

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The central notion around the speech act/communicative act is that language is used to perform actions (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Austin (1962) observed that performing communicative actions in everyday life required employing the necessary words under appropriate circumstances. According to him, when we say something we automatically perform a communicative action via the use of words in life. Examples of speech acts are requests, refusals, apologies, expression of thanks and many others.

Among the various speech acts, the speech act of refusal was selected for the present study. Refusals are noncompliant/ dispreferred (Levinson, 1983) responses to an initiating act such as request, invitation, suggestion and offer.

Refusing someone is a demanding verbal behavior. Its realization requires a host of linguistic strategies to be employed. The linguistic coding of refusals is largely dependent on the socio-cultural awareness of a community in which participants live. For example, to refuse a person of higher status requires awareness of the nature of power relations, distance and many other factors.

Of the many social variables which influence the production of speech acts, two variables have been reported more frequently. Many studies have reported that power and distance are two important social parameters which affect the linguistic realization of speech acts. Refusals are such speech acts which are highly dependant on the power and distance between the speakers and hearers. In many hierarchical societies, like

Iran, power differential between the people is a determining factor in communication (Afghari, 2007; Eslamirasekh, 2004). Therefore, refusing a person with higher power might bring about negative consequences for the refuser. Therefore, people try to be aware of this negative impact of their refusals and try to soften it as much as possible to minimize the negative side effect of it. The present study also looks at the effects of the two important social variables; that is, power and distance.

Each language and culture may have its own way of refusal production, although it may share some features with other languages. This study is a focus on Persian language. Persian or Farsi is the name of the language which is spoken in Iran. The word Farsi is used by Iranians to refer to their language. Persian, or Farsi is the official language of Iran and government, business, educational instruction, and media are conducted in Persian. Most Iranians speak Persian as their mother tongue while others use it as their second language.

1.2 Speech Acts

Speech act theory was first proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1975, and 1977), who were philosophers of the language. The main purpose of communication is to understand the intents of the speaker. For Austin (1962), speech acts or “*doing things with words*” are what we exactly do with words. He believes that words do not only provide information and facts but, these words carry out actions. We use the words to communicate our intents in life.

According to Austin (1962), communication refers to a series of communicative/ speech acts. People use these communicative/speech acts in daily conversations to achieve a communicative goal. Therefore, when we say something, we automatically perform a

communicative act/ action (Austin 1962). Examples of speech acts are requests, refusals, apologies, expression of thanks and many others.

Austin (1962) introduces three dimensions of speech act or communication act: 1) locutionary, 2) illocutionary and 3) perlocutionary. A locutionary act refers to uttering a meaningful linguistic form, and from the hearer's point of view, to understand what the utterance is about. By uttering "I'm hot" the speaker is stating that the room is hot and s/he is experiencing heat.

An illocutionary dimension of speech act is also known as "illocutionary force" (Searle, 1975). It refers to what we really do with our words. Speakers hardly produce utterances without intentions. A speaker may utter an utterance for example 'John is coming' to mean a threat, a promise or to give a piece of news. Understanding of the speakers' intention depends on the context.

Third dimension, perlocutionary act, is the effect of the speaker's utterance on the hearer. Perlocutionary act or perlocutionary effect is what the speaker achieves after performing the act_the perlocutionary effect of the mentioned example might be something to drink or turning on the fan by other part of the conversation (Austin, 1962).

Austin's most important dimension is the illocutionary force of the utterances which is at the communicative level of an utterance. In fact, 'speech act' is analyzed and discussed to refer to the illocutionary force of utterances. In other words as Yule (1996) states "this force is what the act 'counts as'". Realizing the exact illocutionary force of a speech act is difficult when the hearer does not interpret the exact intention of the speaker. As a result of this problem, illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), is to facilitate interpretation of the utterances. IFID is performative such as I refuse, I apologize, I promise, I warn.

Austin's taxonomy which was based on performative verb motivated Searle (1977) to propose his own five types of classification based on illocutionary act from the speaker's viewpoint. This classification includes:

- 1) Representatives: in this type, speakers talk about the facts and values they believe in or not (e.g., statements, assertions, conclusions)
- 2) Directives: these speech acts reflect the speakers wants, that is the speakers get someone else to do something (e.g., requests, suggestion, order, and advice).
- 3) Commissives: these acts state the obligation on the speaker part to commit to do something (e.g., promises, threat, refusals, guarantee, pledge).
- 4) Expressives: these types express the inner feeling of the speaker which says about the speaker's experiences rather than the world (e.g., apologies, congratulations, compliments, pleasures, likes and dislikes).
- 5) Declarations: The speech acts of this kind make a change in the real world when the speaker is uttering them (e.g., resign, fire) (Searle, 1977).

1.3 Problem of the Study

Searle (1969) and Austin (1962) claim that speech acts are realized by universal rules; that is, speech acts are produced in different languages in similar ways. But some researchers (Wierzbicka, 1991; Blum-Kulka, 1987) support the idea that every culture and language has its own way of speech act production. The latter group also claims that social factors influencing linguistic variations of a given speech act, say, a refusal, are culture-specific. Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) call for expanding the research on speech acts to a variety of languages to make claims about universality or culture specificity of the speech acts more valid.

Many studies on refusals (Beebe et al., 1990; Felix-Brasdefer, 2006) have linked this speech act with the notion of 'face' and 'politeness'. They have postulated that refusals are very sensitive to "face" (Goffman, 1967). Refusals have the potential to threaten the speaker or hearer's face or both (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Therefore, they have been categorized as dual face threatening acts (FTAs) by Brown and Levinson. Their realization requires the speakers of any language not only a grammatical and lexical knowledge of the language, but the socio-cultural awareness of the underlying rules of pragmatics. Depending on the context and the situation of occurrence, speakers use a variety of direct and indirect strategies to communicate a refusal successfully; that is with the minimum threat to face.

Research has shown refusing a person of higher power is even more difficult than refusing a person of equal or lower power status (Beebe et al. 1990; Felix-Brasdefer, 2006). There is the possibility of offending a person who has power in this kind of refusals and might incur negative outcome for the refuser. The realization of refusals to people of higher power might cause speakers to use more caution in manipulating the refusals strategies to avoid the negative outcomes.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This study investigates the speech act of refusals to the initiating acts of offer, suggestion, invitation, and request produced by Iranian Farsi speakers using naturally occurring conversations as its source of data. The reason for choosing these four initiating acts is that very frequently refusals are responses to these four acts in every day communication.

Particularly, the study aims at focusing on two issues: first, it is an attempt to discover how Iranian Farsi speakers as L1 refuse a person of equal and higher status, second, it aims to demonstrate how the employed refusal strategies vary according to the two social variables of distance and power. The notion of power is particularly interesting to look at, as Iran is a hierarchical society, and power relations could overshadow every kind of communication.

1.5 Research Questions

The study addresses the following two research questions:

1. What strategies are frequently used by Iranian Farsi speakers of L1 in their production of refusals?
2. How do social variables “power” and “social distance” between the interactants affect the production of refusals in Persian?

One of the factors which affect the choice of strategy used by the speaker is the 'power' of the addressee over the speaker and the 'distance' between the speaker and hearer. The definition which was proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), Fraser (1990), and Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995) around the notion of social variables of power and distance refers to the power of the addressee over the speaker and could be considered high, equal or low.

The high power participant is the speaker who has higher rank, title, or social position or is in control of the situation. The low power reflects that the speaker has lower or lesser rank, title, or social position, or has no control over the situation. Social distance refers to the distance between the speaker and the hearer, or the degree of familiarity or solidarity, very close, close, distant, or very distant.

Past studies have treated these two affecting variables as fixed phenomena which affect each interaction equally (Spencer-Oatey, 1996). However, in this study, they are taken as changing and dynamic. The nature of every discourse defines the power relations and social distance between participants. Each particular context has its own conditions for understanding power and distance (Locher, 2004). For example, not all teacher-student interactions enjoy the same power relations between the participants. Understanding of power relations means considering a lot of factors, such as who the teacher and students are, where the interaction is happening, what rules and regulations operate, what they are talking about and many others.

1.6 Significance of the Study

To prove universality or culture-specificity of speech acts, they must be researched in a variety of languages (Blum-Kulka, 1987) especially in non-Western languages. This study is significant in that it focuses on a non-Western language and culture to test whether it agrees with the findings of studies in other languages.

Studies on Persian refusals are limited. Only two studies exist (Izadi and Zuraidah, 2010; Shokouhi and Khalili, 2008). Their attempt has been to uncover pragmatic transfer in the EFL learners' refusal production and both have used DCT for data collection, which cannot fully represent what actually happens in the society. The study is significant in that it is the first attempt (to the best of the researcher's knowledge) to look at refusals as it naturally occurs in language. Using natural data, the study can provide a valid baseline for future cross-cultural and Interlanguage Pragmatics research.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study is arranged as follows. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature on speech act theory, a review of other studies on refusals and a description of research methods of data collection in pragmatics studies. Chapter 3 presents the design of the study and description of data gathering procedures. Chapter 4 is on findings of the study and chapter 5 presents the discussion and conclusion of the study.