able to attend", "I won't be able to make it", "I am unable to attend that day". A quantitative analysis of the realization patterns of expressions of inability reveals that of the 50 expressions identified, there are 6 tokens of "I can't", 36 instances of "I can't/cannot + V" (e.g. 'I can't make it/I can't that day'), and 7 examples of "I won't be able to attend". The findings also show that the most common direct form used to express inability to accept the invitation, namely "I can't make it", is clearly favoured in the friend and classmate situations (n=14 each), while the structure "I won't be able to attend" is clearly favoured in the professor situation (n=6).

Indirect Refusal Strategies

Overall use of indirect strategies

The respondents produced 148 indirect refusals, using different types of speech acts. Table 4 summarizes the results of the analysis.

Table 4. Realization types of indirect refusals and their frequencies.

Indirect strategies	Friend	Classmate	Professor	Total
Reason	24	15	17	56 (37.9%)
Apology/Regret	25	16	13	54 (36.5%)
Alternative	4	18	5	27 (18.3%)
Promise	1	8	0	9 (6.1%)
Conditional acceptance	1	0	0	1 (0.6%)
Request	0	0	1	1 (0.6%)
Total	55	57	36	148 (100%)

As shown in Table 4, the participants used six different speech acts, namely *reason*, *apology/regret*, *alternative*, *promise*, *conditional acceptance*, and *request*, to decline

invitations indirectly. Overall, two groups of indirect refusals emerge from Table 4: major indirect strategies, i.e. those consisting of indirect refusals with frequencies above 10% and minor strategies, i.e. those with frequencies less than 10%. The major indirect refusal types are reason (n=56; 37.9%), apology (n=54; 36.5%) and alternative (n=27; 18.3%). The two most favoured indirect refusal strategies, reason and apology, represent more than 70% of all indirect refusals. The minor indirect refusal strategies include promise (n=9; 6.1%), conditional acceptance (n=1; 0.6%) and request (n=1; 0.6%). With respect to situational distribution, Table 4 indicates that the participants mostly use reasons (n=24) and apologies (n=25) in the friend situation, while alternatives are evoked most frequently in the classmate situation (n=18). Table 4 also shows that promises overwhelmingly appear in the classmate situation (8/9).

In a further step of the study, I looked at the various realization patterns and pragmatic functions of the speech acts used as indirect refusals.

Realization patterns of indirect strategies

Reasons

The analysis of reasons, the most frequent indirect refusal strategy, reveals that the respondents provide general and specific reasons. Examples in which reasons appear alone, as in (16), are rare in the data. Rather, reasons (in bold in the examples below) are mostly accompanied by other speech acts like apology (“I’m sorry”) as in (17), expression of willingness (“I would love to go but”) as in (17), suggesting an alternative (“We can do something at a later time”) as in (18), etc.

16) I have other commitments. (Friend)

17) I’m sorry, I would love to go but **I’m really busy next Saturday**. (Friend)

18) Sorry, **I’ve got other things going on**. We can do something at a later time. (Classmate)

Apologies and Regrets

Apologies or regrets occupy different positions and have different functions in the communicate acts of refusing. When apologies appear at the beginning of the speech act set or precede other indirect refusals (e.g. justifications) as in (19) or direct refusals as in (20), they function as strategic disarmers or preparators for refusals. Apologies and regrets appearing in the middle as in (21) or at the end of the speech act set as in (22) function as softeners for refusals. Apologies are mostly employed in the data as preparators.

19) **I’m sorry** but I have an orthodontist appointment. (Professor)

20) **I’m sorry**, but I can’t make it. (Classmate)

21) Looks like I can’t go man. **Sorry bud**, I’ll send a card later. (Friend)

22) I already made plans for that day, **sorry**. (Friend)

Suggestions of alternatives

Suggesting an alternative is the third most frequent indirect refusal in the corpus. This strategy is intended to let the interlocutor know that if both agree on the suggested course of action, s/he should expect a positive response to his or her invitation. Suggestions appear alone as in (23)

or in combination with other refusal strategies such as apologies, justifications, suggestions of alternatives, etc. as in (24). As far as the realization forms of suggestions are concerned, the respondents use constructions like *How about X!?* (23-24), *Let's X* (25); *We can X* (19); *can I X?* (26); *Would like to X* (27); *I can/can I?* (28), etc.

23) How about tomorrow when I don't have class? (Classmate)

24) **How about we arrange dinner instead?** I'm sorry man. (Friend)

25) I'm sorry, I really want to go, but I have other stuff going on. **But let's get together next week and celebrate them.** (Friend)

26) Sorry, I've got other things going on. **We can do something at a later time.** (Classmate)

27) I'm sorry, I can't right now **would you like to make plans for another day?** (Classmate)

28) I have this other thing to do, **can I arrange another time?** (Classmate)

Promise / Postponement

Promise or postponement is another indirect strategy used to decline invitations. By making a promise, the refuser indicates that the refusal is temporary and that the addressee can expect a positive response another time. In this case, the refusal is mitigated and social harmony is maintained or restored. Promise is the fourth most frequent indirect refusal strategy in the data and it is mostly employed in the classmate situation (8 occurrences attested). In this situation, the respondents promise to accept the invitation for a drink another time, using utterances like "another time", "maybe next week", "maybe some other/another time", "I will next time". The refusers express different levels of commitment in their promises. The promises do not appear alone in the data. Rather, they are associated with other refusals strategies (e.g. direct refusals, justifications, apologies) and the promises can appear before as in (29) or after the other refusal strategies as in (30) and (31).

29) Maybe another time I need to go home after class. (Classmate)

30) Sorry I can't but I will next time. (Classmate)

31) I'm sorry I have a project/class to attend. Maybe another time. (Classmate)

Contrary to other promises found in the classmate situation, one respondent promised in the friend situation to send a card to the addressee as in (31). By doing so, the refuser wants to show that s/he wishes the addressee a successful birthday party. As can be seen in the example, the promise is used to soften the direct refusal "I can't go" which is further mitigated by means of the expression "looks like", the solidarity marker "man", and the apology "sorry bud."

32) Looks like I can't go man. Sorry bud. I'll send a card later. (Friend)

Other indirect strategies

The two other indirect refusal strategies found in the data are "conditional acceptance" as in (33) and request as in (34).

33) I have other plans, but maybe if I finish early I can come for a bit. (Friend)

34) That would be helpful, but unfortunately I can't make it. **Could you maybe give me your colleague's contact information?** (Professor)

In (33), the speaker refuses the invitation to his/her friend's birthday party by indicating that s/he has other commitments. The indirect refusal is further mitigated with a statement that s/he may come later if s/he finishes early with what s/he had already planned to do. With this hypothetical statement, the refuser tries to do two things. Firstly, s/he gives hope to the addressee by telling him/her that s/he may expect to see the other at the party. Secondly, the refuser tries to protect his or her own face in case the promise is not fulfilled. In (34), the request is intended to show the professor the level of commitment of the student despite the refusal.

ADJUNCTS TO REFUSALS

Adjuncts to refusals are different kinds of speech acts, which may come before or after direct and indirect refusals. Adjuncts alone cannot be used to refuse invitations. Rather, they are external modification devices used to soften refusals. The speech acts used as adjuncts may focus on many different aspects of the invitation being declined or different face-wants of the speaker or the addressee. Table 5 presents the types of adjuncts found in the data and their frequencies.

Table 5. Types and frequency of adjuncts to refusals

Adjunct strategies	Friend	Classmate	Professor	Total
Willingness	7	2	6	15 (41.7%)
Gratitude	2	5	5	12 (33.3%)
Good wish	4	0	0	4 (11.1%)
Positive opinion	0	0	5	5 (13.9%)
Total	13	7	16	36 (100%)

Expressions of willingness

Overall, the respondents produced 36 adjuncts and the expression of willingness is the most frequent adjunct in the data. It accounts for 15 occurrences, representing 41.7% of all adjuncts. The pragmatic function of this adjunct is to mitigate the negative impact of refusal on the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. It is employed to indicate that the refusal should not overshadow the willingness of the speaker to comply with the invitation he or she has to decline it. The examples show that some participants express their willingness before actually declining the invitation as in (35), (36) and (37).

35) **I wish I could but** I'm busy that day. (Friend)

36) **I would love to attend but** unfortunately have other things to take care of. (Professor)

37) **I would love to meet up with you, but** I can't this time. (Classmate)

Other respondents express willingness after refusing the invitation as in (38) and (39). In some examples, expressions of willingness are repeated, with one appearing before and another after the direct or indirect refusal as in (40).

38) Oh no! I'm working that night and I don't know if I'll be able to come. I'm very sorry,
I wish I could make it. (Friend)

39) Oh no I can't, I have a class then. I'm so sorry **I would have loved to come.** (Friend)

40) **I would love to but** I'm busy that day sorry. **I wish I could go.** (Friend)

The most prevalent ways in which expressions of willingness are realized are through constructions like "I wish I could make it but", "I would love to go/attend/come but", "I would have loved to go/come/attend but", "I really want to come/go/attend but". With respect to situational distribution, Table 5 shows that expressions of willingness are mostly frequent in the friend and professor situations. This choice may be due to the fact the respondents deem it important to maintain social bond with their friends and social cohesion in the asymmetrical relationship with their professor.

Expressions of Gratitude

According to the results displayed in Table 5, gratitude expressions are the second most preferred adjuncts. They account for 12 examples, representing 33.3% of all adjuncts. The respondents make use of this adjunct to show appreciation for the invitation, to soften the negative impact of the refusals on the interlocutor's face and to save the relationship. Gratitude expressions are mostly employed to support refusals to invitations from classmates and professors (cf. Table 5). The prevalent forms used to expression gratitude are constructions like "thank you", "Thanks for the invitation but", "Thank you for inviting me", "Thanks for letting me know but", "I appreciate letting me know", "That's very nice of you". Also, gratitude expressions appear either before as in (41) or after the refusals as in (42).

41) **Thanks for the offer but** I have something else going on right now, another time?
(Classmate)

42) I am unable to attend that day but **thank you for the information.** (Professor)

Expressions of Positive Opinion

The statement of positive opinion is the third most employed adjunct. It is used to indicate that despite the refusal the speaker acknowledges the (potential) value/benefit of the event to which he or she has been invited. Apart from mitigating the refusal and flattering the addressee's face the statement of positive opinion is intended to prepare a common ground for future interactions. Statements of positive feelings appear only in the professor situation. Having been invited by a professor to attend a talk given by the professor's colleague, the respondents explicitly acknowledge that the talk would be helpful as in (43) and (44) or amazing as in (45) in an effort to soften the invitation refusal and maintain a good relationship with their professor. In one example, the refuser goes on the express deception or regret ("too bad") that he or she will miss such a great opportunity as in (45).

43) **That would be really helpful.** I would like to go, but I'm not able to attend. (Professor)

44) **That sounds amazing but** unfortunately I can't. I'm busy that day. Let me know how it goes. (Professor)

45) Too bad. **That sounds so helpful, but** I can't make it. (Professor)

Good Wishes

The last adjunct identified in the corpus is the expression of good wish. It appears only in the friend situation. The respondents wish their friend a successful birthday party as in (46). Utterances produced to express good wishes are "I hope you have a good time", "Hopefully you have fun", "I hope you have a good night". Good wishes are intended to soften the negative impact of the refusal, to flatter the face of the addressee and to maintain social cohesion between the speaker and the addressee. As they come after direct or indirect refusals, wishes could also be interpreted as a way end the refusal acts on a good note.

46) I'd love to go, but I'm obligated to something else. **Have a good party.** (Friend)

Internal Mitigation and Intensification Devices

The analysis in the previous section has shown that direct and indirect refusals are prefaced and followed by adjuncts, i.e. other types of speech acts which serve to soften the illocutionary force of the main refusal acts. This process is called external modification (cf. Trosborg, 1995: 215). The examples also show that the respondents use lexical and syntactic devices to tone down or to increase the impact of the speech acts involved in the production of refusal sequences. This process is called internal modification (cf. Trosborg, 1995: 209). In this section, I will present devices employed by the participants to mitigate or reinforce direct and indirect refusals as well as adjuncts to refusals.

The analysis reveals that most of the lexical devices employed by the respondents are modal sentence adverbials (see Trosborg 1995: 212). They are used to soften or to intensify various moves of a refusal sequence. Overall, there are 18 adverbs used to reinforce indirect refusals such as reasons, apologies, etc. and adjuncts to refusals. The most preferred adverbs are 'very', 'really', and 'already'. Other adverbials are 'besides', 'actually', 'though', 'hopefully', 'too', and 'so.'

The results also show that 13 adverbs are used to express uncertainty regarding the content of indirect refusals such as suggestions, promises, etc. The adverbs employed to that effect are 'maybe' and 'perhaps'. 'Maybe' is used to mitigate indirect refusals in form of suggestions and promises. In suggestions, this adverb is employed to save the face of the hearer by making the suggested alternative less imposing. In promises, "maybe" is employed to protect the face of the speaker by making the promise less binding for him/her: The hearer is indirectly told that s/he should not have very high expectations regarding a subsequent invitation. "Perhaps" plays the same function in suggestions as in "I can't this time, but **perhaps** we could go another time."

There are also tokens of the adverbs "unfortunately" and "sadly": both adverbials are used to express regret in performing the direct refusals. More precisely, they are used as softeners to express the idea that the refuser is declining the invitation against his or her will and that the refuser is aware of the hearer's disappointment.

It was found that 24 adverbials are employed as time-modifiers in direct refusals and indirect refusals. Adverbs such as “today”, “right now”, “now”, “this time”, “then”, “that night/day”, etc. are employed to indicate that the refusal is limited to a specific time. These adverbs also suggest that the refuser may be available another time as in “I am sorry. I can’t **right now**. Maybe another time”. These time adverbials also serve to underline the urgency of justifications. The speaker indicates that s/he is not available at the time mentioned by the adverbials in the refusal. For instance, adverbs such as “right now”, “today” and “at this time” signal in the classroom situation that the reason given is relevant for the moment and that it is possible for the speaker to accept another invitation at a different time.

The analysis also reveals the use of mitigating adverbs such as “for a bit” and “instead” (to express preference), of the politeness marker “please”, of embedding clauses such as “how about” (to soften suggestions), “looks like”, “I don’t think”, “I don’t know if”, “if possible” (to mitigate direct refusals as in “I don’t think I can make it”; “Looks like I can’t go man”; “I don’t know if I’ll be able to come”).

The participants also employ syntactic devices and mostly the conditional in expressions such as “would be”, “would like/love to”, “would you like to”, “we could go”, “could you”, etc., to signal uncertainty in direct and indirect refusals.

There are three interjections in the data, namely, “oh”, “awe”, “hey”, employed to signal the emotional mind-set of the refuser. The following three solidarity markers are attested: “bro”, “bud”, and “man”. Their pragmatic function is to bring speaker and interlocutor together, to mitigate the potentially negative effect of the refusals, to show closeness in the relationship and to remind them that the relationship is not jeopardized by the refusals. There are also two honorifics, namely “miss” and “sir”, used to show respect to the interlocutor (professor) and mitigate the refusals.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to explore invitation refusals by a group of Canadian English speakers. The analysis has revealed that the participants used more head acts than supportive acts to construct their refusals: 84.7% of the data consist of head acts and 15.3% are supportive acts. It was also found that the respondents most frequently employed indirect refusals (62.7%). The results also show that different strategies are used to realize direct refusals, indirect refusals and supportive acts or adjuncts to refusals.

Regarding direct refusals, the findings indicate that the participants used four different realization strategies. The most common direct strategy is the expression of inability to accept the invitation; it accounts for 96.2% of direct refusals. The other direct strategies, namely “no”, “expression of preference” and “performative”, have very low frequencies in the data.

With respect to indirect refusals, the analysis reveals that the respondents employ six different types of speech acts to decline invitations indirectly. The results reveal that “giving reasons/explanations” and “expressing apologies/regrets” are the two most frequent indirect strategies, they represent 37.9% and 36.5%, respectively, of all indirect refusals. The third most common indirect strategy is “suggesting an alternative” (18.3%). The other three strategies, namely “promise/postponement”, “conditional acceptance” and “request”, have very low number in the examples collected.

Among the adjuncts to refusals identified in the data, “expressing willingness” to comply with the invitation are the most frequently employed act to support direct refusals or indirect refusals; they account for 15 tokens (41.7%) of all adjuncts to refusals. “Expressing gratitude” to the inviter is the second most common supportive act. This supportive strategy is attested 12 times in the data (33.3%). The other speech acts used as adjuncts are “expressions of positive feelings” (13.9%) and “expressions of good wishes” (11.1%). Overall, the adjuncts attested have mitigating functions. The two most frequent adjuncts, namely “expressions of willingness” and “expressions of gratitude”, appear in the three situations, while “expressions of positive feelings”, the third most employed adjunct, are used only in the professor situation and “expressions of good wishes” are only found in the friend situation.

The analysis also reveals that the respondents employed different types of lexical and syntactic devices to modify refusals and adjuncts to refusals. Among the internal modification devices found, lexical devices are by far the most preferred. The participants employed lexical devices such as modal sentence adverbials to intensify or to mitigate refusals. They also made use of time-modifiers to locate the refusals to a specific time range. Also attested are syntactic devices used to softer direct and indirect refusals.

Overall, the present study reveals the use of different realization patterns of invitation refusals in Canadian English. It is important to note that the study was based on written questionnaire data produced by a very small group of participants and it focused on only three situations. It is likely that the examples analysed here do not illustrate all invitation refusal strategies in Canadian English. Additional studies, based on other types of data and involving other situations and groups of participants, will certainly extend the scope of the current research and contribute to a better understanding of choices by Canadian English speakers in invitation – invitation refusal exchanges.

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