

Investigating Refusal Strategies in Situational Comedy: A Case Study of *Sheldon Cooper, Ph.D.*

Nico Harared

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI

nico.hrd@gmail.com

Abstract: This research aimed to investigate the form of refusal strategy in the situational comedy and to figure out the structure of refusal strategy used by Sheldon Cooper, Ph.D. The researcher used Sheldon Cooper, Ph.D.'s utterances showed as refusal as the research subject. The researcher collected the data through the dialogue. The research approach was a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis. The results showed that the strategies of refusal in the conversation among participants in *The Big Bang Theory*, especially Sheldon Cooper, Ph.D., such as refusal with direct explanation, refusal with a rhetorical statement, refusal with sarcasm and refusal with indirect. The investigation concluded that direct explanation dominantly in all situations.

Keywords: *refusal strategy, speech acts, the situational comedy*

Introduction

Language as the tools of communication to convey our feeling and purpose in types of speech acts. In daily conversation, people tend to show speech acts, which refer to a combination of individual speech acts, perform together. Speech act has its function in a certain communication, for instance, apologizing, and any aspect of human being such as the time, refusing, etc.

Searle in (Hülya, 2016) stated that there are five classes in speech acts such as representatives (assertive), declarations, directives, expressive, and commissive. The main point of the following study is about the expressive classification of the speech act such as refusal when a someone makes a word 'no' in communication indirectly or directly. When we fail in refusing in communication, it will brings misunderstanding each other. Gass & Houck added in (Moaveni, 2014) that refusal is a speech act which appear as respond in negative way to other speech acts like invitations, suggestions, offers and requests. In addition, (Çiftçi, 2016) stated refusals in cross-cultural understanding become one of the interesting study to investigate face concept.

The research by (Morkus, 2014) confirmed that the speech act in refusal is culturally distinctive. In refusal, we expect someone will say no in communication in their own way by making a face concept. This is in line with what statement from (Qusuay, H., Che, S. & Raja, 2011). They concluded that in several cultures, the way how people make a word 'no' is interesting to figure out and the way they express this negative answer may vary from culture to culture. These refusals need pragmatic knowledge when someone responds either says 'no' or shows its refusal with non-verbal respond. In line with what quoted by (Sattar et al., 2011) that refusal as the negative counterparts to acceptances and consenting are rejections and refusals. Only one can receive invitations, applications, and offers. In every cultures, the way how someone makes refusal statement is probably more important than how to answer. If that so, conveying and accepting a message of refusal is a task that needs a tremendous skill. According to some ethnics and cultural-linguistic values, the speaker should recognize the structure, the function, and when to use it. The skill of refusing another's request, offer, or invitation with no hurting someone's feelings is essential since the inability to say no has led many non-native speakers to offend their hearer" (Al-Kahtani, 2005).

According to (Umalee, 2011) refusal can disrupts relation of human being. It is in line with (Montero, 2015) which says that refusals can threaten the interlocutor's face; therefore, different

pragmatic strategies are important to avoid such a situation. This situation makes will create disharmony the face of the speaker and hearer. Many strategies are used to minimize the reaction of a refusal and take a good care of the relationship. (Chojimah, 2015) stated refusal, an act which commonly reveals in everyday communication, is a rejection to suggestions, invitations, offers even requests. It might cause offense in the part of addresses since his/her choice of actions responses not positively. To minimize the offense, politeness is important called for whenever the act of refusal realized.

The study by (Sattar et al., 2011) said a refusal is a response in negative way to several communication such as offering, requesting, invitation and suggestion. Refusal is important because it always used in dialy communication. But in some cases, it's difficult when we reject someone's request. Rejecting requests deal not only in line with linguistics knowledge but also pragmatic knowledge. Even rejecting in a foreign language, where there's possibility to offend the interlocutor.

The studies of refusal in language usage mostly focus on the using of language as a means of communication with others in daily life. We can see one of the interesting research of human interaction in daily life in situational comedy. One of the situational comedies that very popular in America TV show and this kind of sitcom already broadcasted into many countries. We call this The Big Bang Theory. The Big Bang Theory the well known modern situational comedy shows that appears the geek-culture. The Big Bang Theory reached its 11th season and has already renewed for 12th.

The research investigates the refusal strategy of the character namely Sheldon Cooper. The researcher chooses Sheldon Cooper, Ph.D. as the main data because he is the iconic character in this sitcom in case of refusal utterances. The way he refuses incredible and mostly appears in the conversation and creates a humor.

Some scholars have conducted refusal strategy in some particular researchers such as investigated refusal strategies in one language or even across two languages or cultures. The latest one such as gender perspective in refusal strategies made of English students as comparative study conducted by (Wang, 2019). This study concerned DCT (Discourse Completing Test). The results show either male or female students of the English department use the refusal strategies in a speech act. This study also shows of refusal strategies in different between male and female in the direct refusal and the indirect refusal. Commonly, female students tend to say an indirect refusal politeness strategy to save the others' face in the communication, avoiding the face threatening, while male students choose to use direct refusal. The achievements of this study led some contribution to the relevant study. It also provides some indications to English teaching and learning in China and some significance to improve the English pragmatic competence of English majors.

Then, (Alzebaree & Yavuz, 2018) conducted Kurdish EFL undergraduate students in case of the socio-pragmatics and pragma linguistics competence through the speech acts of suggestion and refusal. (Alateeq, 2016) examined the speech act of refusal among Saudis. Specifically, it investigates the refusal strategies implemented by Saudis in Saudi Arabia Social settings. (Moaveni, 2014) investigated a study of refusal strategies' by American and International students at an American University. (Sa'd & Qadermazi, 2014) attempted to investigate the effect that exposure to English on the use of refusal strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners compared with those of non-English learners when they refused in their native language, Persian. Most of study about refusals focused on English as the first language, but some cases such as (Qusuay, H., Che, S. & Raja, 2011) conducted Malay College students in case of their refusal strategies in English. Another researchers, (Izadi & Zilaie, 2014) investigated Iranian speakers of Persian of refusals to the starting acts such as offers, suggestions, invitations and requests. Afterwards, research by (Amirrudin & Salleh, 2016) explored the use of refusal strategies as a speech act by Malay university students in Malaysia. Specifically, the research was looking at gender differences in refusal strategies and the most

revealing social strategies in response to refusals used for the power distance. By the same time, (Çifti, 2016) examined the use of refusal strategies by Turkish EFL speakers in comparison with native speakers of English and Turkish. (Hülya, 2016) also investigated how refusal utterances used by Turkish as English University Instructors.

(Nguyen, 2006) deals with refusals of requests by native speaker in Australian comparing with Vietnamese who learn English. This study showed that both populations differ in their way to refuse. By the same token, similarly, (Asmali, 2013) carries out a tremendous cross-cultural study comparing refusal strategies of three culture, they are Turkish people, Polish people and Latvian English teachers. Refusals have showed up a significant speech act to study in different cultures.

(Harared, 2017) investigated The Big Bang Theory qualitatively by examining the correlation of the indirect strategy of the speech acts and its types of utterance. Findings showed that indirect utterances among characters by exemplifying declarative, interrogative and imperative. Indirect strategy of the speech acts and its types of utterance that is sub-categorized into several types of utterance of speech act, namely: representative, directive and expressive. I have examined a considerable amount of research refusal strategies across two languages or cultures but little research investigate refusal behaviour in situational comedy. It interests to compare research on refusals strategies as used by someone in a sitcom. I expect this research to give information about the form of refusal strategy in sitcom, not only from the strategy but also the purpose of using its refusal. I also expect the result is also to enrich the research in refusal that related to humor in situational comedy.

Method

This research is qualitative research in line with descriptive method. The aim of this research to figure out the form of refusal strategy in the situational comedy and the structure of refusal strategy by Sheldon Cooper, Ph.D. The research technique in this present analysis:

In this stage, for the data collection, the researcher collected the manuscripts and sort out of 17 series of 3 seasons of The Big Bang Theory. The manuscript sort out and highlight to seek the form of refusal strategy used in such stretch of speech among characters for them engaging in the conversation in both formal and in an informal situation of talk.

The researcher sorted the script out and highlighted; the researcher transcribed the data of the stretch of speech used in the conversations by organizing and describing the presentation of transcription conventions which includes three main important ways to do as follows. First, number every instance to refer to specific lines as the readers could easily find the instances and check the context they require. Numbering is an effort to ease the researcher to show the interaction orderly. Second, used transcription conventions to transcribe a stretch of speech relied in the interaction. I aim the transcription conventions to capture the situation of talk and to inform readers of what situation happened in the interaction. And third, gave every name of the characters as it is beneficial for readers to know the speakers who involve in the interaction in each stretch of speech.

The researcher collected the data from refusal utterances in this present research. It adopts the refusal strategy by examining the interplay of speech acts in describing refusal utterances in its structure. The researcher identified, classified, and presented in the form of description. In conclusion, after analyzing the data, the researcher described a conclusion according to the analysis. Here, the researcher made a valid conclusion and noted in a description of the refusal strategy used in such discourse contexts (i.e., conversation).

This research presents data on refusal utterances of the character namely Sheldon Cooper, Ph.D. This research focuses on refusal strategy that appear in both formal and informal conversations. The source of data is face-to-face conversations among characters. I take the data from the conversations in the 17 series of three seasons of The Big Bang Theory season 1-3.

Results and Discussion

Refusal with Direct Explanation

The dialogue below happens between Leonard and Sheldon. Since they have a new neighbor, Leonard wants to invite her new neighbor, and then he asks Sheldon.

Season 1 episode 1

Leonard: *We must invite her eat together!*

Sheldon: *No, we will start watching season two of Battle star Galactic.* (1)

In the dialogue above Leonard wants to invite Penny, his new neighbor. But in the meantime Sheldon refuses the invitation directly in (1) by saying no with the explanation that they will start watching season two of Battle star Galactic.

Season 1 episode 2

Leonard: *Let's bring it up together.*

Sheldon: *I don't think so.*

Leonard: *Why?*

Sheldon: *Let see, we don't have a dolly,*

.....

(2)

For the following dialogue, the context of the conversation when Leonard says to Sheldon that they have to bring the heavy stuff from lower ground to the fifth floor of the apartment, but immediately Sheldon refuses in direct by saying refusal with the logic of explanation in (2).

Season 1 episode 3

(in the Penny's car)

Sheldon: *Slow down Penny. Please I said, slow Penny!*

Penny: *hey, We are OK!
You're not leaving yourself
enough space between cars.*

Sheldon: *No, I will do the math for you.*

Let's say, this car weight,

about 4,000 pounds.

Now add 140 for me,

120 for you... (3)

Penny: *120?*

Sheldon: *I'm sorry. Did I insult you?*

Is your body mass

somehow tied into your self-worth?

Well, yeah. Interesting.

The following dialogue occurs in Penny's car. Penny runs her car fastly, then Sheldon alerts Penny by saying "slow down". Penny replies that is fine, but Sheldon refuses Penny's statement in (3) by seeing that thing as a theoretical physicist.

Refusal with Rhetorical Statement

Season 1 episode 1

- Penny: Ok guys, Let's eat!
 Sheldon: Penny... that's where I sit.
 Penny: oh gee, you can sit beside me.
 Sheldon: No.. Penny.
 Penny: why?
 Sheldon: why? Here's the thing
In this season (winter), that position is
next to the radiator
to give warm, and not really
close as to make perspiration
In the summer, it's straight
in the path of a cross-breeze
created by opening
windows over there and there.
This position faces the television at an angle that is neither
direct
thus discouraging conversation,
nor so far wide to make a parallax distortion.
I could go on, but I think
I've made my point. (4)
- Penny: Do you want me to move?
 Sheldon: Well...
 Leonard: Just sit somewhere else.
 Sheldon: Fine.

The dialogue above between Penny and Sheldon when they met as a new neighbour at the first time. It happens when Sheldon becomes host in his apartment. Penny immediately sits on the couch and that is a spot where Sheldon usually sits. And Penny tries to ask him to sit next to her, but Sheldon refuses in (4) by saying rhetorical and a long explanation. In this dialogue Sheldon refuses Penny's offering by giving long rhetorical statement.

Season 1 episode 16

- Penny: Sheldon, I didn't see your present.
 Sheldon: That's because I didn't bring one.
 Penny: Sheldon, you're his friend.
 Friends give each other presents.
 Sheldon: The entire statements of gift-giving makes no sense.
It's a non-sense activity. It because I have to imagine what
you need, whereas you know what you need.
Let's say I go out and I spend \$50 on you.
It's a boring activity because I have to imagine what you
need, whereas you know what you need.
Now, I could simplify things...
just give you the \$50 directly,
and then you could give me \$50
on my birthday, and so on,
until one of us dies,
leaving the other one old
and \$50 richer.
And I ask you, is it worth it? (5)

In the dialogue above, the conversation between Penny and Sheldon happens in Penny's apartment. Penny plans to make a surprise party for Leonard. She has her present, but there's no present from Sheldon for Leonard. Penny suggests Sheldon to give Leonard a present and Sheldon refuses Penny's suggestion by giving long rhetorical statement in (5).

Refusal with Sarcasm

The following dialogue occurs in Penny's apartment. Leonard and Sheldon shock by seeing Penny's room. One word for Penny's room, MESSY. Then, there is a conversation between Leonard and Sheldon.

Season 1 episode 2

Shelly: Oh my goodness,
Look at this place.
Leo: haha, it's a little messy, huh?
Shelly: A Little messy?
The Mandelbrot set of complex is a little messy. (6)
This is chaos Leonard.

Leonard says his opinion about Penny's room. Sheldon immediately responds Leonard's statement by saying refusal with sarcasm (6). The pattern of sarcasm when there is a positive statement in a negative situation. "The Mandelbrot set of a complex number" refers to a negative situation and a little messy refers to a positive statement. Even in the last sentence, Sheldon emphasizes his statement is sarcasm by saying "this is chaos".

Refusal with Indirect

Refusal strategy with indirect can be seen in the following dialogue between Sheldon and Penny. They are having a conversation at 2nd downstairs. In the meantime, Penny walks and meets Sheldon while Sheldon who is sitting playing game online on the downstairs, busy with his laptop.

Season 2 ep2

Penny: Hello, Sheldon.
Sheldon: Hello Penny.
Penny: Still mixing it up?
You know, I was wondering why you don't go to dinner alone.
Sheldon: All right,
If I go dinner alone and during the meal, I have to go to the
restroom.
How do I know someone's not touching my food on the table? (7)
Penny: (Pause) Ok Good night, Sheldon.

In the dialogue above, Sheldon gives an answer to his neighbor across the hall Penny. Penny asks Sheldon why he doesn't go outside instead of playing game online alone in the downstairs. Sheldon indirectly responds (7) to her question by asking a new question which is contains of indirect. Here, Sheldon refuses go outside alone by using indirect. It shows when Sheldon says the utterance as a hint to Penny that he does not want to go to dinner outside alone. He says it is as a respond to answer why cannot go alone to play, dinner outside. He wants to show he does not like to go outside alone. This answer is told baldly in front of Penny that gives impact to Penny who then feels embarrassed and annoyed.

Season 1 episode 11

Leonard: I'm very congested.

Sheldon: So?

Leonard: I need something labeled "mucous" in the kitchen?

Sheldon: If I'm standing, I going to vomit. (8)

In dialogue above happens in the living room. Leonard is sick and sitting on the couch next to Sheldon. He's very congested. Then, he asks Sheldon to go to the kitchen and get him a yellow Tupper Ware bowl. In the same time, Sheldon's head just hit the wall in the living room. Sheldon refuses a request from Leonard without using the simple English word such NO, but he refuses with indirect that giving a hint for Leonard by saying (8). It shows that he can not stand and help Leonard.

Season 1 episode 13

[quiz simulation]

Penny: [gives the question]

Howard: [buzzes in]

Sheldon: [answers the question]

Penny: [gives the question]

Howard: [buzzes in]

Sheldon: [answers the question]

Penny: [gives the question]

Howard: [buzzes in]

Sheldon: [answers the question]

*Leonard: Shelly, you should
Him answer the question*

Sheldon: why? should I?

Penny: It shows that you are polite.

Sheldon: what kind of manners have to do with it. It is competition.

Were the Romans polite in war?

*To compete with others you should to convey correct
answers, if I know them, why should not I give them?*

(9)

The dialogue above happens in the living room. Sheldon, Leonard and Howard play Q&A. Penny becomes a host and the one who gives the question to them. But, every time Penny gives the question Sheldon always answers without giving the others chance to answer the question. In the same time, Penny plays her role as the host by giving him a warning. Sheldon refuses to let other to answer the question by saying (9). Here, he refuses by using a metaphor like Q&A like a war and adds his action like Roman. It shows that his refusal to use indirect in metaphor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results that the strategies of refusal present in the conversation among participants in The Big Bang Theory, especially Sheldon Cooper, Ph.D., are refusal with direct explanation, refusal with a rhetorical statement, refusal with sarcasm and refusal with indirect. I expect this study can help the readers to do next research and also referred by the following researchers. It would interest to look into the application of refusal in different approaches, such as politeness and face-threatening FTA- face saving FSA. It will be helpful to do a study comparing how refusals interplay with those approaches in the same occasion to manage the communication.

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